

# Fully Caused

The benefits of a naturalistic  
understanding of behavior

Quotations compiled,  
notes and introduction by

Ken Batts



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I want to express my gratitude and admiration for the authors represented here. I hope their eloquent descriptions of the benefits of naturalism will contribute to making a more enlightened, happier world.

Particular thanks go to my mentors Peter Gill, Joseph Skolnik, and Lynne Feldman; my friend and favorite philosopher Tom Clark; and my many colleagues and students who have helped formulate my thoughts.

I dedicate this book to my wife Auli and daughters Adessa and Isabella.

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“Naturalism is the understanding that there is a single, natural world as shown by science, and that we are completely included in it. Naturalism holds that everything we are and do is connected to the rest of the world and derived from conditions that precede us and surround us. Each of us is an unfolding natural process, and every aspect of that process is caused, and is a cause itself. So we are fully caused creatures, and seeing just how we are caused gives us power and control, while encouraging compassion and humility. By understanding consciousness, choice, and even our highest capacities as materially based, naturalism re-enchants the physical world, allowing us to be at home in the universe. Naturalism shows our full connection to the world and others, it leads to an ethics of compassion, and it gives us far greater control over our circumstances.”

Thomas W. Clark, philosopher, Director, Center for Naturalism

Encountering Naturalism: A worldview and its use, 2007.

# Introduction

Show me a prison, show me a jail  
Show me a prisoner whose face has grown pale

And I'll show you a young man  
With so many reasons why  
There but for fortune go you or I

– Phil Ochs, “There but for Fortune”, 1966.

The myth of free will, the ancient doctrine which holds that human behavior is supernaturally or otherwise mysteriously self-caused, cannot withstand objective scrutiny and continues to lose ground. The impact of this ongoing cultural change, part of a broader trend toward naturalism, is seen where philosophy intersects culture: criminal justice, public policy on poverty and health, addiction treatment, psychotherapy, among others. The belief that people’s actions are something other than entirely natural has muddled thinking and resulted in ineffective, self-defeating models and policies. The shift toward a more realistic, naturalistic understanding of human behavior therefore has the potential for dramatic, positive results.

Supernatural concepts have not only proved unfounded and unhelpful, they’ve served to marginalize and obscure empirical, naturalistic explanations which, once revealed, can provide us with methods of improving our situation. Medicine is perhaps the most obvious example; when germs and other natural causes replaced spirits and curses as the explanation for disease, the productive

search for cures began (see McGarry, page 50). Science has replaced mythical creation stories with observation-based cosmology and evolutionary biology; as a result our understanding of the world and our place in it has increased immeasurably.

If we believe, as the myth of free will requires, that people are able to choose what they do without being caused, then there's no compelling reason for us to be sympathetic regarding our fellow humans' troubles (or they for our own). In that case Thomas Clark and Phil Ochs and others would be wrong; fortune, luck, would have little to do with our circumstances, and their pleas for compassion would be misguided. For the believer in free will, the only way to diminish harmful behavior consistent with their worldview is punishment, including retribution. Nor could the successful be reasonably expected to share any of the fruits of their success since, as ultimate originators of their actions, they deeply deserve their bounty in its entirety.

If, on the other hand, we recognize that humans are fully a part of nature, fully embedded in the causal web, we will feel more compassion for other people's troubles and for our own. With the principles of behavior no longer shrouded in mystery, we stand to increase our understanding of, and potentially gain control over, our actions.

Appreciating the causedness of our behavior provides us with a deeper sense of connectedness to each other and enthusiasm for cooperation, shared prosperity and mutual aid, since we understand that "there but for fortune go you or I." Shedding our belief in free will doesn't decrease our motivation to behave morally or intelligently. By lessening the paralysis caused by guilt and contempt, and increasing our sense of connection and control over

ourselves and the world around us, it increases both our motivation and ability to do so.

What follows is a selection of quotes by and about prominent philosophers, (ancient to modern), neuroscientists, legal scholars, poets, politicians, psychotherapists and others. Each describes one or more benefits to be derived from replacing the myth of free will with a rational, naturalistic concept of ourselves. Though not all the authors here would necessarily describe themselves as full-blown naturalists, the excerpts included here indicate that they see the value of naturalism, at least selectively, to help understand the world and achieve important goals.

Entries in the first section, “Historical Quotes,” are presented in chronological order by author’s birth, from ancient to modern times. Entries in the second section, “Contemporary Quotes,” appear in alphabetical order. Finally, I’ve included a section called “Organizational Quotes” with entries from such diverse fields as business, leadership training, and various web-based communities, where the concept of human behavior as fully caused is being embraced.

Unless otherwise noted, the texts cited are books or articles written by the quoted author. For each author, my comments and bibliographical information appear below the solid line.

Ken Batts  
Psychotherapist, 2007.

# Historical Quotes

(chronological order)

# Democritus

460 – 370 BCE

Greek philosopher

“Everything existing in the universe is the fruit of chance and necessity”

“I would rather discover a single causal connection than win the throne of Persia.”

---

Democritus, an early atomist and determinist, believed that all causes are natural and that free will is an illusion. He believed that the gods were invented by humans to explain natural events whose true, natural causes were not readily apparent. His belief that all is caused, and, unlike the actions and motives of gods, in theory knowable, elevates the value of causal inquiry to a supreme position.

“Democritus of Abdera,” J. J. O'Connor and E. F. Robertson, School of Mathematics and Statistics, University of St Andrews, Scotland.

Many of the ancient Greek philosophers and their Roman disciples, though superficially polytheists, were essentially secular and practical, chiefly concerned with alleviating suffering, promoting morality, happiness, and human rights, in other words improving our earthly existence. Socrates held that we need not consult the gods on moral issues. For example he argued that murder is wrong not because the gods say so, but that the gods say it is wrong because of the harm it does, which we can witness ourselves. Epicurus, though not explicitly atheistic, was a proto-secular humanist. He stated that the gods lived far away and were unconcerned with humans; therefore we must seek to manage our own affairs.

With the fall of the ancient Greek and Roman empires and the rise of Christianity, philosophical progress virtually ceased. During the next millennium, religious and other cultural forces nearly obliterated rationalism, including the critique of free will. In the West, the church claimed, with an attempt at dogmatic finality, that God gave man free will (see St. Augustine); to disagree with this was heresy and as such a punishable offence.

Gradually rationalism began to revive. Ancient Greek texts were rediscovered through Arabic translations. Global exploration required better navigational aids, the development of which led to the subsequent rediscovery and refinement of empiricism and advances in physics (including optics\*) and mathematics. These pursuits in turn stimulated a revival of rational philosophy; a new age of thought began. Political events in Europe challenged the absolute authority of the church, and a few brilliant thinkers, scientists and philosophers, dared to

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\* For example the telescope with which Galileo discovered the moons of Jupiter and the mountains of the moon, whose existence contradicts biblical cosmology.

challenge the existing worldview. These factors, along with the slow but steady growth of secular culture, brought us to the Enlightenment, a period of great philosophical advance, and with it the attack on the myth of free will was revived.

# Baruch Spinoza

1632 – 1677

Dutch philosopher

“In the Mind there is no absolute, or free, will, but the Mind is determined to will this or that by a cause that is also determined by another, and this again by another, and so to infinity.”

“Most of those who have written about the Affects, and men's way of living, seem to treat, not of natural things, which follow the common laws of nature, but of things that are outside nature. Indeed they seem to conceive man in nature as a dominion within a dominion. For they believe that man disturbs, rather than follows, the order of nature, that he has absolute power over his actions, and that he is determined only by himself.”

“I have made a ceaseless effort not to ridicule, not to bewail, not to scorn human actions, but to understand them.”

---

By “affects,” Spinoza means emotions. In the first two quotes Spinoza argues for an exclusively naturalistic, causal understanding of the world, including human emotion and behavior. The last quote implies an ethical recommendation: a rational understanding of humans conflicts with a contemptuous view of them.

*Ethics*, 1677.

# Voltaire

1694 – 1778

French philosopher

“What is the meaning of this phrase “to be free”? it means “to be able,” or assuredly it has no sense.”

“Let us go further. this liberty (free will) being only the power of acting, what is this power? it is the effect of the constitution and present state of our organs. Leibnitz wishes to resolve a geometrical problem, he has an apopleptic fit, he certainly has not liberty to resolve his problem. Is a vigorous young man, madly in love, who holds his willing mistress in his arms, free to tame his passion? undoubtedly not. He has the power of enjoying, and has not the power of refraining. Locke was therefore very right to call liberty "power." When is it that this young man can refrain despite the violence of his passion? when a stronger idea determines in a contrary sense the activity of his body and his soul.

Someone cries: “If it be so, everything is only machine, everything in the universe is subjected to eternal laws” Well! would you have everything at the pleasure of a million blind caprices? Either everything is the sequence of the necessity of the nature of things, or everything is the effect of the eternal order of an absolute master; in both cases we are only wheels in the machine of the world.

It is a vain witticism, a commonplace to say that without the pretended liberty of the will, all pains and rewards are useless. Reason, and you will come to a quite contrary conclusion. If a brigand is executed, his accomplice who

sees him expire has the liberty of not being frightened at the punishment; if his will is determined by itself, he will go from the foot of the scaffold to assassinate on the broad highway; if his organs, stricken with horror, make him experience an unconquerable terror, he will stop robbing. His companion's punishment becomes useful to him and an insurance for society only so long as his will is not free.”

