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THE ACT OF CHOICE

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Doubtless the most quoted sentence in the English free-will literature comes from Samuel Johnson: "Sir we *know* our will is free, and *there's* an end on't."[1] Later in Boswell's *Life* the point is developed in what we now think of as a distinctively Moorean way: "You are surer that you can lift up your finger or not as you please than you are of any conclusion from a deduction of reasoning."[2] Our knowledge of our own free will is more certain than any thesis of philosophy; so if it comes to a clash between the two, it is philosophy that should give way.

Despite the frequency with which Johnson's passage is quoted, I think that its true importance has been missed. For what is it of which we are so certain? I take it that the certainty of which Johnson speaks comes from an *experience* of free will. He says as much: "All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience for it."[3]

Once we start to contemplate the experience of free will, much of the literature on it seems beside the point.[4] Libertarians insist that a truly free will is one that is fundamentally uncaused; it is the true originator of action. But this is not to describe an experience; it is hard to

1. J. Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, AD 1769, Ætat. 60 (Everyman Edition, p. 366). Compare Locke's comment that "I cannot have a clearer perception of any thing than that I am free" (letter to Molyneux, 20 Jan. 1693, in *The Correspondence of John Locke* Vol. IV [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979], p. 625).
2. AD 1778, Ætat. 69 (Everyman Edition, p. 833).
3. *Ibid*.
4. Though not all; in particular, there is a growing literature on the experience of free will. See for instance, E. Nahmias *et al*., "The Phenomenology of Free Will", *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 11 (2004): 162–79, which also contains a very useful review of some of the twentieth-century psychological literature. For some earlier philosophical treatments see G. Strawson, *Freedom and Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) and D. Velleman "Epistemic Freedom," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 70 (1989): 73–79. There is also an interesting recent literature trying to elucidate ordinary intuitions empirically; but the questions asked so far do not enable one to distinguish what is believed on the basis of experience from what is believed for other reasons. See, for instance, E. Nahmias *et al.*, "Surveying Freedom: Folk Intuitions about Free Will and Moral Responsibility," *Philosophical Psychology* 18 (2005): 561–84; and S. Nichols and J. Knobe, "Moral Responsibility and Determinism: The Cognitive Science of Folk Intuitions," *Noûs,* forthcoming.

think what an experience of that would feel like. The libertarian thesis is itself a bit of speculative philosophy rather than the fundamental knowledge to which Johnson thinks speculative philosophy should defer.

The complaint here has been made before: Anthony Collins objects to those who appeal to vulgar experience to support libertarian views, '"yet, inconsistently therewith, contradict the vulgar experience, by owning it to be an *intricate matter*, and treating it after an intricate matter."[5] By "intricate" I take it that Collins doesn't mean simply complicated; there is nothing to stop the vulgar having complicated experiences. The real objection is to an account that invests vulgar experience with philosophical properties that are not the kind of thing that are, or perhaps even could be, experienced.

Choice, and how it differs from agency

Johnson is right to insist that we have an experience of freedom; and surely right to insist that we would need very good grounds before rejecting it as illusory. So we need to ask what the experience is an experience of. My contention in this paper is that it is primarily an experience of choice, and that choice is a real and under-explored phenomenon. It has of course been noticed; but most theorists who have made much of it have taken it as support for libertarianism.[6] I argue that it provides no such support.

I say that choice is the primary ingredient in the experience of free will. But there is also what we may call an experience of *agency*. To see the difference, consider anarchic-hand syndrome. The unfortunate sufferer finds that one of their hands has taken on a life of its own, unbuttoning shirts that they have just done up, taking food from others' plates, and so on.[7] Clearly, this is a situation in which the sufferer loses the experience of agency over the anarchic hand.[8] But now consider their other, normally functioning hand, which frequently intervenes to try to stop the anarchic hand. Does the subject *choose* what to do with it? Sometimes they might: we could, for instance, ask them to choose whether to put their hand on their left knee or their right. But typically the functioning hand just does its job — buttoning the shirts, taking the right food, restraining the anarchic hand — with no choice being made. Insofar as the subject makes choices, these are at quite a different level: to wear the yellow shirt, to have the pasta rather than the rice, to join the Foreign Legion. In executing each choice the functioning hand does its part, but it would be unusual for the subject to choose what *it* does. Yet the subject retains agency over it.

