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Origination, Moral Responsibility, and Life-Hopes: Ted Honderich on Determinism and Freedom

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Perhaps no one has written more extensively, more deeply, and more insightfully about determinism and freedom than Ted Honderich (1988, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2013). His influence and legacy with regard to the problem of free will—or *the determinism problem*, as he prefers to frame it—loom large. In these comments I would like to focus on two main aspects of Honderich's work: (1) his defense of determinism and its consequences for *origination* and *moral responsibility*; and (2) his concern that the truth of determinism threatens and restricts, but does not eliminate, our *life-hopes*. In many ways, I see my own defense of *free will skepticism* as the natural successor to Honderich's work (see Caruso 2012, 2013, 2016, 2017a, forthcoming). There are, however, some small differences between us. My goal in this chapter is to clarify our areas of agreement and disagreement and to acknowledge my enormous debt to Ted. If I can also move him toward my own more optimistic brand of free will skepticism, then that would be great too.

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11.1 Determinism and Its Consequences

Since Honderich's views on determinism and freedom are by now well known, I will provide only a brief summary of them here. To begin, Honderich defends the thesis of determinism, which maintains that ordinary causation is true of all events and that in our choosing and deciding we are subject to causal laws. This amounts to the claim that all our mental events, including choices, decisions, and actions, are effects of causal sequences or chains and therefore have to happen (or are necessitated) and cannot be owed to *origination* (see Honderich 1988, 2002a). More recently, Honderich has preferred to state the thesis of determinism in terms of explanation—saying that determinism is better called *causalism* or *explanationism*, “which names convey that every event has a causal explanation but does not imply something darker than that” (2017). Understood this way, all events or happenings, without exception, are effects or lawful correlates such that each has a fundamental explanation.

If we are good empiricists, as Honderich contends we should be, then we should accept determinism as true since all experience counts in its favor. In fact, “no general proposition of interest has greater inductive and empirical support than that all events whatever, including the choices or decisions and the like, have explanations” (2002b, p. 462). Honderich has further argued that quantum mechanics has not falsified determinism. Not only has there been “*no direct and univocal experimental evidence of the existence of quantum event*” (2002b, p. 463), he argues that the standard interpretation of quantum mechanics is a “logical mess” and contains “contradiction” in it (see 1988, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2013).

Throughout his corpus, Honderich has also explored the consequences of determinism for our lives and for free will. He has argued that both compatibilist and incompatibilist approaches fail to adequately deal with the problem of determinism because they both share the mistaken assumption that there is only one conception of free will. Honderich instead argues that there are actually two conceptions of free will—free will as *voluntariness* and as *origination*. While the former is compatible with determinism, the latter is not. Honderich acknowledges, however, that the truth of determinism and the loss of origination create concerns for our

“standing” as human beings and for our “life-hopes.” In an attempt to preserve some of what is lost when we give up the idea of origination and the responsibility attached to it, Honderich has introduced his “grand hope” for humanity, which involves abandoning the “politics of desert” and embracing the *Principle of Humanity* (see Honderich 2013), which aims at getting and keeping people out of bad lives.

Before exploring the consequences of determinism for our *life-hopes* in the following section, let me first say something about Honderich’s views on origination and moral responsibility and how they line up with my own position of free will skepticism. *Free will skepticism*, as I conceive it, maintains that what we do, and the way we are, is ultimately the result of factors beyond our control and because of this we are never morally responsible for our actions in the *basic desert* sense (Pereboom 2001, 2014; Strawson 1986; Caruso and Morris 2017)—the sense that would make us *truly deserving* of praise and blame. In the past, the standard argument for free will skepticism was *hard determinism*: the view that determinism is true, and incompatible with free will and basic desert moral responsibility—either because it precludes the *ability to do otherwise* (leeway incompatibilism) or because it is inconsistent with one’s being the “ultimate source” of action (source incompatibilism). For hard determinists, libertarian free will is an impossibility because human actions are part of a fully deterministic world and compatibilism is operating in bad faith.

While hard determinism had its classic statement in the time when Newtonian physics reigned, it has very few defenders today—largely because the standard interpretation of quantum mechanics (despite Honderich’s best efforts) has been taken by many to undermine, or at least throw into doubt, the thesis of universal determinism. This is not to say, of course, that determinism has been refuted or falsified by modern physics, because it has not. Honderich is a testament to the fact that determinism still has its modern defenders. We also need to acknowledge that the final interpretation of physics is not yet in. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that even if we allow some indeterminacy to exist at the microlevel of our existence—the level studied by quantum mechanics—it’s still likely that there remains what Honderich calls *near-determinism* or *determinism-where-it-matters* (2002a, p. 5).