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I wish Voltaire had used a less gruesome, more humane example! His point is nevertheless important. People with free will, including very disturbed ones, could choose to be unaffected by all attempts to influence their behavior, even the most benevolent, constructive ones, rendering all such efforts useless. More recently B.F. Skinner has emphasized that reinforcement is much more effective than punishment; it's best to treat children well in the first place, to help them avoid the miserable conditions conducive to the production of “brigands.”

*The Philosophical Dictionary* (1724), translated by H.I. Woolf , 1924.

# Baron d'Holbach

1723 – 1789

French philosopher

“It is evident that the system of liberty, or free will, has been invented to exonerate God from the evil that is done in this world. But is it not from God man received this liberty?”

“If things were considered without prejudice, it would be perceived, that in morals, education is nothing more than the agriculture of the mind; that, like the earth, by reason of its natural disposition, of the culture bestowed upon it, of the seeds with which it is sown, of the seasons, more or less favourable that conduct it to maturity, we may be assured that the soul will produce either virtue or vice – moral fruit, that will be either salubrious for man or baneful to society. Morals is the science of the relations that subsist between the minds, the wills, and the actions of men, in the same manner that geometry is the science of the relations that are found between bodies. Morals would be a chimera and would have no certain principles, if it was not founded upon the knowledge of the motives which must necessarily have an influence upon the human will, and which must necessarily determine the actions of human beings.”

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By “soul,” d’Holbach means the material self: “He who distinguishes the soul from the body, only makes a distinction between his brain and himself.”

*The System of Nature*, 1770.

# Percy Bysshe Shelley

1792 – 1822

English poet

“The doctrine of Necessity tends to introduce a great change into the established notions of morality and utterly to destroy religion. Reward and punishment must be considered by the Necessarian merely as motives which he would employ in order to procure the adoption or abandonment of any given line of conduct. Desert in the present sense of the word would no longer have any meaning; and he who should inflict pain upon another for no better reason than that he deserved it would only gratify his revenge under pretense of satisfying justice. It is not enough, says the advocate of free will, that a criminal should be prevented from a repetition of his crime: he should feel pain, and his torments when justly inflicted ought precisely to be proportioned to his fault. But utility is morality; that which is incapable of producing happiness is useless; and though the crime of Damians must be condemned, yet the frightful torments which revenge, under the name of justice, inflicted on this unhappy man, cannot be supposed have augmented, even at the long run, the stock of pleasurable sensation in the world. At the same time the doctrine of necessity does not in the least diminish our approbation of vice. The conviction which all feel that a viper is a poisonous animal and that a tiger is constrained by the inevitable condition of his existence to devour men does not induce us to avoid them less sedulously, or, even more, to hesitate in destroying them; but he would surely be of hard heart, who, meeting with a serpent on a desert island, or in a situation where it was capable of injury, should wantonly deprive it of existence. A

Necessarian is inconsequent to his own principles, if he indulges in hatred or contempt; the compassion which he feels for the criminal is unmixed with a desire of injuring him; he looks with elevated and dreadless composure upon the links of the universal chain as they pass before his eyes; while cowardice, curiosity, and inconsistency only assail him in proportion to the feebleness and indistinctness with which he has perceived and rejected the elusions of free-will.”

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“Necessity! Thou Mother of the World!” from a note included in his poem “Queen Mab,” 1809.

# Abraham Lincoln

1809 – 1865

President of the United States

“Lincoln's speculations on fatalism and necessity also throw a different light on one of Lincoln's most-admired attributes, his “charity for all” and his “malice toward none,” from the defeated Confederate leadership down to the sentry caught asleep on duty. Lincoln interpreters have been tempted to ascribe this “charity” to a mysterious, godlike reservoir of virtue in Lincoln; but Herndon (William Henry Herndon, Lincoln's Springfield, Illinois Law Partner) knew better – and knew that it was closely linked to Lincoln's fatalism. “Lincoln's patience sprang from his philosophy,” Herndon explained, “his charity for men and his want of malice for them everywhere, all grew out of his peculiar philosophy.” Since Lincoln was a “thorough fatalist” and “believed that what was to be would be, and no prayers of ours could arrest or reverse the decree,” then “men were but simple tools of fate, of conditions, and of laws,” and no one “was responsible for what he was, thought, or did, because he was a child of conditions.”

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In the nineteenth century “fatalism” was synonymous with necessitarianism, the doctrine that we lack free will. Fatalism didn't have the connotation it has today, that one's own actions are bound to be ineffective, a stance which would seem to encourage passivity and moral nihilism. Though Lincoln didn't believe in free will, judging from his life he was a man of both morals and action.

“Abraham Lincoln and the Doctrine of Necessity”, by Allen C. Guelzo, article published by the University of Illinois Press on behalf of the Abraham Lincoln Association. Lincoln’s quotes from William Henry Herndon, source material *Hidden Lincoln*, edited by Emanuel Hertz, 1938.

# Charles Darwin

1809 – 1882

English biologist, founder of  
modern evolutionary theory

“Charles Darwin recognized the importance of free will to evolutionary biology. He first wrote about human free will in his M & N notebooks as he became a materialist in 1838, soon after the voyage of the Beagle:

“The general delusion about free will is obvious because man has power of action, & he can seldom analyse his motives (originally mostly INSTINCTIVE, & therefore now great effort of reason to discover them....)”

Darwin saw punishing criminals for any reason other than deterring others as morally wrong: Criminals should be pitied and rehabilitated rather than hated. Revenge he abhorred. Further, “this view should teach one humility, one deserves no credit for anything (yet one takes it for beauty and good temper).” And finally, he said, a “believer in these views will pay great attention to Education.”

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“Evolution, Religion and Free Will” by Gregory W. Graffin, life sciences professor at the University of California at Los Angeles, and William B. Provine, biology professor at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, in the American Scientist Online, 2007. Darwin’s quotes from his notebooks.

# Mikhail Bakunin

1814 – 1876

Russian revolutionary

“The manifestations of organic life, chemical properties and reactions, electricity, light, warmth and the natural attraction of physical bodies, constitute in our view so many different but no less closely interdependent variants of that totality of real beings which we call matter.”

“The ‘mission’ of science is, by observation of the general relations of passing and real facts, to establish the general laws inherent in the development of the phenomena of the physical and social world.”

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Mikhail Bakunin: *Selected Writings*, Arthur Lehning, 1974.

# Karl Marx

1818 – 1883

German philosopher, political  
economist, revolutionary

“Is it not a delusion to substitute for the individual with his real motives, with multifarious social circumstances pressing upon him, the abstraction of 'free will' .... Is there not a necessity for deeply reflecting upon an alteration of the system that breeds these crimes, instead of glorifying the hangman who executes a lot of criminals to make room only for the supply of new ones?” (Marx, cited in Murphy 1995: 3-4)

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The free will myth denies the causality of human behavior, making the “multifarious social circumstances pressing upon” the criminal into mere excuses, which, unlike causes, cannot be taken seriously. The naturalists’ hopeful message is that crime, like disease, has causes which should be taken seriously and addressed in order to prevent it.

Retribution, for example the death penalty, Marx’s call for “deeply reflecting” is based on the conviction that the status quo, in this case the death penalty, is sustained by a to what is really going on, things could actually change for the betterThe status quo (in this case the death penalty) is Marx’s plea for “deeply reflecting” is Supernaturalist worldviews do not encourage, “deeply reflecting”,

since such activity would bring about their demise. The myth of free will, by placing has served to limit reflection, .

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Murphy, Jeffrie G., 1995: "Marxism and Retribution", in Punishment, edited by A. John Simmons, Marshall Cohen, Joshua Cohen, & Charles R. Beitz, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

# Mark Twain

1835 – 1910

American novelist and essayist

“Young Man: I suppose, then, there is no more merit in being brave than in being a coward?”

Old Man: PERSONAL merit? No. A brave man does not CREATE his bravery. He is entitled to no personal credit for possessing it. It is born to him. A baby born with a billion dollars--where is the personal merit in that? A baby born with nothing – where is the personal demerit in that? The one is fawned upon, admired, worshiped, by sycophants, the other is neglected and despised – where is the sense in it?

Young Man: Sometimes a timid man sets himself the task of conquering his cowardice and becoming brave--and succeeds. What do you say to that?

Old Man: That it shows the value of TRAINING IN RIGHT DIRECTIONS OVER TRAINING IN WRONG ONES. Inestimably valuable is training, influence, education, in right directions – TRAINING ONE'S SELF-APPROBATION TO ELEVATE ITS IDEALS.”

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“What is Man?,” 1906.

# Friedrich Nietzsche

1844 – 1900

German philosopher

“The desire for 'freedom of the will' in the superlative metaphysical sense, which still holds sway, unfortunately, in the minds of the half-educated; the desire to bear the entire and ultimate responsibility for one's actions oneself, and to absolve God, the world, ancestors, chance, and society.”

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As long as we believe we are (mysteriously) the cause of our own troubles, we won't be able to look critically at religion, tradition, societal norms, or totally compassionately at ourselves. Turning all criticism inward certainly helps maintain the status quo.

*Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886.

