

# THE NATURE OF FREE WILL

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## SUMMARY

There is more than one problem of free will. Many philosophers approach the free will question seeking a foundation for systems of ethics or a justification for societal practices of praise and blame. Important as those issues are, they are not my quest. Rather, I address the metaphysical question of how to accommodate free will within the natural world. I conclude that the natural world is not identical with the physical world, and that it must contain entities or influences that are not physical in any current sense of that word.

The view I defend is a dualist view, but I claim dualism could be avoided only by accepting premises that are less acceptable. Humans appear to exercise choices that affect the physical history of the world, and if that appearance were merely an illusion, there is no plausible explanation for the evolution of consciousness in our species.

There are many senses in which agents may be described free to act in some way. Through a linguistic analysis of the modal verbs CAN and COULD, I distinguish one underlying concept that I define as “metaphysical free will” in Chapter 2.

Many philosophers contend that free will is compatible with causal closure of the physical domain. In Chapter 3, I argue that “metaphysical free will” is not so compatible, and that compatibilist arguments involve a different concept of free will.

The reality of metaphysical free will and its incompatibility with physical causal closure entail that the physical domain is not causally closed. In chapter 4, I explore why many philosophers endorse causal closure, and reject arguments in its favour.

In Chapter 5, I argue that metaphysical free will can be reconciled with physics though not subsumed within it, and in the final chapter, I describe some current projects attempting to explain consciousness or free will in terms of quantum theories of physics. I suggest that any theory successfully accounting for free will will extend beyond physics, but fall within a wider view of “Nature”.

I certify that the following thesis is entirely my own original work and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or educational institution. All sources of information used in the thesis have been indicated, and due acknowledgement has been given to the work of others.

Signed:

David Thomas Wilson

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