That is: “At the ordinary level of choices and actions, and even ordinary electrochemical activity in our brains, causal laws govern what happens. It’s all cause and effect in what you might call real life” (2002a, p. 5).

My own reasons for accepting free will skepticism, however, are best described as a version of *hard-incompatibilism* (see Pereboom 2001, 2014; Pereboom and Caruso 2018). Hard incompatibilism amounts to a rejection of both compatibilism and libertarianism. It maintains that the sort of free will required for basic desert moral responsibility is incompatible with causal determination by factors beyond the agent’s control and *also* with the kind of indeterminacy in action required by the most plausible versions of libertarianism. Against the view that free will is compatible with the causal determination of our actions by natural factors beyond our control, I contend that there is no relevant difference between this prospect and our actions being causally determined by manipulators (see Pereboom 2001, 2014). I further argue that it is incompatible with an agent’s *ability to do otherwise*, a necessary condition for free will. Against event causal libertarianism, I object that on such accounts agents are left unable to *settle* whether a decision occurs and hence cannot have the control required for moral responsibility (Caruso 2012, 2015; see also Pereboom 2001, 2014). The same problem, I contend, arises for non-causal libertarian accounts, which also fail to provide agents with the control in action required for basic desert moral responsibility. While agent-causal libertarianism could, in theory, supply this sort of control, I argue that it cannot be reconciled with our best physical theories and faces additional problems accounting for mental causation (Caruso 2012). Since this exhausts the options for views on which we have the sort of free will at issue, I conclude that free will skepticism is the only remaining position.

While I generally accept Honderich’s conception of determinism with regard to human choices, decisions, and actions—and agree strongly with *near-determinism*, or what I have elsewhere called *hard-enough determinism* (Caruso 2012)—my primary reason for accepting free will skepticism is hard-incompatibilism. That is, I am officially agnostic about the kind of indeterminism posited by the traditional interpretation of quantum mechanics. While my view is similar to Honderich’s, then, it is not identical. I also imagine that Honderich would resist my univocal

treatment of *free will* and my label of *free will skepticism* since he shuns the traditional categories of the debate. I would, however, like to push on this latter point a bit to see if can get Honderich to at least agree that his view is a *form* of free will skepticism—in fact, the form *most relevant* to the traditional debate.

In the historical debate, the variety of free will that is of central philosophical and practical importance is the sort required for moral responsibility in a particular but pervasive sense. This sense of moral responsibility is set apart by the notion of *basic desert* (Pereboom 2001, 2014; Strawson 1986; Caruso and Morris 2017) and is purely backward-looking and non-consequentialist. I follow Derk Pereboom in defining basic desert moral responsibility as follows:

For an agent to be morally responsible for an action in this sense is for it to be hers in such a way that she would deserve to be blamed if she understood that it was morally wrong, and she would deserve to be praised if she understood that it was morally exemplary. The desert at issue here is *basic* in the sense that the agent would deserve to be blamed or praised just because she has performed the action, given an understanding of its moral status, and not, for example, merely by virtue of consequentialist or contractualist considerations. (2014, p. 2)

I have elsewhere argued that we can also understand basic desert moral responsibility in terms of whether it would ever be appropriate for a divine all-knowing judge (who didn't necessarily create the agents in question) to administer differing kinds of treatment (i.e., greater or lesser rewards or punishments) to human agents on the basis of actions that these agents performed during their lifetime. The purpose of invoking the notion of a divine judge in the afterlife is to instill the idea that any rewards or punishments issued after death will have no further utility—be it positive or negative. Any differences in treatment to agents (however slight) would therefore seem warranted only from a *basic desert* sense, and not a consequentialist perspective (see Caruso and Morris 2017).

Understood this way, free will is a kind of power or ability an agent must possess in order to justify certain kinds of desert-based judgments, attitudes, or treatments in response to decisions or actions that the agent performed or failed to perform. These desert-based judgments, attitudes,

and treatments would be justified on purely backward-looking grounds and would not appeal to consequentialist or contractualist considerations. It is this kind of free will and moral responsibility that is being denied by free will skeptics like myself, Derk Pereboom (2001, 2014), Galen Strawson (1986), and Neil Levy (2011). And I would argue that it is also the kind of free will rejected by Honderich since his position maintains that determinism is incompatible with origination and the kind of moral responsibility attached to it.