# Sigmund Freud

1856 – 1939

Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist,  
founder of the psychoanalytic  
school of psychology

“We like to forget that in fact everything in our life is chance, from our genesis out of the encounter of spermatozoon and egg onward.”

“Given the centrality of determinism in Freud’s thinking, it is only fitting that while he was studying dreams, he should also have been amassing materials on what he called the psychopathology of everyday life. The results did not surprise him: commonplace, “normal pathology” offered him literally uncountable instances of “accidents” that analysis showed to be anything but accidental. To misspell a familiar name, forget a favorite poem, mysteriously mislay an object, fail to send one’s wife the usual bouquet of flowers on her birthday—these are all messages virtually begging to be decoded. They are clues to desires or anxieties the actor is not free to acknowledge even to himself. These findings confirmed Freud’s unequivocal respect for the workings of causality. The diagnostic gain implicit in his conclusion is only too obvious. Inviting a scientific reading of apparently causeless and inexplicable events, it exhibits, using the most ordinary experiences as witnesses, the hidden order governing the human mind.”

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Though Freud originated neither the idea of psychological determinism nor the concept of the unconscious, he investigated and elaborated on them extensively, thus

greatly advancing the modern understanding of psychopathology as caused phenomena that can be empirically investigated, diagnosed, and treated.

*Freud: A Life for our Time* by Peter Gay, 1988.

# Bertrand Russell

1872 – 1970

British philosopher

“Reforms in education have come very largely through the study of the insane and feeble-minded, because they have not been held morally responsible for their failures and have therefore been treated more scientifically than normal children. Until very recently it was held that, if a boy could not learn his lesson, the proper cure was caning or flogging. This view is nearly extinct in the treatment of children, but it survives in the criminal law. It is evident that a man with a propensity to crime must be stopped, but so must a man who has hydrophobia and wants to bite people, although nobody considers him morally responsible. A man who is suffering from plague has to be imprisoned until he is cured, although nobody thinks him wicked. The same thing should be done with a man who suffers from a propensity to commit forgery; but there should be no more idea of guilt in the one case than in the other.”

---

Perceiving someone as innocent makes it easier to treat them with compassion. Following Russell’s reasoning, we’ll also be able to treat them more rationally (scientifically), which ought to produce better results. Relinquishing our belief in people’s free will helps us see everyone as ultimately innocent.

*Why I am not a Christian*, 1936.

# Albert Einstein

1879 – 1955

German physicist

“Our actions should be based on the ever-present awareness that human beings in their thinking, feeling and acting are just as causally bound as the stars in their motion.”

“I do not at all believe in human freedom in the philosophical sense. Everybody acts not only under external compulsion but also in accordance with inner necessity. Schopenhauer’s saying, “A man can do what he wants, but not want what he wants,” has been a very real inspiration to me since my youth; it has been a continual consolation in the face of life’s hardships, my own and others’, and an unfailing wellspring of tolerance.”

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Einstein included a version of the second quote in his brief “Credo” (“I believe”), delivered to the German League of Human Rights in 1932. That speech illustrates how central his belief in our lack of free will was a central guiding principle in his humanitarian beliefs and activism.

*Ideas and Opinions*, 1954.

# **Contemporary Quotes**

(alphabetical order)

# William M. Baum

Behaviorist psychologist  
University of New Hampshire

## **“Compassion and Control**

In the past, the idea that people choose according to free will was often bound up with the use of punishment to persuade people to avoid wrong actions. Thieves had their hands cut off; public hangings were common.

In the United States today such ideas and practices are giving way to a more compassionate approach to wrongdoing. The notion that there can be extenuating circumstances introduces the possibility of moving beyond blaming and punishing criminals. It allows judges more flexibility in deciding what consequences to impose. A teenager who steals a car to impress his friends can be treated differently from an adult who steals cars for a living.

From a practical standpoint, criminal behavior raises two sorts of questions: Can the behavior be changed? If so, what must be done to change it: (If the answer to the first question is “no,” then the second question becomes how to protect the rest of society from an incorrigible criminal.) When we focus on how to change behavior, we raise practical questions, such as whether jailing the micreant will serve any useful purpose, whether the person might benefit from job training, or whether counseling might help. The more we recognize that behavior is under the control of genes and environmental history, the more we feel free to be compassionate and practical about correcting wrongdoers.”

---

Behaviorists know that people's behavior is constantly being affected, modified, through reinforcement and punishment, by individuals and institutions. The issue isn't whether or not it's ever ethical to purposefully affect behavior, but how to ethically elicit the types of behavior which reflect our ideals (fairness, compassion, human rights).

*Understanding Behaviorism: Science, Behavior, and Culture, 2003.*

# Paul Breer

## Psychotherapist

“The techniques described later in the book should make it easier to accept life just as it is and to enjoy all the emotional and behavioral benefits that go with that perspective. Straining, blaming, craving, defending and protesting are all implicated in the agency syndrome. Their emotional counterparts – anxiety, guilt, despair, pride, and anger – can be expected to change as behavior itself changes. For anyone patient enough to see the process through, the end result is a transformation of personality. The more thorough the uprooting of agency, the more radical will be that transformation.”

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The techniques referred to by Breer are designed to integrate the conviction that we lack free will into daily life, by replacing “reactive, free-will based attitudes” with more objective, naturalistic ones.

*The Spontaneous Self: Viable Alternatives to Free will*, 1989.

# Grant Burns

Librarian, book reviewer,  
University of Michigan–Flint

“One wonders if the combination of widespread contempt for the poor – and even the denial of their existence – does not stem from the middle class's deep anxiety about the tenuous nature of its own grip on security. The adage that ‘there but for fortune go I’ is one that most reasonably comfortable Americans would prefer not to acknowledge. Admitting that one's well-being owes less to personal merit and hard work than to the quirks and accidents of circumstance is an act that challenges the most basic assumptions about personal worth – and that raises the ugliest visions of despair. It is so much easier and so much more agreeable – if we cannot pretend that the poor do not exist – to blame them for their own poverty.”

---

From a review of Barbara Ehrenreich's book *Nickel and Dimed in America: On (Not)Getting by in America*, 2001.

# **Dr. Mike Carlie**

Professor of Sociology, Southwest  
Missouri State University, Springfield

“Why Gangs Form According to Determinists:

According to determinists, gangs form and people join them as a result of biological, psychological, and/or socio-cultural pressures. There is little in the research which speaks to biological determinism as regards gangs... There is, however, much that could be said about psychological and socio-cultural reasons for gang formation and gang joining.”

“Socio-cultural explanations abound and include the need to: identify a rite of passage from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to young adulthood when socially acceptable rites of passage are unavailable; address feelings of economic deprivation; for close personal ties, unconditional love, and discipline; feel as though one has control of an otherwise uncontrollable social environment; and to be active, even if the activity is criminal. Maslow, too, has much to offer in terms of the individual's need to satisfy certain personal and social needs before progressing satisfactorily to self-actualization. And in terms of learning, a favorite social explanation for behavior, the influence of migrating gang members , mass media, and positive role models can not be overlooked.

How to Reduce Gang Formation According to Determinists:

1. Identify and modify the biological, physiological, or neurological traits responsible for gang formation and gang joining or isolate/eliminate individuals who possess them;
2. Provide therapy to individuals with psychological disturbances which create a tendency to form or join a gang, to prevent others from developing similar disturbances, or isolate/eliminate people who are disturbed; and/or
3. Identify and modify the social and cultural forces which cause some individuals to form or join a gang.”

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Dr. Carlie compares the Determinist’s approach to gang reduction favorably to the “Free Will Theorist’s,” approach, which consists primarily of a single tool, punishment. Since the free-willist believes an individual’s behavior is not a product of their environment, manipulating that environment would be ineffective. If on the other hand a gang member’s behavior is a result of determinants, altering those determinants might affect their behavior. Altering the environments which produce gang members could potentially reduce gang behavior.

*Into The Abyss: A Personal Journey into the World of Street Gangs, 2002.*

# Dr. Mecca Chiesa

Lecturer, behavior analyst,  
University of Kent, UK

“Where other listeners are dismayed by the implication that people cannot be held responsible for their behavior, behaviorists accommodate determinism and accountability. The positive implication of determinism in the area of moral responsibility is that it can encourage compassion in judgements of behavior (one's own and that of others) by focusing attention on the offensiveness of acts rather than persons. Another positive consequence is that it may help to alleviate emotional reactions on the part of professionals who have to work with offenders, particularly where the offences in question are especially distressing to observers.”

“Consider the performance of an accomplished ballet dancer, concert pianist, or public speaker; accepting that their performance is determined and even that the quality of their performance is predictable does nothing to lessen the visceral and intellectual pleasure to be gained by the observer.”

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The idea expressed in the second quote applies equally to everyday life. Good treatment, given and received, produces pleasure, which would hardly be diminished by the awareness that it is fully natural.

*Behavior Theory and Philosophy*, Kennon A. Lattal and Philip N. Chase, editors, 2003.

