

Free Determinism: A Recursive Model of Agency, Constraint, and Choice

Kyle Hamilton

Abstract

The traditional free-will debate is often organized around whether human agency is compatible with causal determination. This paper proposes Free Determinism as a recursive model that changes the temporal unit of analysis. Agents enter decisions with biological, psychological, social, environmental, and historical conditions they did not wholly choose. They nevertheless represent possibilities, deliberate, act, encounter consequences, learn, and thereby alter some of the conditions under which later agency occurs. The basic sequence is: Conditions → Possibilities → Decision → Choice → Consequence → Experience → Memory/Learning → New Conditions. Freedom is defined here not as exemption from causation but as an agent's capacity to navigate within conditions. Determination is correspondingly dynamic: it includes inherited conditions and accumulated conditions partly produced by earlier exercises of agency. The distinctive proposal is therefore recursive: conditions shape agency, while agency contributes to the future conditions that shape subsequent agency. The paper distinguishes this temporal feedback thesis from standard compatibilism, reasons-responsive accounts, and libertarian sourcehood, and considers objections concerning determinism, manipulation, luck, responsibility, and novelty.

Keywords: free will; determinism; agency; compatibilism; feedback; choice; learning; constraint; moral responsibility

1. Introduction

A familiar framing of the free-will problem asks whether a human action is free or determined. Free Determinism begins from a different question: what process produced the present choice, and what does that choice produce afterward? The shift matters because the chooser at a later decision is not psychologically or practically identical to the chooser at an earlier one. Consequences become experiences; experiences can become memories, skills, habits, commitments, relationships, resources, injuries, expectations, and altered environments. Those changes then enter later decisions as conditions.

The model therefore treats agency as historically recursive. A person begins life amid conditions not selected by that person—among them biological inheritance, early environment, language, social structures, and formative experiences. Yet a person also acts within those conditions. Some actions leave durable traces. A skill acquired through practice may expand later possibilities; debt may contract them; trust may create access; repeated behavior may become habit; education may alter both beliefs and practical opportunities. The present terrain is consequently partly inherited and partly accumulated.

This paper calls that relationship Free Determinism. The name is not intended to assert that freedom and determinism have simply been reconciled by definition. Rather, it marks a process claim: freedom-like navigation occurs within conditions, and the consequences of that navigation can themselves become determinants of later navigation. The central thesis is temporal and recursive rather than a claim that an agent is an uncaused cause.

2. The Core Model

The compact form of Free Determinism is:

**Conditions → Possibilities → Decision → Choice → Consequence → Experience →
Memory/Learning → New Conditions**

Each term names a function. Conditions are the relevant features already present. Possibilities are actions or futures physically and cognitively available or represented to the agent. Decision is the internal process of generating, comparing, weighting, and narrowing possibilities. Choice is commitment to a route or action. Consequence is what occurs when action meets a world that includes other agents and events outside the chooser's control. Experience is the consequence as lived by the agent. Memory and learning carry information forward. New conditions are the altered state from which later navigation begins.

This model deliberately distinguishes decision from choice. Ordinary language often treats the terms as synonyms, but the distinction is analytically useful. A person considering a job can imagine several futures, retrieve memories, compare costs, anticipate emotions, and reverse an inclination several times before accepting or rejecting the offer. Much of the agency-relevant process occurs before observable commitment.

3. Freedom Without 'Nowhere'

Free Determinism defines freedom as the capacity of an agent to navigate within conditions. In this model, freedom is not an all-or-nothing metaphysical property. It is a degree-sensitive practical capacity. An agent has greater navigational freedom when the agent can recognize a broader set of genuinely available possibilities, evaluate them with greater informational and deliberative competence, and translate a selected possibility into action with less coercion or impairment. An agent has less navigational freedom when the available option set is narrower or when the capacities required to evaluate and act on those options are substantially restricted. This definition does not require the navigation process itself to be uncaused.

Constraint and agency can therefore coexist at the level of practical navigation. A chess player is constrained by the board, rules, and position, yet knowledge and skill make a substantial difference to what the player can recognize and accomplish. Human constraints are far more complex, but the structural point is similar: the range of effective action depends both on conditions and on capacities operating within them.

This does not establish that causal determinism is true. Nor does the model require it. Free Determinism can operate under uncertainty. Outcomes can diverge from intentions because other agents, environmental events, incomplete information, probabilistic processes, and unanticipated interactions participate in consequences. The chooser navigates; the chooser does not control the whole world.

4. The Recursive Thesis: Past Agency as Future Structure

The model's strongest claim concerns the return path from consequence to future conditions. Determination is not only inherited. Some determinants are accumulated. A promise made yesterday can constrain today; practice can become skill; repeated action can become habit; a relationship can create responsibilities; an earlier decision can change location, income, social network, or knowledge.