According to Honderich, “[t]he theory of determinism we are putting together, and more particularly the fundamental part that can be called Initiation Determinism, takes a choice to be a real effect, like the neural event associated with it” (2002a, p. 37). *Initiation Determinism* maintains that all choices and other conscious events are effects of heredity and environment. The importance of this with regard to the traditional free will debate is that such determinism is incompatible with what Honderich calls *origination*—that is, the idea that an action is owed to a choice or decision that is uncaused and yet within the control of the actor (2013, p. 57). According to Honderich, the conception of free will as origination is “the primary ordinary sense, the sense that matters” (2013, p. 57). Furthermore, our being free in the origination sense, “and hence our being held responsible and credited with responsibility for our actions, not to mention our prospect of heaven, is our being free in a way logically incompatible with determinism” (2013, p. 57). Lastly, according to Honderich: “[I]t is likely that a Free Will theory really cannot get rid of the embarrassment of an originator. It has to have *something* that is going to be responsible. A past decision itself, whether it was probable or self-causing or teleological or anything else, isn’t what we hold responsible for actions or give a kind of moral credit to for actions” (2002a, p. 54). Given such comments, I maintain that it is legitimate to label Honderich a free will skeptic since the kind of free will he denies is precisely the kind free will skeptics deny. While *voluntariness* is an important concept, neither Honderich nor I believe it is enough to ground basic desert moral responsibility. And since basic desert moral responsibility is, I contend, what is of central philosophical and practical importance in the historical debate, I think Honderich should embrace a more full-throated free will skepticism.

Now, I imagine that Honderich may disagree with my last point (about what is of central philosophical and practical importance) but I have elsewhere argued that there are several distinct advantages to defining free will in terms of the control in action required for basic desert moral responsibility: (1) it provides a neutral definition that virtually all parties can agree to—that is, it doesn’t exclude from the outset various conceptions of free will that are available for compatibilists, libertarians, and free will skeptics to adopt; (2) it captures the practical importance of the debate; (3) it fits with the commonsense (i.e., folk) understanding of these concepts; and, perhaps most importantly, (4) rejecting this understanding of free will makes it difficult to understand the nature of the substantive disputes that are driving the free will debate (see Caruso and Morris 2017 for a detailed defense of (1)–(4)). If I am correct that basic desert moral responsibility is what is of central philosophical and practical importance in the free will debate, then the following argument can be given for labeling Honderich a free will skeptic:

1. According to Honderich, only *origination*—the idea that an action is owed to a choice or decision that is uncaused and yet within the control of the actor—can preserve the kind of free will needed for basic desert moral responsibility. [*Voluntariness* is not enough to ground basic desert moral responsibility—i.e., “our being held responsible and credited with responsibility for our actions, not to mention our prospect of heaven, is our being free in way logically incompatible with determinism” (Honderich 2013, p. 57).]
2. Origination is incompatible with determinism (and near-determinism).
3. Determinism (or near-determinism) is true.
4. Hence, we lack the kind of free will needed for basic desert moral responsibility—that is, we are never truly deserving of praise and blame in the backward-looking, non-consequentialist sense. [This is the thesis of free will skepticism.]

Honderich should accept this conclusion since it is entailed by his own arguments and commitments. I therefore encourage Honderich to self-identify as a free will skeptic and drop his pluralistic approach to the traditional debate. By rejecting the traditional compatibilist/incompatibilist

distinction and embracing two different conceptions of free will, Honderich gives the *mistaken* impression that he takes voluntariness to mean the same thing that compatibilists do. This, however, is not the case since most compatibilists take voluntariness (appropriately defined and qualified) to be *sufficient* for basic desert moral responsibility—something Honderich clearly rejects. Honderich is therefore a traditional incompatibilist when it comes to the core question: Is determinism compatible with the kind of free will required for basic desert moral responsibility?

To avoid confusion moving forward, however, I will adopt the terms *origination skepticism* and *moral responsibility skepticism* for the more specific positions Honderich embraces and restrict *free will skepticism* for my own broader set of assumptions.

11.2 Life-Hopes

We have just seen that according to Honderich, the truth of determinism requires that we give up the concept of “origination” and with it the promise of an open future. While we might have been the author of our own actions and thus held accountable and morally responsible in a way more acceptable to common sense, determinism (and hard-incompatibilism) rules out this possibility. While most *origination skeptics* and *moral responsibility skeptics* appear to welcome the practical implications of such a view, Honderich expresses a genuine sense of real loss. Unlike the *optimistic skepticisms* of Derk Pereboom, Bruce Waller (2011, 2015), and myself, Honderich is authentically “dismayed” by the consequences of determinism since he thinks it threatens and restricts our *life-hopes*.