## **Deborah Cohen, MD**

## **Thomas Farley, MD**

“A revised view of eating as an automatic behavior, as opposed to a behavior that human beings can self-regulate, has profound implications for our response to the obesity epidemic. Indeed, researchers have described high levels of food marketing, accessibility, and quantity as the “toxic environment” at the root of the obesity epidemic. This concept suggests that educational or motivational approaches to reducing population-level consumption, such as the food guide pyramid, nutrition labeling, and dietary counseling, will continue to fail. In place of these approaches, to reduce consumption we should decrease the accessibility, visibility, or quantities of foods to which people are exposed and reduce the cues in our environment that encourage eating. The best approaches include reducing portion sizes, limiting access to ready-to-eat foods, limiting the availability of snack foods in schools and workplaces, and reducing food advertising. Because human beings appear to be very sensitive to small changes in the food environment, these modifications may not need to be large to be effective. Furthermore, because of the automatic nature of eating and because people are currently consuming more calories than they need, these changes – once implemented – might hardly be noticed. This perspective represents our best hope for controlling the obesity epidemic.”

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Laying aside the facile, pseudo-solution of free will allows the authors to look for true causes of obesity and to seek potential solutions. Contempt faced by the obese person is fueled by the myth that overweight people could stop eating as much if they simply tried harder. In their article the authors point to the extreme stigma of

being obese as evidence that if people could simply stop overeating, surely they would.

Deborah Cohen is a Senior Natural Scientist at RAND Corporation. Thomas Farley is a professor at Tulane University, Louisiana.

“Eating as Automatic Behavior” in “Preventing Chronic Disease,” online publication of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Gov’t., 2008.

# Thomas W. Clark

## Philosopher

“By understanding the causal factors that shape us and our lives – factors such as genetic endowment, upbringing and social environments – naturalism draws attention to what works in getting what we want. This increases individual self-efficacy and supports effective social policies in areas such as criminal and social justice, behavioral health and the environment. Further, since we understand we aren’t the ultimate originators of ourselves or our behavior, we can’t take ultimate credit or blame for who we are and what we do. This reduces unwarranted feelings of moral superiority, pride, shame and guilt, while encouraging self-acceptance. And since we see others as fully caused, for instance substance abusers, criminal offenders, the destitute and homeless, we might become less blaming, less punitive, and more empathetic and understanding. People don’t create themselves, so responsibility for their character and behavior isn’t ultimately theirs, but is distributed over the many factors that shaped them. Were we given their environmental and genetic lot in life, we would have become who they are and acted as they did: there but for circumstances go I. This challenges head-on the radical individualism of Western culture that imagines we are literally self-made. It also grounds a naturalistic ethics of compassion that guides personal behavior and motivates progressive social policy. This is an unapologetically humanistic naturalism.”

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Clark has been the main source of both ideas and means of expressing myself on the portion of this topic which falls outside my field of psychotherapy. He is director of the Center for Naturalism, and maintains the leading

website on the topic of naturalism at  
[centerfornaturalism.org](http://centerfornaturalism.org).

*Encountering Naturalism: A worldview and its uses, 2007.*

# Richard Dawkins

Biologist, Charles Simonyi Professor For The Understanding Of Science, Oxford

“Basil Fawlty, British television's hotelier from hell created by the immortal John Cleese, was at the end of his tether when his car broke down and wouldn't start. He gave it fair warning, counted to three, gave it one more chance, and then acted. "Right! I warned you. You've had this coming to you!" He got out of the car, seized a tree branch and set about thrashing the car within an inch of its life. Of course we laugh at his irrationality. Instead of beating the car, we would investigate the problem. Is the carburettor flooded? Are the sparking plugs or distributor points damp? Has it simply run out of gas? Why do we not react in the same way to a defective man: a murderer, say, or a rapist? Why don't we laugh at a judge who punishes a criminal, just as heartily as we laugh at Basil Fawlty? Or at King Xerxes who, in 480 BC, sentenced the rough sea to 300 lashes for wrecking his bridge of ships? Isn't the murderer or the rapist just a machine with a defective component? Or a defective upbringing? Defective education? Defective genes? ... My dangerous idea is that we shall eventually grow out of all this and even learn to laugh at it, just as we laugh at Basil Fawlty when he beats his car. “

“Political scientists of the future, studying the processes by which unscrupulous leaders arise and take over national institutions, have now lost key evidence forever [due to Saddam's execution]. But perhaps the most important research in which a living Saddam Hussein could have helped is psychological. Most people can't even come close to understanding how any man could be so cruel as Hitler or Saddam Hussein, or how such transparently evil monsters could secure sufficient support to take over an

entire country. What were the formative influences on these men? Was it something in their childhood that turned them bad? In their genes? In their testosterone levels? Could the danger have been nipped in the bud by an alert psychiatrist before it was too late? How would Hitler, or Saddam Hussein have responded to a different style of education? We don't have a clear answer to these questions. We need to do the research.”

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Dawkins shows how a strong commitment to the concept of causality helps us understand both the ridiculous (Basil Fawlty) and the deadly serious (Saddam Hussein). Fawlty, by exacting revenge on his car, only punishes himself. In Saddam's case, the urge for vengeance robbed serious students of human dysfunction of a very useful resource.

First Quote: Answer to the Question “What is your dangerous idea?” posed by the World Question Center at [www.Edge.org](http://www.Edge.org), 2006.

Second Quote: “Executing Saddam Hussein was an Act of Vandalism,” [RichardDawkins.net](http://RichardDawkins.net), 2007.

# Arnell Dowret

Radio Host, Website Host

“The belief that our behavior is caused by determinants which we do not choose does not diminish our capacity to change and grow. Without having to fear the damaging effects of judging and hating oneself, once someone accepts that their behaviors are the results of determinants the likelihood of them becoming more able to view their own behaviors objectively dramatically increases.

As soon as someone rejects the mythology that tells them that whatever difficulties they are struggling with results from their own decision to bring such situations upon themselves, a new and more realistic view of self-image becomes possible.

Someone who has struggled with challenge after challenge might for the first time become able to appreciate the amazing strength and determination which they have repeatedly demonstrated but might have never acknowledged. When people realize that they are not to blame for who they are, the perpetual cycle of dysfunctional behavior contributing to feelings of inferiority; and those feelings of inferiority contributing to evermore dysfunctional behaviors; becomes broken.

Facilitating increased self-awareness and self-esteem, the possession of a comprehensive understanding of the ultimate role that determinants play in our lives does not result in complacency and the abandonment of striving. It makes significant personal growth and achievement a realistic possibility.”

“The Secular Journey – Living a Life of Discovery”,  
OneWithEverything.Org, 2001.

# Chris Evatt

Author

“One hundred years ago, I wouldn’t have written this book. Instead, I’d be raising ten kids, milking cows, ironing sheets, sewing on buttons, and baking apricot pies. One hundred years from now, I probably wouldn’t have written it either. By then, most people will know that free will is a myth and illusion. The word will be out. Meanwhile, I feel blessed to know the truth ahead of the curve. Here are a few ways my edgy grasp of free will has transformed me:

I’m more aware of YOU: Knowing that people don’t have free will has made me more tuned into their joys, sorrows, ambitions, upbringing and past experiences. I care more about what makes people tick.

I blame others far less: I’ve stopped knocking others for having different values from my own. Instead of criticizing people, I look for positive ways to assist them on their (healthy) paths.

People annoy me far less: When someone irritates me, I remind myself that he or she (like me) has no more free agency than a hurricane. This thought comforts me.”

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“The Myth and Me,” *The Myth of Free Will*, 2008.

# Dr. Martha Farah

Neuroscientist, University of Pennsylvania

“Cognitive neuroscience is further along the path than people might realize toward explaining all kinds of human behaviors and human qualities as the functioning of a material system.”

“Why is it important to know what brain systems underlie self control? Many neuropsychiatric disorders, from substance dependence to personality disorders to attention deficit disorder, involve impairments of self control. Basic research such as this study may eventually lead to a better understanding of the systems responsible for these disorders, as well as for differences in people's ability to control our less constructive impulses, such as the urge to say or do something ugly. As Brass and Haggard put it in their introduction, “[The] decision whether to act often has critical consequences. For example, there is a clear distinction between intending to hit someone and actually hitting them.”

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Brain systems, not free will, are responsible for self control. Understanding this is a necessary step toward gaining control over harmful impulses.

“Brainstorms: Advances in Brain Science Pose Hard Questions” by Peter Nichols, Arts & Sciences Magazine, Penn State University, 2006.

# Owen Flanagan

Neuroscientist, philosopher, Princeton University

“No one knows how to make sense of the idea of an act of will that is both not determined and, at the same time, rational.”

“Humans ... are creatures who want to live meaningfully and morally. We have certain natural dispositions that make us want to live this way, and there is nothing remotely objectionable about working to achieve these aims. But they require work, since the demands of living meaningfully and morally are not in natural harmony. Every person who has pursued these aims has experienced the tension between living well personally and of doing what is best for our fellow humans and the other sentient beings that deserve our consideration. This is why ethics, conceived as human ecology, adopts the language of ecology and speaks of balancing and equilibrium. There is no algorithm, however, that can tell us exactly how to balance competing goods.”

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The first paragraph establishes Flanagan’s rejection of free will since, for the traditional concept to be coherent, free will would have to be both non-determined and rational. The second quote explains why lacking free will doesn’t result in losing our desire or ability to act ethically or to act in our intelligent self-interest. In fact, by virtue of its clarity, a purely naturalistic approach to our situation makes our attempts at “balancing competing goods” much more likely to be successful. Rejecting the idea that a ready-made “algorithmic” (plug-in-the-numbers) system of ethics – handed to us by a super-

natural being or otherwise – means that we can and must assume the neverending task of seeking balance and equilibrium for ourselves.)