The point is quite general. There will be periods for any agent when they make no choices at all. Walking home, enjoying the spring weather and watching the people it brings out, I might have no need to make a choice. Yet I have the experience of acting; I am not being borne along on anarchic legs. Even when I do make a choice — to cross

5. *An Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty* (Second Edition, 1717), p. 30.

6. See for instance A. Donagan, *Choice: The Essential Element in Human Action* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), esp. Chs. 9 and 10; R. Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

7. S. Della Sala *et al*., "Right-sided anarchic (alien) hand: a longitudinal study," *Neuropsychologia* 29 (1991): 1113–27. For an accessible review see S. Della Sala, "The Anarchic Hand" *Psychologist* 18 (2005): 606–09. Della Sala suggests that the syndrome stems from damage to the part of the brain (the secondary motor area, or SMA) that controls action on the basis of "internal" drives. This leaves the hand at the mercy of the part that responds to "external" visual cues. The struggle between the two hands, and the agent's sense that the hand is out of control, result from unilateral damage, i. e., damage to the SMA in just one hemisphere, which controls just one hand. In cases of bilateral damage, where both SMAs are affected, the result is utilization behavior. Here patients show a compulsive urge to use the objects they see, but without the sense of loss of control: "The patient spotted the [experimenter's] wallet, started to take out all the credit cards and other things, such as the national insurance number, reading it aloud. The experimenter asked: 'Whose wallet is it?' 'Yours,' replied the patient, a bit baffled by the question, but carrying on ransacking it." (*Ibid*., p. 608)

8. Though this might be coupled with the knowledge that in some sense the actions are their own: "Of course I know that I am doing it," says a patient of Marcel's: "It just doesn't feel like me." See A. Marcel, "The Sense of Agency," in J. Roessler and N. Eilan (eds.), *Agency and Self-Awareness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 48–93, at p. 79. Note too that anarchic hand syndrome does not undermine ownership; those who suffer from it still think of the hand as theirs, unlike those suffering from *alien* hand syndrome. (See *ibid*., pp. 76–77.) For further discussion of the differences see Della Sala, *op. cit*.

the road now, whilst there is no traffic, or to stay on this side where the trees smell better — this does not increase my sense of agency.

So the experience of choice is not the same as the experience of agency. We shall need to return to the issue of agency later, but my main focus is on choice. And my first proposition is that choice comes *when the question of what to do arises*. Often in our day-to-day activities that question never arises at all. "Operations of thought," wrote Whitehead, "are like cavalry charges in a battle — they are strictly limited in number, they require fresh horses, and must only be made at decisive moments."[9] The point applies, *a fortiori*, to choice. Provided that we are experienced actors, the question of what to do need not arise, not even in difficult or challenging situations. Gary Klein, in his study of various kinds of experts (nurses, fire commanders, missile operators, etc.), writes:[10]

> We asked people to tell us about their hardest cases, thinking that these would show the most decision making. But where were the decisions? The commander sees a vertical fire and knows just what to do.... He never seems to decide anything. He is not comparing a favorite option to another option, as the two-option hypothesis suggests. He is not comparing anything.

Experienced actors frequently just know what to do. Klein argues that they use a number of methods to arrive at this knowledge, of which the most important involves a form of stereotyping: new situations are recognized as similar to situations that have been encountered before, and so the actor knows what to do on the basis of what worked in the past. Standardly, then, the question of what to do does not arise. When it does, this is because some special feature obtains. The situation may be in some way novel, so that our stereotypes do not fit it. Or it may be especially significant, so that we pay special attention even when our stereotypes do apply. Or we may simply have been prompted to think about it. Under any of these circumstances our acts will be preceded by choices.

This distinction I am drawing between the acts that we choose to perform, and those that we perform without choice, suggests some kind of two-level system. One level is that of automatic heuristic-based responses. These are fast, cognitively economical, typically very limited in scope. We pick up on a certain cue and respond to it. The second level involves conscious consideration and choice: it is slow, demanding, but more flexible. Though the details are contentious, such an approach has become increasingly influential in psychology, and I do indeed presuppose it here.[11] But I shall not do anything to defend or elucidate it; things have reached the point where the main questions can only be answered by empirical psychology.