According to Honderich, life-hopes give an individual’s life a good deal of its meaning and they tend to have two kinds of content. The first kind of content has to do with a state of affairs that we hope for—say becoming a successful philosopher, being a good father, or simply having a decent life. Here a *hope* is defined as “a desire for something, involving an approving valuation of it, bound up with feeling, and such that it is not certain that the thing will come about” (2002a, pp. 92–93). The narrow state of affairs that make up the content of our hopes is important, but less important than something else: “The other kind of content of a hope

has to do with our future actions, maybe a long campaign of them” (2002a, p. 92). For Honderich, life-hopes are about more than just wanting things—they are about our *future actions*. This is because it is through our own actions that we will get what we want. “We are not fatalists of a certain ancient kind,” he writes, “who feel that what will happen in their future will have nothing to do with their own actions.” Instead, we think of our futures in terms of our coming actions—that is, “we think in terms of what can be called *initiating* our actions” (2002a, p. 92).

The problem, we are told, is that we have a kind of life-hope that is incompatible with a belief in determinism. This kind of life-hope involves thinking of our future as open or unfixed or alterable. As Honderich writes: “If I have a hope of this kind, I take it that questions about my future are not yet answered—it is not that the answers are already settled and stored up, but that they do not yet exist. I’ve got a chance. It’s up to me. Maybe I can succeed” (2002a, p. 93). This kind of life-hope can be said to involve thinking that our futures are not just products or automatic upshots of our characters, past experiences, situational circumstances, or natures. Life-hopes, understood this way, require free will and origination since they require that the future is open and my nature and environment is overcomable.

For Honderich, the fact that determinism is incompatible with such life-hopes is dismaying:

Suppose you become convinced of the truth of our theory of determinism. Becoming really convinced will not be easy, for several reasons. But try not to imagine a day when you do come to believe determinism fully. Also imagine bringing your new belief together with a life-hope of the kind we have been considering, this natural way of contemplating your future. What would the upshot be? It would almost certainly be *dismay*. Your response to determinism in connection with the hope would be dismay. If you really were persuaded of determinism, the hope would collapse ... This is because such a hope has a necessary part or condition on which the rest of it depends. That is the image of origination. There can be no such hope if all the future is just effects of effects. It for this reason, I think, that many people have found determinism to be a black thing. John Stuart Mill felt it as an incubus, and, to speak for myself, it has certainly got me down in the past. (2002a, pp. 94–95)

It seems, then, that while Honderich is the foremost champion of determinism, he does not find its consequences completely welcoming—at least not with regard to our life-hopes. While he acknowledges that there is another kind of life-hopes which is *not* threatened by determinism—hopes that have in them the picture of future actions done out of *embraced desires* (2002a, p. 95)—he nonetheless feels that dismay is a legitimate reaction with regard to life-hopes of the first kind (the kind that requires origination and not just voluntariness). While I do not completely disagree with Honderich's assessment of life-hopes, especially if one includes in it his discussion of rejecting dismay and achieving a kind of "satisfied intransigence" (2002a, Chap. 8) or better yet adopting an attitude of *affirmation*, I tend to be more optimistic in my reaction to determinism and origination skepticism than he is (but he can correct me if I am wrong about this).

I consider myself an *optimistic skeptic*. As such, I maintain that life without free will (of the origination variety) and basic desert moral responsibility would not be as destructive as many people believe. I have elsewhere argued, for instance, that prospects of finding meaning in life or of sustaining good interpersonal relationships would not be threatened (see Pereboom and Caruso 2018). And although retributivism and severe punishment, such as the death penalty, would be ruled out, incapacitation and rehabilitation programs would still be justified (see Caruso 2016, 2017b; Pereboom and Caruso 2018). I have also extended my optimism about the practical implications of free will skepticism to the question of creativity (Caruso 2017a). Since creativity resembles in many ways Honderich's life-hopes—in that both manifest a desire for creative agency through which we strive for and hopefully achieve our creative, artistic, and life goals—I would like to offer a solution to Honderich's dismay which builds on my response to the *question of creativity*.