*The Problem of the Soul*, 2004.

# Les Garwood

## Psychiatrist

“Worldwide, societies fail to meet the modern demands of their peoples. This phenomenon is rooted in the genetically determined and neurologically mediated illusion of so-called "Free Will"(FW). Despite exponential advances in science and technology, the poor performance of social and political institutions implicates FW as a key, underlying flaw. Yet, ironically, FW is the unquestioned philosophical paradigm implicit in essentially all strategies for dealing with today's complex social problems. Furthermore, since our leaders believe that FW actually exists, they must vainly struggle to find workable solutions. They do not even look for real causes so long as they suspect none beyond people making merely "bad choices". Therefore, the long-standing myth that certain social problems are "unsolvable" exposes FW as inescapably fatalistic. The implications drawn from FW are obsolete and incompatible with a vast, ever-growing and reliably reproducible body of empirical knowledge about humanity. The evidence shows that we are an intrinsic component of the universe--not apart from it. Thus, to maintain FW as a guiding principle in public policymaking is an increasingly expensive, often cruel, and consistently futile endeavor. But, in this group, we share visions of a better world, one built upon a scientifically based model. We are interested in advancing the concepts of Naturalism and how they may be applied to promote superior social reform, and to reduce suffering. The realization that FW is merely a seductive illusion embraces the genuinely promising reality of our determined universe. When minds begin to open to this we discover that there are indeed more wondrous things on earth, and in the rest of the cosmos, than were dreamt of in the mind of any prophet who has ever lived.

Please join us in exploring this enlightened philosophy, with its profound ramifications for our species, and how, together, we can help create a saner, more compassionate world.”



From the introduction to “Determinism: Envision a deterministic universe”, web group, founded 2001.

# Dr. Peter Gill

Psychotherapist, educator

“A rich capacity for and a generous expression of compassion are hallmarks of good mental health. We believe that compassion stems from a deep conviction that everyone is totally respectable and is “the player of the hand dealt to him.” It may be epitomized as “There but for the difference in our determinants go I.”

“We are part of the animal kingdom. In no essential respect are we qualitatively different from other animals. They, as are we, are totally determined, totally respectable, totally innocent in the broad sense; and, as are we, they are always doing the best they can at every moment under the circumstances of the moment.”

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In the 1980’s Dr. Gill founded a still-thriving school of psychotherapy based on his deterministic/naturalistic worldview. By “respect,” Gill means the unconditionally compassionate attitude he recommends toward all of nature, including all of nature’s creatures, justified by the ultimate innocence of all. Respect doesn’t imply approval, love or admiration, which are conditional. As he puts it, “[This] in no way allows us to escape the consequences of our behaviors.”

*Concepts of Reality* by Peter Lawrence Gill and Deborah Bohnert, 2000.

# Joshua D. Greene Jonathan Cohen

Psychologists, Princeton University

“Neuroscience is unlikely to tell us anything that will challenge the law’s stated assumptions. However, we maintain that advances in neuroscience are likely to change the way people think about human action and criminal responsibility by vividly illustrating lessons that some people appreciated long ago. Free will as we ordinarily understand it is an illusion generated by our cognitive architecture. Retributivist notions of criminal responsibility ultimately depend on this illusion, and, if we are lucky, they will give way to consequentialist ones, thus radically transforming our approach to criminal justice. At this time, the law deals firmly but mercifully with individuals whose behaviour is obviously the product of forces that are ultimately beyond their control. Some day, the law may treat all convicted criminals this way. That is, humanely.”

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By “the law’s stated assumptions,” I think the authors mean the law’s conceptions of right and wrong, not its attitude toward appropriate punishment, which, as they make clear later in the quote, *is* challenged.

“For the law, neuroscience changes nothing and everything”, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* , 2004.

# Robert Gulack

Attorney, legal scholar

“An ethical nation that had discarded the idea of free will could no longer blame crime on criminals. It could no longer hide from itself its responsibility to provide all children with proper homes, food, medicine, schools, economic opportunity, and ethical training. Its emphasis would be on preventing crime by justice, as opposed to revenging crime by cruelty.

We would start by giving all children a decent chance. We would offer people rehabilitation programs for drug addiction, instead of filling our prisons with drug addicts. We might be forced to lock up certain dangerous people, but we would do so under the most benevolent possible conditions - we wouldn't stuff people into hellholes that make them worse, as we do today. And we would never execute people.

If we could just give up this idea of holding people responsible for what they do, we could, at long last, start to behave responsibly in what we do.”

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“Free Will: The Last Great Lie,” address delivered to the Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County, New Jersey, 2004.

# Thich Nhat Hanh

Buddhist monk, social activist

“When we hate someone, and are angry at her, it is because we do not understand her or the circumstances she comes from. By practicing deep looking, we realize that if we grew up like her, in her set of circumstances and in her environment, we would be just like her. That kind of understanding removes your anger, and suddenly that person is no longer your enemy. Then you can love her. As long as she remains an enemy, love is impossible.”

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Though I doubt this exercise in empathy is capable of removing *all* anger, particularly toward those who’ve done us serious harm, it may help rid us of the additional anger caused by our erroneous intuition that a person has freely chosen to harm us. The same applies to self-compassion: realizing that our own actions aren’t free helps us have compassion for ourselves, which in turn helps us to realistically evaluate and potentially improve ourselves.

*Taming the Tiger Within*, 2004.

# John Hospers

Emeritus Professor of Philosophy  
University of Southern California

“Whether or not we have personality disturbances, whether or not we have the ability to overcome deficiencies of early environment, is like the answer to the question whether or not we shall be struck down by a dread disease: “it's all a matter of luck.” It is important to keep this in mind, for people almost always forget it, with consequences in human intolerance and unnecessary suffering that are incalculable.”

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Hospers was a philosophical determinist and a political Libertarian. Metaphysical freedom and political freedom are entirely independent concepts; it's entirely consistent to promote both political freedom and a naturalistic worldview.

“What Means this Freedom?,” *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science*, Sidney Hook (ed., 1958.

# Jeffrey L. Kirchmeier

Professor of Law, City University of New York

“[B]ecause a complete free will model is inconsistent with current knowledge, we should eliminate the role that classical retributive principles play in our criminal justice system so that the system focuses on disease theory and utilitarian principles. Instead of retribution principles, the criminal justice system should focus only on curing the offender, healing the victim, and protecting society.

“A consideration of the current capital punishment system, in light of empirical evidence of the causes of human actions and in light of philosophical justifications, reveals a criminal justice system with no moral foundation. Consistent with Judge Bazelon’s RSB (“Rotten Social Background”) theories, complete free will is a questionable theory and new scientific studies reveal causes of crime exterior to the defendants. Not only is the current capital punishment system without an empirical or philosophical justification, but in practice the condemned are chosen by jurors and judges who apply their own beliefs about free will to incomplete and imperfect information about the defendants. Instead of executing the “worst of the worst” we are executing the “unluckiest of the unlucky.”

“A Tear in the Eye of the Law: Mitigating Factors and the Progression Toward a Disease Theory of Criminal Justice”, Oregon Law Review, 2004.

## **Kevin T. McCauley, M.D.**

Physician, Director of Medical Training at  
Sober Living by the Sea Treatment Centers

“Under stress, the addict craves drugs. As far as the mid-brain is concerned, the addict's moral sense is now a hindrance to securing survival. It is not that addicts don't have values. It's that in the heat of that survival panic, the addict cannot draw upon their values to guide their behavior. Their values and their behavior become progressively out of congruence, thus increasing stress. In order to consummate the craving, the addict's cortex will shut down. But that's not the same as badness. The absence of one thing (cortical function) cannot stand for the presence of another thing (criminal intent).”

“ [S]omething very important happened when I was able to fill in the Disease Model for addiction: Addicts became patients! And that means addicts earn all the same rights as the patient with diabetes and broken legs. If I cannot ethically punish the diabetic, I cannot do so to the addict. If I cannot effectively treat broken legs with incarceration, neither can I do so to addicts.”

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“Is Addiction Really a "Disease?" Paper delivered to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, 2004.

# Marc D. McGarry

## Psychotherapist

“The truth is that determinism is a far happier belief than free will, and its adherents are as moral as anyone else. If you think you can will yourself to change and then find that you can’t, you will feel like a failure: contemptible or even sinful. A succession of dashed hopes leads to defeatism. In contrast, a determinist thinks we are all doing the best we can; we’ll change as soon as we can. This doesn’t mean an end to morality anymore than atheism does; it simply implies that troubled people be dealt with compassion and respect and not punishment and shame. Don’t forget that a very strong determinant is the approval and respect of others, which you don’t gain by being anti-social. A belief in determinism doesn’t mean you are indifferent to your failings; after all, most of us think deterministically about our physical illnesses, but that doesn’t stop us from fighting them.”

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“Free Will as a Supernatural Concept,” *Secular Nation*, 2005.

