

Intro to Phil – Reconstructing Kane's Argument

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The whole argument seems to occur in the bottom paragraph of page 290.

“If the case for the incompatibility of free will and determinism cannot be made on AP alone, it can be made if UR is added. If agents must be responsible to some degree for anything that is a sufficient cause or motive of their actions, an impossible infinite regress of past actions would be required unless some actions in the agent’s life history (SFAs) did not have sufficient causes or motives (and hence were not determined).” [Kane, 2008].

First identify the conclusion.

“If the case for the incompatibility of free will and determinism cannot be made on AP alone, it can be made if UR is added. ”
[Kane, 2008, 290].

Tip: It's good to remove unnecessary words:

Conclusion If determinism is true, then you cannot perform any free acts.

Next, Try to identify the general structure of the author's argument."

If agents must be responsible to some degree for anything that is a sufficient cause or motive of their actions, an impossible infinite regress of past actions would be required unless some actions in the agent's life history (SFAs) did not have sufficient causes or motives (and hence were not determined)." [Kane, 2008, 290].

Looks like he's thinking if you combine a premise saying what responsibility requires and one about determinism, you get a requirement regarding a regress of past actions. Furthermore, he thinks that this requirement is impossible to fulfill.

Next, try to restate these piece by piece.

“it can be made if UR is added. If agents must be responsible to some degree for anything that is a sufficient cause or motive of their actions ...” [Kane, 2008, 290].

Tip: Again, it's good to remove unnecessary words:

Premise. In order to be responsible for an action, you have to be responsible for its causes, if it has any.

“... unless some actions in the agent’s life history (SFAs) did not have sufficient causes or motives (and hence were not determined)” [Kane, 2008, 290].

Premise. If determinism is true, then your actions will always have causes.

“If agents must be responsible to some degree for anything that is a sufficient cause or motive of their actions ... regress of past actions would be required unless some actions ... were not determined)” [Kane, 2008, 290].

Sub-conclusion If determinism is true, then in order to be responsible for an action, you have to be responsible for a previous action.

“... an impossible infinite regress of past actions ...” [Kane, 2008, 290].

Premise. It's impossible to be responsible for an action, responsible for a second action that's previous to the first, responsible for a third action that's previous to the second, and so on.

Finally, fill in missing premises and subconclusions.

Premise. In order to be responsible for an action, you have to be responsible for its causes, if it has any.

Premise. If determinism is true, then your actions will always have causes.

Subconclusion. If determinism is true, then in order to be responsible for an action, you have to be responsible for a previous action

Premise. It's impossible to be responsible for an action, responsible for a second action that's previous to the first, responsible for a third action that's previous to the second, and so on.

Conclusion. If determinism is true, then you cannot perform any free acts.



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Premise. If determinism is true, then your actions will always have causes.

Premise. Causes always come before effects.

Subconclusion. If determinism is true, then in order to be responsible for an action, you have to be responsible for a previous action

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Subconclusion. If determinism is true, then you are not responsible for any actions.

Conclusion. If determinism is true, then you cannot perform any free acts.



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Premise. It's impossible to be responsible for an action, responsible for a second action that's previous to the first, responsible for a third action that's previous to the second, and so on.

Subconclusion. If determinism is true, then you are not responsible for any actions.

Premise. In order for you to perform free acts, you have to be responsible for them.

Conclusion. If determinism is true, then you cannot perform any free acts.





Kane, R. (2008).

Incompatibilism.

In *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Blackwell.