One aspect of the traditional free will debate that is often overlooked is the *question of creativity*—that is, whether free will (and origination) is required for genuine creativity and whether agents justly deserve to be praised and blamed for their artistic and creative achievements. The question of creativity, I have argued, is relevant to the problem of free will because it raises important questions about human agency, ability and effort, origination, assessment and evaluation, just deserts, and reward

and punishment (see Caruso 2017a). Artistic activities, for instance, involve factors intrinsic to the agent such as *developing* their talents or *taking advantage* of their abilities (e.g., being good at the piano is not a matter of *pure luck*—unlike, say, being born with beautiful green eyes) (Russell 2008, p. 309). While we may acknowledge the role luck plays in terms of innate gifts, opportunities, and artistic achievements (e.g., awards and recognitions), we nonetheless believe that agents are capable of exercising *effort* and working hard to *develop* their artistic skills and abilities. The fact that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born into a musical family with a father who was a professional musician, does not change the fact that he needed to *take advantage* of this opportunity and work hard to *develop* his musical talent.

Additionally, from the perspective of the spectator, artistic activities also invite us to take up what Paul Russell calls the “evaluative stance” toward the agent as well as the performance, creation, or product (2008, p. 310). Human beings not only evaluate the moral actions of their fellows, but also evaluate their artistic activities. We may say of a work of art or performance that it was done well or poorly and we may administer rewards and punishments in response to it. It should also be noted that such praise and criticism are not limited to the artistic performance or creation but go down deeper to the qualities of the *agent* considered as the *source* of the performance. As Russell notes: “Great performances and achievements secure rewards and prizes, criticism and condemnation, for the *person* who produced them. It is the *agent* who receives whatever retributive response is called forth by her activities or performance” (Russell 2008, p. 310). What I’m calling the *question of creativity* should therefore be understood as the question of what conditions are required for genuine creativity and whether agents justly deserve to be praised and blamed for their creative and artistic activities.

Without going into too much detail here, the position I have defended maintains that while people do not deserve praise or blame in the basic desert sense, there are replacement reactive attitudes that could serve similar functions. I contend that forward-looking accounts of moral responsibility (e.g., Pereboom 2014), which are perfectly consistent with free will skepticism, can justify calling agents to account for immoral behavior as well as providing encouragement for creative activities since these

are important for future formation and development. I further argue that relinquishing belief in free will and basic desert would not mean the death of creativity or our sense of achievement since important and realistic conceptions of both remain in place. Let me briefly explain (see Caruso 2017a for more details).

This year we celebrate the centenary of Albert Einstein's discovery of a new theory of gravity—general relativity. It is easy to find in the media statements like the following: “Einstein's achievement required perseverance and enormous creativity, as he struggled over a rough and winding road for eight years to formulate the theory” (Smeenk 2015). Some defenders of origination fear that if determinism or free will skepticism were true, we would be unable to legitimately attribute “perseverance” and “enormous creativity” to Einstein. There is no reason to think, however, that this would be so. If these traits were constitutive of Einstein's character, if they were reflective of who he was, then we are warranted in attributing them to Einstein the person. The denial of free will and basic desert moral responsibility does not prohibit us from making such attributions, nor does it prohibit us from acknowledging the important role character plays in determining outcomes. The free will skeptic can recognize that the virtues of Einstein's character were responsible for his great success, including his perseverance and enormous creativity, without also thinking that he was responsible for creating his own character.

In fact, Einstein himself was a determinist and free will skeptic who believed that his “enormous creativity” was not of his own making. In a 1929 interview in *The Saturday Evening Post*, he states: “I am a determinist. As such, I do not believe in free will ... I believe with Schopenhauer: We can do what we wish, but we can only wish what we must” (1929, p. 114). He goes on to add: “My own career was undoubtedly determined, not by my own will but by various factors over which I have no control” (1929, p. 114). He concludes by rejecting the idea that he deserves praise or credit for his creative achievements: “I claim credit for nothing. Everything is determined, the beginning as well as the end, by forces over which we have no control. It is determined for the insect as well as for the star. Human beings, vegetables or cosmic dust, we all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible player” (1929, p. 117).

Honderich and I both agree with Einstein that he does not deserve credit or praise in the basic desert sense for his “enormous creativity” or for achieving one of his major life-hopes. Saying this, however, does not prevent us from legitimately ascribing creativity to Einstein. Since desert claims are about *accountability* and ascriptions of creativity are about *attributability*, there is no inconsistency in free will skeptics attributing “creativity” to agents (see Caruso 2017a). As long as the actions and attitudes we attribute to agents are reflective of their evaluative judgments or commitments, the requirements for attributability are satisfied. In Einstein’s case, he had a long-standing desire to satisfy his own curiosity about the nature of gravity; he exhibited patience and perseverance in the face of obstacles during his long journey toward the final formulation of general relativity; he played the piano and violin to clear his mind and stimulate his creativity; and so on. All of these character traits are reflective of his evaluative judgments and commitments and hence can be legitimately attributed to him. I therefore contend that we can, without inconsistency, say that Einstein was enormously creative and attributability-responsible for his creative achievements, *without also saying* that he was responsible in the accountability sense.