# Bob Miller

Psychologist, psychotherapist

## **“Invitation to a Revolution:**

Both the Copernican and Darwinian revolutions challenged prevailing beliefs in the exalted status of humans over nature. Both were highly resisted at first, but both resulted in a higher level of understanding of how nature actually works. Because the modern judicial system as well as Christian notions of heaven and hell are based on the concept of free will, there is much resistance to the Naturalistic revolution currently in its nascent stage. However, psychological and scientific research published in the highest level professional journals and books increasingly supports that uncaused causation is an illusion. The evidence for a naturalistic understanding of humans, and its implications for personal happiness and social policy, are far too important to be ignored. And the potential for a naturalistic spirituality is enormous.”

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“The Scientific and Logical Foundations of a Naturalistic Spirituality,” 2002.

# **Dr. Kristin Neff**

Professor in Human Development  
University of Texas, Austin

“Having compassion for oneself is really no different than having compassion for others. Think about what the experience of compassion feels like. First, to have compassion for others you must notice that they are suffering. If you ignore that homeless person on the street, you can’t feel compassion for how difficult his or her experience is. Second, compassion involves feeling moved by others’ suffering so that your heart responds to their pain (the word compassion literally means to “suffer with”). When this occurs, you feel warmth, caring, and the desire to help the suffering person in some way. Having compassion also means that you offer understanding and kindness to others when they fail or make mistakes, rather than judging them harshly. Finally, when you feel compassion for another (rather than mere pity), it means that you realize that suffering, failure, and imperfection is part of the shared human experience. ‘There but for fortune go I.’

Self-compassion involves acting the same way towards yourself when you are having a difficult time, fail, or notice something you don’t like about yourself. Instead of just ignoring your pain with a ‘stiff upper lip’ mentality, you stop to tell yourself ‘this is really difficult right now, how can I comfort and care for myself in this moment?’ Instead of mercilessly judging and criticizing yourself for various inadequacies or shortcomings, self-compassion means you are kind and understanding when confronted with personal failings – after all, who ever said you were supposed to be perfect? You may try to change in ways that allow you to be more healthy and happy, but this is done because you care about yourself, not because you are

worthless or unacceptable as you are. Perhaps most importantly, having compassion for yourself means that you honor and accept your humanness. Things will not always go the way you want them to. You will encounter frustrations, losses will occur, you will make mistakes, bump up against your limitations, fall short of your ideals. This is the human condition, a reality shared by all of us. The more you open your heart to this reality instead of constantly fighting against it, the more you will be able to feel compassion for yourself and all your fellow humans in the experience of life.”

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The phrase “There but for fortune go I” seems to tie Dr. Neff’s call for compassion to a naturalistic worldview where luck, not free will, rules. Adjusting the aphorism to address self-compassion, one could say that “Here due to fortune go I.”

[www.self-compassion.org](http://www.self-compassion.org).

# Phil Ochs

folksinger

“Show me a prison, show me a jail,  
Show me a prisoner whose face has gone pale  
And I'll show you a young man with so many reasons why  
And there but for fortune, may go you or I.

Show me the alley, show me the train,  
Show me a hobo who sleeps out in the rain,  
And I'll show you a young man with so many reasons why  
There but for fortune, may go you or go I – you and I.

Show me the whiskey stains on the floor,  
Show me the drunken man as he stumbles out the door,  
And I'll show you a young man with so many reasons why  
There but for fortune, may go you or go I – you and I.

Show me the country where bombs had to fall,  
Show me the ruins of buildings once so tall,  
And I'll show you a young land with so many reasons why  
There but for fortune, go you or go I – you and I.”

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“There But for Fortune”, Elektra Records, 1966.

# Derk Pereboom

Philosopher, University of Vermont

“Living without a conception of our choices and actions as freely willed ... would not have disastrous consequences, and indeed it promises significant benefits for human life. Hard incompatibilism would not undermine the purpose in life that our projects can provide. Neither would it hinder the possibility of the good interpersonal relationships fundamental to our happiness. Acceptance of hard incompatibilism rather holds out the promise of greater equanimity by reducing anger that hinders fulfillment. Far from threatening meaning in life, hard incompatibilism can help us achieve the conditions required for flourishing, for it can assist in releasing us from the harmful passions that contribute so much to human distress.”

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The hard incompatibilist position can be described using Pereboom’s words: “Living without the conception of our choices and actions as freely willed....”

*Living without Free Will*, 2001.

# Andrew A. Phemister

Assistant Professor,  
Rehabilitation Counseling Program,  
Minnesota State University, Mankato

“Traditionally, research on the attribution of responsibility has presumed that people are more interested in understanding the causes of events (Brickman et al., 1982). Such a manner of thinking presupposes the question "why?" as in "why me?" or "why did this happen?" and is antithetical to the inherent possibilities within asking oneself "how will I respond?" This denotes a culturally accepted "past orientation," not unlike traditional psychoanalysis. In a rehabilitation counseling relationship one result of such past orientation could conceivably be the strong suggestion to clients that they are the products of forces beyond their control (Bruyere, 1986).

However, Brickman et al., (1982) contended that quite the opposite may be true; that people in general are more concerned with controlling behavior in order to maximize desired outcomes. The authors asserted that this is evident in the practice of self-rewards or self-punishments that are contingent upon a particular behavior or achievement. This line of reasoning illustrates a "future orientation" and aligns with May's (1967) view that, as a person seeks to control his or her future then he or she clearly does not feel like a powerless victim.”

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Though Phemister personally comes down on the free will side of the debate, he correctly identifies the importance of both the counselor and the patients' worldviews on therapeutic outcomes. Blame, guilt, passivity, help-

lessness, all affect one's ability to respond optimally to a disability. Anti-naturalistic myths lead us to false conclusions which have negative emotional and behavioral consequences ("I (or you) freely chose this", "God is punishing me (or you)", "What happens in this life doesn't matter", etc.). A fully causal attributional model promotes a realistic, pragmatic approach to the process of healing.

"a: Exploring Conceptions of Disability and Counseling Theory", *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 2001.

# **William B. Provine**

Biologist, Cornell University

“Free will is a disastrous and mean social myth. Using free will as an excuse, we condone a vicious attitude of revenge toward anyone who does wrong in our society. Most of the movies in a video store are based upon getting even with some nasty person. This attitude leads to a grossly expensive and hopeless systems of punishment in America, though much the same attitude can be found in most countries around the world.

Without free will, justification for revenge disappears and rehabilitation is the main job of judicial systems and prisons. We will all live in a better society when the myth of free will is dispelled.”

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From his presentation at the Second Annual Darwin Day Celebration University of Tennessee, Knoxville Feb. 12, 1998.

# John Rawls

Political philosopher

“It seems to be one of the fixed points of our considered judgments that no one deserves his place in the distribution of native endowments, any more than one deserves one's initial starting place in society. The assertion that a man deserves the superior character that enables him to make the effort to cultivate his abilities is equally problematic; for his character depends in large part upon fortunate family and social circumstances for which he can claim no credit. The notion of desert seems not to apply to these cases.”

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Without free will, no one ultimately deserves anything, good or bad. However, as healthy, social animals, we want everyone to have what they need in order to enjoy themselves, which in turn enriches our community and ourselves.

*A Theory of Justice*, 1971.

# Janet Radcliffe Richards

Director of the Centre for  
Biomedical Ethics and Philosophy,  
University College London

“ ... if we understand that there are good evolutionary reasons for our wanting people to suffer when they have done direct or indirect harm to us, then we can account for our strong feelings about the appropriateness of retribution without presuming they are a guide to moral truth .... We may be able to recognize our retributivist feelings as a deep and important aspect of our character - and take them seriously to that extent – without endorsing them as a guide to truth, and start rethinking our attitudes toward punishment on that basis.”

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Not strictly concerned with the existence of free will, this quote addresses a related issue, the urge toward retribution. Retributive measures are rationalized by appealing to the offender’s possession of free will (“they could have done otherwise”). Without the myth of Free will, retribution loses its moral justification.

*Human Nature After Darwin*, 2000.

# Eleanor Rosch

Psychologist  
University of California, Berkeley

“Not only is [the belief in Deep Moral Responsibility †] not necessary, it may even be harmful. I’m thinking of what psychologist Eleanor Rosch says in a talk she gave in San Francisco last August called ‘What Buddhist Meditation has to Tell Psychology About the Mind’. At one point she was discussing the Buddhist doctrine of the endlessly ramifying interdependence of everything, and observed that ‘an understanding of [this] interdependence has clinical significance. It can provide people who suffer from guilt, depression, or anxiety with a vision of themselves as part of an interdependent network in which they need neither blame themselves nor feel powerless. In fact it may be that it is only when people are able to see the way in which they are not responsible for events that they can find the deeper level at which it is possible to take responsibility beyond concept and (depending upon the terminology of one’s religious affiliation) repent, forgive, relax, or have power over the phenomenal world.”

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From an interview of Galen Strawson (see his entry) by Tamler Sommers, *The Believer*, 2003.

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† By “Deep Moral Responsibility” (DMR), Strawson means the kind of “ultimate” responsibility one could have only if one possessed free will. He acknowledges the value and necessity of people bearing consequences of their actions.

# B.F. Skinner

## Behavioral Psychologist

“Autonomous man serves to explain only the things we are not yet able to explain in other ways .... The task of a scientific analysis is to explain how the behavior of a person as a physical system is related to the conditions under which the human species evolved and the conditions under which the individual lives. Unless there is indeed some capricious or creative intervention, these events must be related, and no intervention is in fact needed.”