To avoid ambiguity between conditions, choice, consequence, and action, the model uses distinct symbols throughout. Let K_t denote conditions at time t ; P_t the possibilities genuinely available or represented to the agent; D_t the decision process; H_t the choice or commitment; Q_t the consequence that results when the choice interacts with the world; E_t the agent's resulting experience; and M_t the memory, learning, habit formation, or other durable update carried forward. The sequence is therefore $K_t \rightarrow P_t \rightarrow D_t \rightarrow H_t \rightarrow Q_t \rightarrow E_t \rightarrow M_t \rightarrow K_{t+1}$. The crucial transition is $M_t \rightarrow K_{t+1}$: information and structural changes produced in one episode become part of the conditions of the next.

This yields the central formulation: conditions shape freedom; exercised agency produces consequences; consequences can become conditions; changed conditions shape subsequent agency. In this restricted sense, past freedom becomes future structure. The claim is not that every choice permanently determines the future. Many effects dissipate, some conditions are reversible, and chance or intervention can redirect a trajectory. The claim is that some effects persist and thereby alter later possibility and deliberation.

5. Desire, Belief, Temperament, Emotion, and Attention

The book from which this model is developed uses desire, belief, and temperament (DBT) as compact labels for major forms of weighting in decision. Desire supplies attraction or aversion; belief supplies interpretation and expectation; temperament supplies characteristic inclination. These factors can conflict. An agent can desire an outcome while believing it harmful, or judge patience best while being dispositionally inclined toward rapid response.

DBT is not posited as an exhaustive psychological theory. Attention, emotion, knowledge, habit, bodily state, social influence, and other variables also affect deliberation. The conceptual usefulness of DBT lies in showing that the filters influencing navigation can themselves be modified by navigation. Evidence can change beliefs; consequences can

weaken or strengthen desires; training can modify habitual responses. Self-knowledge can itself become a new condition entering subsequent decisions.

6. Relation to Compatibilism

The most serious classification challenge is that Free Determinism shares important territory with compatibilism. Compatibilism holds, minimally, that determinism and free will can be compatible. Contemporary versions often locate freedom in capacities such as reasons-responsiveness rather than in exemption from causation. Fischer and Ravizza (1998), for example, develop an account of guidance control involving an agent's own moderately reasons-responsive mechanism.

Free Determinism should therefore not claim novelty merely because it says that an influenced or caused agent can exercise meaningful agency. That territory is well established. Its proposed contribution is the explicit treatment of the future option set as an endogenous product of prior agency. Whereas Fischer and Ravizza primarily ask whether the mechanism issuing in an action is appropriately the agent's own and sufficiently responsive to reasons, Free Determinism tracks how an exercise of agency can construct, eliminate, expand, or reorganize the possibilities available at later times. The object of analysis is therefore not only ownership of a decision mechanism but the recursive production of the decision terrain itself.

This distinction should not be exaggerated into a claim that historical compatibilist theories ignore learning or feedback. They do not. The narrower claim is architectural: Free Determinism places changes in the later option set at the center of the model and represents those changes as outputs of earlier agency that return as inputs to later agency. Its novelty, if defensible, lies in making this recursive construction of future possibility the primary explanatory structure rather than merely a background feature of an account of responsibility.

7. Relation to Libertarian and Incompatibilist Accounts

Incompatibilist theories hold that free will and determinism cannot both obtain, while libertarian theories add that agents sometimes act freely and therefore require indeterminism of an appropriate kind. Free Determinism does not rely on indeterminism as the source of agency. Randomness alone would not supply ownership, authorship, or intelligent navigation. The model instead asks what capacities an embodied agent exercises within its actual conditions and how those exercises transform later conditions. Classic incompatibilist and libertarian formulations include van Inwagen (1983) and Kane (1996), while Pereboom (2001) develops a hard incompatibilist alternative.

Accordingly, Free Determinism is not offered as an account of ultimate sourcehood. If freedom requires that an agent be the ultimate origin of itself and its motives, the present model does not satisfy that requirement. It begins precisely from inherited conditions. Its

proposed form of authorship is developmental rather than ultimate: an agent who did not author the beginning may nevertheless participate in authoring portions of the later terrain.

7.1 The Specific Novelty Claim

The proposed novelty of Free Determinism is not the general compatibility of agency with causal influence. It is the explicit recursive claim that prior agency can causally reshape the later possibility set itself. Earlier choices can open options through learning, skill, trust, resources, and institutional access, or close options through commitment, habit, injury, debt, legal consequence, or environmental change. The model therefore treats P_{t+1} not as a fixed background supplied independently of the agent, but as partly generated by the history $K_t \rightarrow P_t \rightarrow D_t \rightarrow H_t \rightarrow Q_t \rightarrow E_t \rightarrow M_t$. This is the feature on which the framework's claim to distinct explanatory value stands.