At this point, critics of my view may be willing to concede that attributability is consistent with free will skepticism but nonetheless object that something important is still missing from such an account. If free will skepticism were true, they fear, we would lack the sort of control over our creativity that would allow us to derive fulfillment from our creative projects and pursuits. Furthermore, there would be no “true desert for one’s achievements” (Kane 1996, p. 82) and no sense of accomplishment. While I understand these fears, I believe they are overblown. I acknowledge that adopting the skeptical perspective would mean that agents are never morally responsible in the backward-looking, basic desert sense. I also acknowledge that some loss may be experienced in relinquishing our pre-theoretical beliefs about free will and origination. There is a growing body of empirical evidence, for instance, that indicates people are folk psychological indeterminists—that is, they think that their choices aren’t determined (see Nichols and Knobe 2007; Sarkissian et al. 2010; Deery et al. 2013). It is not just that they don’t have the belief that their choices are determined. Rather, they positively think that their

choices are not determined. Giving up the belief in indeterminist free will may be difficult for some, but it would by no means undermine the fulfillment in life that our creative projects and life-hopes can provide.

For instance, it is not obvious that *achievement* is tied to praiseworthiness in the strong way assumed by critics. As Derk Pereboom has argued: “If one hopes for a certain outcome, then if one succeeds in acquiring what one hoped for, intuitively this outcome can be one’s achievement, albeit in a diminished sense, even if one is not praiseworthy for it” (2001, p. 194). Einstein, for example, hoped that his efforts would result in a new theory of gravity. Given that they did, he would have an accurate perception of having achieved what he hoped for, even if he does not deserve praise for his efforts. Achievement, I contend, is best understood in terms of effortful fulfillment of one’s goals, desires, and hopes. One can do this, however, without also being praiseworthy in the basic desert sense. Since free will skepticism is consistent with agents exerting effort and working toward their various goals, there is no need to reject the notion of achievement. To say that praiseworthiness is required for *true achievement* would be question begging without additional argumentation.

I imagine one could argue that there *is* a necessary link between praiseworthiness and achievement since the concept of achievement entails that when an agent achieves a goal they become legitimate targets of praise. I see no reason, however, for thinking this is true. First, while we often associate praiseworthiness with achievement, there is no necessary connection between the two. If we reject the notion of praiseworthiness, as free will skeptics do, a perfectly meaningful conception of achievement remains in place—that is, one that defines achievement in terms of effort and fulfilling one’s goals, hopes, and desires. Second, without praiseworthiness there would still remain sound forward-looking reasons for encouraging creativity and pursuing one’s life-hopes. Lastly, we do not believe agents are praiseworthy or blameworthy for creative omissions—for example, Einstein failing to have the creative insight that led him to formulate general relativity. This throws into doubt, I believe, the supposed necessary connection between praiseworthiness and achievement. The fact that Einstein hoped that his efforts would result in a new theory

of gravity, and they did, means he achieved his goal. But the fact that he *could have just as easily failed* to achieve his goal by failing to have a creative breakthrough, and this failure would have had nothing to do with a lack of effort on his part, suggests to me that the conditions for praiseworthiness are independent of, and likely more demanding than, the conditions for achievement.

Now, some philosophers, including Honderich perhaps, fear that without a conception of ourselves as credit- or praiseworthy for achieving what makes our lives fulfilled, happy, satisfactory, or worthwhile—that is, for realizing our life-hopes—we will become dismayed. Here I follow Pereboom in arguing that while there is an aspect of these life-hopes that may be undercut by skepticism, the skeptical perspective nevertheless leaves them largely intact. Free will skepticism need not instill in us an attitude of resignation to whatever our behavioral dispositions together with environmental conditions hold in store. Suppose, for example, that someone reasonably believes that he has a particular disposition that might well be a hindrance to realizing a life-hope. Let's say that he wants to become a professional concert pianist but is afraid that his stage fright will prevent him from achieving his goal. Because he does not know “whether this disposition will in fact have this effect, it remains open for him—that is, epistemically possible for him—that another disposition of his will allow him to transcend this impediment” (Pereboom 2014, p. 194; see also Chap. 8 this volume). As a result, he might reasonably hope that he will overcome his disposition and achieve his goal. For the free will skeptic, if he in fact does overcome his stage fright and succeed at his life's-hope, this will count as an achievement—perhaps not the kind of achievement libertarians had in mind, but an achievement in a substantial sense nonetheless.