“It is hard to imagine a world in which people live together without quarreling, maintain themselves by producing the food, shelter, and clothing they need, enjoy themselves and contribute to the enjoyment of others in art, music, literature, and games, consume only a reasonable part of the resources of the world and add as little as possible to its pollution, bear no more children than can be raised decently, continue to explore the world around them and discover better ways of dealing with it, and come to know themselves accurately and, therefore, manage themselves effectively. Yet all this is possible, and even the slightest sign of progress should bring a kind of change which in traditional terms would be said to assuage wounded vanity, offset a sense of hopelessness or nostalgia, correct the impression that “we neither can nor need to do anything for ourselves,” and promote a “sense of freedom and dignity” by building “a sense of confidence and worth.” In other words, it should abundantly reinforce those who have been induced by their culture to work for its survival.”

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Skinner's title, "Beyond Freedom and Dignity" is seriously misleading. As this quote illustrates, Skinner seeks to redefine freedom and dignity, to make them more realistic and more attainable. He believes our present conception of freedom and dignity are flawed because they are based on the unscientific concept of "autonomous man", that is, "free will man," who would be causally disconnected from his environment. See Voltaire (page 9) for an interesting parallel.

*Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, 1971.

# Tamler Sommers

Philosopher, University of Minnesota

“Imagine for a moment that instead of Timothy McVeigh destroying the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, it had been a mouse. Suppose this mouse got into the wiring of the electrical system, tangled the circuits and caused a big fire, killing all those inside. Now think of the victims’ families. There would, of course, still be enormous grief and suffering, but there would be one significant difference: There would be no resentment, no consuming anger, no hatred ...”

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From the introduction to Sommers’s interview with British philosopher Galen Strawson, *The Believer* (online), 2003.

# Steven Stokes

Philosopher, moderator,  
Philosophy Cafe, Atlanta, GA.

“For me the benefit of recognizing the truth about our lack of free will, is that it is the truth. This is significant to me, because I appreciate the value of truth; others who have no fundamental or axiomatic appreciation for truth might very well miss this sublime benefit.

Also, we all feel the unseen pressure of the forces of our lives that move us to do what we do, and keep us from doing what we don't do, but without knowledge of our unfreeness, we live a discombobulated life, never knowing why. In our hearts of hearts, we know we always do the only thing that we can do, and yet hold expectations for our fellow beings to somehow do other than what they can only do. This irreconcilable accounting of living makes for an almost universal neurosis particular to humanity.”

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“NFWism: Boon or Bane” from his blog [paradoxofwill.blogspot.com](http://paradoxofwill.blogspot.com), 2007.

# Galen Strawson

Philosopher, University of Reading, UK

“So can I live the denial of free will and DMR rather than just accept it theoretically? Well, if I think I’ve done something bad, I feel wholly responsible – I feel remorse, regret and so on. So no. But perhaps the remorse doesn’t endure for too long. I think that if such feelings persist too long, they become self-indulgent in some deep way. I think, in fact, that all guilt is self-indulgent – it’s all about self – while things like remorse and contrition are not, although they can become so, if they persist too long they get ritualized.”

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From his interview by Tamler Sommers, *The Believer*, 2003.

# Chris Townsend

Leadership Educator,  
Editor, Journal of Leadership Educators

“Behavior is caused. It is the leader’s responsibility to create an environment where people want to succeed and continually improve the organization. If I can demonstrate why continual improvement is advantageous, people’s natural curiosity can be aroused and they can work toward a shared vision for excellence. I strive to utilize the Transformational Leadership Model. It is my responsibility, as a leader, to set up an environment where all of the group can be transformed into the best they can be.”

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Another example of how the insight that behavior is caused is, rather than a barrier to progress, useful in studying and improving behavior.

“Leadership Philosophy: The Leader as a Teacher,” The Journal of Leadership Educators, 2007.

# Dr. Clay Tucker-Ladd

## Psychologist

“Much human behavior is unquestionably very complex, but it is reasonable to assume that all behavior is potentially understandable, i.e. a consistent, logical, to-be-expected outcome resulting from many causes. One way of looking at this is to say, "If I knew all the laws that are influencing your behavior, I would understand you perfectly. I would see that given your genes and physical condition, given the effects of past events and your memory (perhaps distorted) of past experiences, and given your view of the present situation, I would do exactly what you are doing, no matter how saintly or how evil.”

“If a person can learn to think this way, i.e. that all human feelings and actions are caused by psychological laws, then all behavior becomes, in a sense, "acceptable" because it is, at the moment, unavoidably lawful. The truth is everything is lawful, so far as science knows. Thus, all behavior, yours and everyone's, is the natural, inevitable outcome of the existing causes. No other outcome was possible given the circumstances (causes and laws). Such an attitude leads logically to tolerance of yourself and others --of all that has happened in the past. Moreover, a deterministic orientation offers hope that scientists and other careful observers, including you, will discover more and more useful knowledge ("laws") for changing the future. Accept yesterday, influence tomorrow.”

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“Psychological Self-Help” (website, [www.psychologicalselfhelp.org](http://www.psychologicalselfhelp.org)).

# Dr. Nora Volkow

Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse

“Advances in brain-imaging technology have shown what many researchers have long suspected – that drug addiction is a disease of the brain, and not simply a failure of free will. One of the most instrumental leaders in that effort has been Nora Volkow, MD. The sometimes controversial work of Dr. Volkow and others during the past 15 years has provided a better understanding of how neurobiological changes in the brain can lead a person to lose control over his or her behavior and become addicted to drugs. ‘That research and understanding may soon yield more effective medications and better overall treatment for patients with addiction,’ said Dr. Volkow at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association.”

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Recognizing the non-existence and incoherence of the concept of free will would be the best, most definitive way to eliminate it as a suspect in dysfunctional processes. Second best is to research and identify the specific dysfunction being studied and confirm that, indeed, observable causes are sufficient to account for it in its entirety. Those who seek to understand the causes and cures of social problems must waste valuable time and resources defending against the myth that human behavior is uncaused and therefore inscrutable.

“The Neurobiology of Free Will and Drug Addiction” by Colby Stong, *NeuroPsychiatry Reviews*, 2007.

# Bruce N. Waller

Philosopher, Youngstown State University,  
Youngstown, Ohio

“Careful focus on the full details of our environmental histories ... brings the principle of equality down from the transcendent realms of “all created equal” or a Kantian “kingdom of ends” and anchors it in the gritty environments that shaped us and were – at critical points – not of our own choosing or making. And, if everyone is precisely equal in just deserts, then the vast differences in wealth and power among individuals in our society are unjust. Recognizing the injustice of that distribution is the first step toward righting that distributive balance and lifting the severe practical restraints on individual freedom imposed by such inequities.”

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*Freedom without Responsibility*, 1990.

# Daniel Wegner

Psychologist, Harvard University,  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

“We worry that explaining evil condones it. We have to maintain our outrage at Hitler. But wouldn’t it be nice to have a theory of evil in advance that could keep him from coming to power?”

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If evil were a supernatural force, we would have little hope of understanding or preventing it.

*The Illusion of Conscious Will, 2002.*

# **Organizational Quotes**

(random order)

# C.J. Baxter Group, LLC

Business Consulting company

“The best way to understand motivation is to examine three underlying principles of human behavior, because the concept of motivation is central to understanding such behavior.

- The first principle states that all human behavior is caused. This simply means that people have a reason for doing whatever they do.
- Second, all behavior is directed toward achieving a goal. People do things to accomplish something. Behavior is not just random.
- Finally, each person is unique because of a different heredity and environment. No two people are alike, so no two people have exactly the same characteristics.”

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This company's website describes their mission as follows: "Partnering to increase productivity and profitability through employee development." Though they may be unaware of the full philosophical implications of their principles, they've taken a step in the right direction. In our profit-driven culture, one way Naturalism might spread is by showing its beneficial effect on the bottom line.

J. Baxter Group LLC Newsletter, 2004.

# Institute for Cognitive Science

University of Geneva, Switzerland

“David Hume famously claimed that causality is the cement of the universe. Today, we can re-interpret his claim by saying that causality is the cognitive cement of the universe. It is indeed a central notion in the representation of action that governs the observed behaviour in many different species. It links eventualities and predicts the consequences of action. It is the origin of behaviours that allow animals, notably human animals, to act upon and thus shape their environments. Causality is also the cognitive basis for the acquisition and the use of categories and concepts in the child. As such, it is the basis for rationality.”

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From “Causality,” an online conference sponsored by the Institute, 2005.

# Beingism.Org

## Website

“This [discussion about free will] is important because belief in free will is a major obstacle to having compassion. Very often it is taboo to analyze the causes of unethical or unpopular actions, as if understanding the causes involved somehow means condoning or approving the actions themselves. For example, we are often discouraged from considering the motives of terrorists or other criminals. When someone asks why such a person would do a terrible thing, the tendency is to assume that the perpetrators are simply horrible human beings and that there is nothing more to consider. Unfortunately, this is merely to substitute stigma for rational examination, resulting in increased suffering and virtually guaranteeing that the problem behavior will continue. A thorough debunking of free will shows that though human behavior may often be extremely complex, it is almost certainly as comprehensible and understandable as any other part of reality. When we understand why people act as they do even if we disapprove of their behavior, we can work to create the kind of world in which they are no longer prompted to act in that manner.”

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From their website [www.beingism.org](http://www.beingism.org).