8. Objections and Replies

8.1 Is this simply compatibilism under a new name?

This is the strongest objection. If Free Determinism meant only that agents can act meaningfully despite causal influences, the objection would largely succeed. The model must earn a distinct role through its recursive thesis: agency is analyzed not only by the conditions producing an action but by the durable conditions produced by action. Whether that architecture is sufficiently novel is a comparative question requiring engagement with existing historical and reasons-responsive compatibilist accounts.

8.2 If the entire loop is determined, where is the freedom?

The model uses a degree-sensitive capacity conception of freedom. Navigation consists in recognizing possibilities, responding to information and reasons, predicting consequences, learning, revising behavior, and converting deliberation into action. Two agents can therefore possess different degrees of navigational freedom even if both are causally embedded: one may face a wider viable option set or possess greater capacity to evaluate and execute among those options. A critic who requires categorical alternative possibilities or ultimate sourcehood will still reject this criterion as insufficient. Free Determinism does not hide that disagreement; it specifies a different target for the term freedom so the competing criteria can be evaluated directly.

8.3 Does manipulation defeat the model?

Manipulation cases challenge accounts that classify an action as free solely because it issues from the agent's present psychological structure. Free Determinism's historical orientation gives it resources to distinguish ordinary self-development from externally engineered control, but a full theory needs criteria for ownership. Merely having a history is not enough: a manipulated history is still a history. Future development of the framework should specify

when changes to DBT, habits, or decision mechanisms count as the agent's own in the responsibility-relevant sense. This concern is related to the broader literature on historical ownership and responsibility.

8.4 Does chance create freedom?

No. Chance limits control and makes outcomes uncertain, but unpredictability is not equivalent to agency. Free Determinism includes chance to prevent the feedback loop from being mistaken for a closed manifestation theory in which intention mechanically produces reality. Agency concerns navigation; chance concerns uncertainty in the conditions and consequences surrounding that navigation.

8.5 Does explanation erase responsibility?

Not automatically. Explaining the conditions contributing to an action and morally evaluating the agent are separate tasks. A causal explanation can be relevant to responsibility without settling it. A mature version of Free Determinism would need a separate normative account specifying how capacity, knowledge, coercion, ownership, impairment, and available alternatives alter responsibility.

9. Scope and Metaphysical Neutrality

The originating book contains broader proposals concerning an observer, an Infinity Field, collapse language, electromagnetism, dimensional description, and 'I AM.' Those proposals are not required for the core recursive model and are intentionally excluded from the central argument here. The grounded thesis needs only agents, conditions, represented possibilities, decisions, actions, consequences, learning, and updating.

This separation is methodologically important. Claims about embodied perception and neural or electromagnetic processes can be investigated scientifically; claims about an Infinity Field or the metaphysical nature of consciousness require independent argument. A peer-reviewed assessment of the recursive agency model should not depend on accepting those stronger metaphysical extensions.

10. What Would Make the Model Empirically Useful?

Although Free Determinism is primarily a philosophical framework, parts of it can be operationalized. Researchers could model how prior choices change later option sets, how learning alters deliberation, how habits increase transition probabilities toward repeated actions, or how institutional consequences reshape future individual choices. Such research would not by itself prove a metaphysical theory of free will. It could, however, test whether the recursive architecture is a useful representation of real decision trajectories.

The model also suggests comparative questions: How much of a later decision landscape is inherited versus self-produced? Which consequences create persistent conditions? Under what

circumstances does reflective awareness alter an established behavioral channel? When do social structures preserve earlier collective choices as constraints on later agents? These are tractable questions across philosophy of action, psychology, behavioral science, and social theory.

11. Conclusion

Free Determinism proposes a shift from the isolated choice to the history-producing loop. Agents begin within conditions they did not wholly choose. They navigate possibilities through capacities shaped by those conditions. Their actions meet a world they do not control, producing consequences that can alter memory, skill, habit, belief, relationships, resources, environments, and future possibilities. The resulting agent encounters the next decision from a changed position.

The framework therefore does not claim that freedom escapes causality. Freedom, as used here, is a variable capacity for navigation within causally structured conditions, not an exemption from those conditions. Agency can nevertheless matter causally because an agent's choices may alter later option sets, capacities, relationships, environments, and constraints. Nor does the model claim that every consequence is authored by the chooser. Chance, other agents, and external systems participate in outcomes. Its central thesis is narrower: some exercises of agency alter the conditions and possibilities of subsequent agency.

Whether this proposal ultimately constitutes a new position in the free-will taxonomy, a distinctive form of compatibilism, or a useful process model cutting across existing positions should be determined by sustained comparison rather than assertion. The contribution offered here is the recursive architecture itself: inherited conditions → navigation → consequence → updating → changed conditions → renewed navigation. The philosophical question then becomes not only 'Was this choice free?' but also 'What did this exercise of agency create, and how will what it created participate in the next choice?'

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Author Note

This manuscript develops the core philosophical mechanism presented in Kyle Hamilton, *Free Determinism: Philosophy 101*. Broader metaphysical extensions from the book are bracketed here so that the recursive model of agency can be assessed independently.