I further contend that our sense of self-worth is to a non-trivial extent due to features not produced by our volitions, let alone by free will. As Pereboom correctly points out, people “place great value on natural beauty, native athletic ability, and intelligence, none of which have their source in our volition” (2014, p. 194). Of course, we also value voluntary efforts, but it does not matter much to us that these voluntary efforts are also freely willed. Consider how good character comes to be:

It is plausibly formed to a significant degree by upbringing, and the belief that this is so is widespread. Parents regard themselves as having failed in raising their children if they turn out with immoral dispositions, and they typically take great care to bring their children up to prevent such an outcome. Accordingly, people often come to believe that they have the good moral character they do largely because they were raised with love and skill. But those who believe this about themselves seldom experience dismay because of it. We tend not to become dispirited upon coming to understand that good moral character is not our own doing, and that we do not deserve a great deal of praise or credit for it. By contrast, we often feel fortunate and thankful. (Pereboom 2014, p. 195)

The same is true for creativity and our life-hopes. When one realizes the extent to which creative and artistic success, or achievement in one's professional career, is dependent on upbringing, the opportunities that society presents, the support of parents and teachers, and plain luck, one does not typically react with dismay. Rather these thoughts frequently engender thankfulness and a sense of being fortunate. This seems to be how Einstein reacted when he realized: "My own career was undoubtedly determined, not by my own will but by various factors over which I have no control" (1929, p. 114). Given that this is a common reaction, and at least one open to skeptics to embrace, I maintain that there is no reason to think meaning in life, our senses of achievement, and our life-hopes, would be threatened by free will skepticism.

Now, Honderich seems to acknowledge that this is a legitimate reaction when he discusses the second kind of life-hopes, the kind that *is* compatible with determinism. These life-hopes have to do with actions that flow from our embraced desires, that is, voluntary actions. According to Honderich, when this second kind of life-hope is brought together with determinism, we see that "determinism can be true without affecting these hopes at all" (2002a, p. 96). That is: "There is nothing in them that is inconsistent with [determinism]. There is nothing about embracing desires and situations that conflicts with determinism" (2002a, p. 96). Honderich is therefore willing to acknowledge that determinism (and free will skepticism more broadly) leave the second kind of life-hopes "untouched and untroubled." In fact, he goes so far as to say that our response to determinism may involve thoughts about the first kind

of life-hopes (the incompatible kind) and our disregarding them as unimportant: “We may feel we don’t have to think about them. This response as a whole involves rejecting dismay. This way with determinism is a kind of satisfied intransigence” (2002a, p. 97).

Honderich also argues that we can choose the attitude of *affirmation* rather than intransigence or dismay (2002a, Chap. 10). Having two different sets of attitudes is unsatisfactory, so what we need to try to do is to take into account all of it, and find or make a new response to determinism. Honderich’s proposed solution is to try to give up whatever depends on thoughts inconsistent with the truth of determinism or near-determinism. Affirmation, then, is:

trying by various strategies to accommodate ourselves to the situation we find ourselves in—accommodate ourselves to just what we can really possess if determinism is true, accommodate ourselves to the part of our lives that does not rest on the illusion of Free Will. We can reflect on what is perhaps the limited worth of what we have to give up, consider possible compensations of a belief in determinism, take care not to underestimate what we can have, and consider a certain prospect having to do with genuine and settled belief in determinism. (2002a, p. 126)

While Honderich appears to be embracing some form of optimism here, as undoubtedly he is, our views differ to the extent that he *continues to experience dismay* at the loss of origination. Personally, I experience very little loss or dismay and am in fact quite bullish about the prospects of life without belief in free will (or origination) and basic desert moral responsibility. My view is that these beliefs do more harm than good since they tend to stifle personal development, encourage punitive access in criminal justice, and perpetuate social and economic inequalities (see, e.g., Caruso [forthcoming](#)).

From Honderich’s perspective, however, both reactions to determinism are legitimate—that is, the reaction of dismay and intransigence. He maintains that, “Neither kind of attitude to the future, considered in itself, can be regarded as any kind of mistake. There is no room for the idea of mistake” (2002a, p. 97). While I agree with Honderich that people are *capable* of experiencing both types of reactions, and even perhaps that they are *natural*, I challenge the claim that they are both

legitimate reactions and stand on equal footing. In fact, I contend that the conception of life-hopes born of belief in origination and open futures involves doxastic irrationality and is pernicious in nature since it gives credence to the notion of just deserts and leads to increased punitiveness. Rather than being dismayed at its loss, I think we should set out to destroy it, drive a stake in its heart, and bury it at the crossroads (to borrow a phrase from Bruce Waller).