# The Center for Naturalism

Non-profit organization, website

## **“Guiding Philosophy:**

Based on knowledge derived from the physical and social sciences, the world view that is naturalism holds that human beings are fully included in nature. Science tells us that we are connected and united, in each and every aspect of our being, to the natural world. There is, under naturalism, nothing supernatural about us which places us above or beyond nature, but this is something to be celebrated, not feared. Practically speaking, naturalism holds that an individual’s development and behavior are entirely the result of prior and surrounding conditions, both genetic and environmental. Naturalism, therefore, denies that persons have contra-causal free will - that something within them is capable of acting as a first cause. But this isn't a problem, it's just how things are. See *A Guide to Naturalism, Tenets of Naturalism, Consequences of Naturalism, and Resources.*

Naturalism as a guiding philosophy can help create a better world by illuminating more precisely the conditions under which individuals and societies flourish, and by providing a tangible, real basis for connection and community. It holds that doctrines and policies which assume the existence of a contra-causally free agent, and which therefore ignore the actual causes of behavior, are unfounded and counter-productive. To the extent to which we suppose persons act out of their uncaused free will, to that extent will we be blind to those factors which produce criminality and other social pathologies, or, on the positive side, the factors which make for well-adjusted, productive individuals and societies.”

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This is Tom Clark's organization.  
From his website [www.centerfornaturalism.org](http://www.centerfornaturalism.org), 2007.

# Society of Natural Science

Non-profit membership organization, website

## **“AXIOMS:**

The processes of the scientific method are the most reliable and acceptable methods for discovering and clarifying the truths of man's existence. Established religions deal with the same issues regarding true human nature and the ideal life as we do but tend to eschew scientific methodology, relying instead on myths, visions, folklore, “miracles” etc. They are best regarded as primitive psychologies.

Everything in nature is caused; this is the definition of Total Determinism.

All of humanity’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are caused (forced) by one or more determinants. (The concept of “free will” is so elusive it can’t even be defined, except to mean without cause, chaotic.)

Beliefs, especially those which are emotionally loaded, are powerful determinants of thoughts, feelings and behaviors. “We are what we believe.”

Man's need for the acceptance and love of his fellows is a powerful determinant of his thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

The pursuit of happiness, as stated in The Declaration of Independence, is the “purpose” of life.

There is no mind independent of the body nor body independent of the mind; there is only an integrated organism. This concept is known as the Psychosomatic Principle.

All humans are born innocent, and are gentle in nature. Thus, we reject all notions that children are born vicious or in 'sin'."

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From their website [www.determinism.com](http://www.determinism.com), 2001.

# The Longview Institute

## Think Tank

“The miserliness of our public assistance is justified by the claim that poverty is the consequence of personal moral failings. Most of our policies incorrectly assume that people can avoid or overcome poverty through hard work alone. Yet this assumption ignores the realities of our failing urban schools, increasing employment insecurities, and the lack of affordable housing, health care, and child care. It ignores the fact that the American Dream is rapidly becoming unattainable for an increasing number of Americans, whether employed or not.

The preoccupation with the moral failings of the poor disregards the structural problems underlying poverty. Instead, we see increasing numbers of policies that are obsessed with preventing “welfare fraud.” This obsession creates barriers to help for those who need it. Welfare offices have always required recipients to “prove” their eligibility. Agency employees are in effect trained to begin with the presumption of guilt; every seemingly needy face they encounter is that of a cheater until the potential client can prove the contrary. With the passage of TANF, the rules have become so complex that even welfare caseworkers do not always understand them, let alone their clients. Some of those who need help choose to forego it rather than face this humiliating eligibility process.”

“The fact that single-parent households are more common in the United States than in many of these countries where the poor receive greater assistance undermines the claim that more generous policies will encourage more single women to have children out of wedlock. These other countries all take a more comprehensive government ap-

proach to combating poverty, and they assume that it is caused by economic and structural factors rather than bad behavior.”

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The authors characterize the rightist approach to the problem of poverty as “a misguided focus on moral poverty” with its chronic obsession with “welfare cheats.”

Removing the free will myth from both the progressive’s and the conservative’s formulation would clear things up dramatically. Even if attitudes of the poor were a contributing factor, where did those attitudes come from? Such attitudes must themselves be caused. This illustrates a utility of the free will myth, to protect certain causal contributors from scrutiny (see Nietzsche). Free will serves as a wall which conceals distal causes and places all “blame” on the proximal (nearest) cause, the individual or individuals themselves. Admitting a complexity of causation, even one that might include the attitudes of the sufferer, wouldn’t deter a naturalistically oriented society from feeling compassion for those in trouble or from trying to help them. Without the contempt induced by the free will myth we could approach the problem of poverty with compassion and enthusiasm, knowing that, like disease, it has identifiable causes and thus potentially identifiable solutions.

“The Compassion Gap in American Poverty Policy” by Fred Block, Anna C. Korteweg, and Kerry Woodward, in “Contexts”, *Journal of the American Sociological Association*, 2006.

# Selections

## **Baruch Spinoza**

“I have made a ceaseless effort not to ridicule, not to bewail, not to scorn human actions, but to understand them.”

## **Voltaire**

“What is the meaning of this phrase “to be free”? it means “to be able,” or assuredly it has no sense.”

## **Baron d’Holbach**

“Morals would be a chimera and would have no certain principles, if it was not founded upon the knowledge of the motives which must necessarily have an influence upon the human will, and which must necessarily determine the actions of human beings.”

## **Charles Darwin**

“This view (no free will) should teach one humility, one deserves no credit for anything (yet one takes it for beauty and good temper)...a believer in these views will pay great attention to Education.”

## **Bertrand Russell**

“Reforms in education have come very largely through the study of the insane and feeble-minded, because they have not been held morally responsible for their failures and have therefore been treated more scientifically than normal children.”

## **Albert Einstein**

“[The lack of free will] has been a continual consolation in the face of life’s hardships, my own and others’, and an unflinching wellspring of tolerance.”

**Thomas W. Clark**

“By understanding the causal factors that shape us and our lives – factors such as genetic endowment, upbringing and social environments – naturalism draws attention to what works in getting what we want.”

**Richard Dawkins**

“My dangerous idea is that we shall eventually grow out of all this (belief in free will) and even learn to laugh at it, just as we laugh at Basil Fawlty when he beats his car. “

**Martha Farah**

“Cognitive neuroscience is further along the path than people might realize toward explaining all kinds of human behaviors and human qualities as the functioning of a material system.”

**Les Garwood**

“The realization that Free Will is merely a seductive illusion embraces the genuinely promising reality of our determined universe. When minds begin to open to this we discover that there are indeed more wondrous things on earth, and in the rest of the cosmos, than were dreamt of in the mind of any prophet who has ever lived.”

**Peter Gill**

“A rich capacity for and a generous expression of compassion are hallmarks of good mental health. We believe that compassion stems from a deep conviction that everyone is totally respectable and is “the player of the hand dealt to him.” It may be epitomized as “There but for the difference in our determinants go I.”

**Joshua D. Greene, Jonathan Cohen**

“At this time, the law deals firmly but mercifully with individuals whose behaviour is obviously the product of forces that are ultimately beyond their control. Some day, the law

may treat all convicted criminals this way. That is, humanely.”

**Robert Gulack**

“An ethical nation that had discarded the idea of free will could no longer blame crime on criminals. It could no longer hide from itself its responsibility to provide all children with proper homes, food, medicine, schools, economic opportunity, and ethical training.”

**Thich Nhat Hanh**

“When we hate someone, and are angry at her, it is because we do not understand her or the circumstances she comes from. By practicing deep looking, we realize that if we grew up like her, in her set of circumstances and in her environment, we would be just like her.”

**John Hospers**

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**Marc McGarry**

“A belief in determinism doesn’t mean you are indifferent to your failings; after all, most of us think deterministically about our physical illnesses, but that doesn’t stop us from fighting them.”

**Bob Miller**

“The evidence for a naturalistic understanding of humans, and its implications for personal happiness and social policy, are far too important to be ignored. And the potential for a naturalistic spirituality is enormous.”

**Derk Pereboom**

“Living without a conception of our choices and actions as freely willed ... would not have disastrous consequences, and indeed it promises significant benefits for human life.”

**John Rawls**

“It seems to be one of the fixed points of our considered judgments that no one deserves his place in the distribution of native endowments, any more than one deserves one's initial starting place in society.”

**William B. Provine**

“Free will is a disastrous and mean social myth. Using free will as an excuse, we condone a vicious attitude of revenge toward anyone who does wrong in our society.”

**Janet Radcliffe Richards**

“ ... [If] we understand that there are good evolutionary reasons for our wanting people to suffer when they have done direct or indirect harm to us, then we can account for our strong feelings about the appropriateness of retribution without presuming they are a guide to moral truth.”

**B.F. Skinner**

“Autonomous man serves to explain only the things we are not yet able to explain in other ways... The task of a scientific analysis is to explain how the behavior of a person as a physical system is related to the conditions under which the human species evolved and the conditions under which the individual lives.”

**Steven Stokes**

“Without knowledge of our un-freeness, we live a discom-bobulated life, never knowing why. In our hearts of hearts, we know we always do the only thing that we can do, and

yet hold expectations for our fellow beings to somehow do other than what they can only do.”

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