Consider briefly the reactive attitudes (P.F. Strawson 1962) of resentment, indignation, blame, and moral anger. Since these reactive attitudes can cause harm, they would seem to be appropriate only if it is fair that the agent be subject to them in the sense that she *deserves* them. We can say, then, that an agent is *accountable* for her action when she deserves, in the basic desert sense, to be praised or blamed for what she did—that is, she deserves certain kinds of desert-based judgments, attitudes, or treatments in response to decisions or actions she performed or failed to perform, and these judgments, attitudes, or treatments are justified on purely backward-looking grounds and do not appeal to consequentialist or forward-looking considerations, such as future protection, future reconciliation, or future moral formation.

The version of free will skepticism I defend maintains that agents are never morally responsible in the basic desert sense, and hence expression of resentment, indignation, and moral anger involves doxastic irrationality (at least to the extent it is accompanied by the belief that its target *deserves* to be its recipient). Now I imagine one could, and most compatibilists would, raise the following Strawsonian question: Can we ever *really* relinquish these reactive attitudes? In response, I would first say that it is important to distinguish two different questions here: (1) Would it be desirable? and (2) Is it possible? With regard to the first question, I maintain that the moral anger associated with the reactive attitudes of resentment and indignation is often corrosive to our interpersonal relationships and to our social policies. As Pereboom (2001, 2014) has argued, the expressions of these reactive attitudes are suboptimal as modes of communication in relationships relative to alternative attitudes available to us—for example, feeling hurt, or shocked, or disappointed.

My response to the second question—that is, “Is it possible to relinquish these reactive attitudes?”—begins by distinguishing between

narrow-profile emotional responses and *wide-profile* responses (Nichols and Knobe 2007; Pereboom 2014). Narrow-profile emotional responses are local or immediate emotional reactions to a situation. Wide-profile responses are not immediate and can involve rational reflection. I believe it is perfectly consistent for a free will skeptic to maintain that expression of resentment and indignation is irrational *and still acknowledge* that there may be certain types and degrees of resentment and indignation that are beyond our power to affect. That is, free will skeptics can expect that we will not keep ourselves from some degree of narrow-profile, immediate resentment when we are seriously wronged in our most intimate personal relationships. Nevertheless, in wide-profile cases, I contend that we do have the ability to diminish or even eliminate resentment and indignation, or at least disavow it in the sense of rejecting any force it might be thought to have in *justifying* harmful reactions and policies.

To what extent Honderich disagrees with anything I just said is not entirely clear—especially given his concept of *affirmation*. Perhaps there is not much daylight between us. Of course, I would be extremely pleased to hear that Honderich is more optimistic about the consequences of origination skepticism than he sometimes appears. Perhaps it is even the case that since Honderich has paved the way for origination skepticism, he has made it possible for *me* to experience less dismay. Nietzsche felt he had come too early for the message he carried, and perhaps Honderich has also had to endure more dismay as a pioneer than those who followed. Either way, I look forward to hearing Ted's reply, and I am truly thankful for his work in this area.

11.3 Conclusion

Here, I have discussed two main aspects of Honderich's work: first, his defense of determinism and its consequences for *origination* and *moral responsibility*; second, his concern that the truth of determinism threatens and restricts, but does not eliminate, our life-hopes. I have also compared my own views to Honderich's in an attempt to seek clarification on two main fronts. First, I have maintained that what is of central philosophical

and practical importance in the free will debate is the kind of free will needed for basic desert moral responsibility. Honderich, however, prefers to talk, not of a single historical debate but of *two* conceptions of free will—one that goes back to Kant (origination) and the other to Hume (voluntariness). The problem with this, however, is that the tradition following Hume has taken voluntariness (appropriately qualified and detailed) to be *sufficient for basic desert moral responsibility*. Honderich, however, like other free will skeptics and deniers, seems to agree that voluntariness is not sufficient for basic desert. To the extent then that Honderich denies the existence of the *only* kind of free will that can preserve basic desert—that is, origination—I recommend that he relinquish his conceptual dualism and become a full-fledged member of the free will skeptic club—either as a traditional hard determinist or as a hard-incompatibilist. Second, I have argued that there is no reason to experience dismay at all even if we lack origination and the kind of free will needed for basic desert moral responsibility, since life-hopes, achievement, and meaning in life can all survive.

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