In contrast there is much philosophical work to be done in elucidating the notion of choice. I suggest three central features. First, choice is an act.[12] It requires time, concentration, a certain amount of effort — which helps explain how we can resent having to make a choice.[13] We can choose (a higher order choice) whether to choose, and when. We can put off a choice, perhaps to gain more information, or perhaps

9. A. N. Whitehead, *An Introduction to Mathematics* (New York: Holt, 1911), p. 61, quoted in J. Bargh and T. Chartrand, "The Unbearable Automaticity of Being," *American Psychologist* 54 (1999): 462–79, p. 464.

10. G. Klein, *Sources of Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), p. 16.

11. For a good overview see K. Stanovich, *The Robot's Rebellion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), Ch. 2. For some application to the experience of action (though not specifically choice) see P. Haggard and H. Johnson, "Experiences of Voluntary Action," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10 (2003): 72–84. They stress the idea that even automatic actions can be brought under conscious control, a feature that I shall be discussing later.

12. This feature of choice has been well emphasized by Thomas Pink in *The Psychology of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). In subsequent work, though, he has taken this to militate in favour of libertarianism; not the conclusion I want to draw. See *Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Ch. 7.

13. The effort is real and undermines our ability to do other things; see R. Baumeister *et al.*, "Ego-depletion: Is the Active Self a Limited Resource?", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74 (1998): 1252–65, at pp. 1256-58. For general discussion of the effort involved see T. Bayne and N. Levy, "The Feeling of Doing," in N. Sebanz and W. Prinz (eds.), *Disorders of Volition* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006). For a nice discussion of the costs of excessive choice see B. Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

just because we are reluctant to make it. Or we can bring a choice forward, convinced that we already know enough, keen to make it, or keen to get it over with.[14]

Second, choice is not determined by our prior beliefs and desires. It is quite compatible with a given set of beliefs and desires either that we choose one way or that we choose another. That, of course, is part of what makes choice an action: we are not pushed along by our beliefs and desires.

Third, choice has effects. Once the question of what to do arises, choice is typically *necessary* for action. In order to move to action, we need to make a choice about what to do. The other psychological states that we might have, in particular, our beliefs and desires, are not, on their own, enough. Just as they do not determine our choices, they do not determine our actions, either. In contrast, choice typically is enough. Once the question of what to do has arisen, choice is not just necessary but *sufficient* for action: it gives rise to an intention, and the intention leads to the action.

It is our ordinary experience that provides us with evidence of these effects. It is merely evidence, defeasible in many ways that we shall examine shortly. But in this it is parallel to so many other mundane cases. We have matches, kindling, plenty of oxygen. Is this enough to give us a fire? No. One of the matches needs to be struck. Our evidence for this is simple: typically we don't get a fire without striking a match, and we do get a fire if we do. Likewise for choice. Once the question of what to do has arisen, if we don't choose we don't move; once we do choose, we do.

I say that these effects are typical, not that they always obtain. In some cases, even when the question of what to do has arisen, an act of choice will not be necessary for action: automatic actions will take over. Conversely, an act of choice will sometimes not be sufficient for us to act in the way chosen. Automatic tendencies can override an intention arrived at by deliberate choice; or the intention might be forgotten; or one might change one's mind. Such considerations need not worry us any more than the observation that fires can be started by sparks hitting a match that no one has struck, or that matches can be damp, or badly made, or can blow out.[15]

Can we say more about what choice *is*? I doubt that we can say much more at the level of conceptual analysis — or conceptual elucidation, as we might better put it, since there is no question of reduction. But we can say a great deal more about how choice fits in with our ideas of free will. We surely should not say that choice is a necessary condition for free will. Most automatic actions, actions that are not chosen, are nonetheless free. Indeed, I think that, as with most philosophically interesting concepts, attempts to give necessary and sufficient conditions for free will are bound to be flawed. Compatibilists — those who argue that free will is compatible with determinism — made a grave error when they took on the task of giving an analysis, especially since the concept answers to so many different concerns.[16]

Nonetheless there are characteristic features of free will, and an account that leaves any of them out will be inadequate. Choice is such a feature. Ask students to imagine a time when they have exercised their free will, and they will almost always imagine a case in which they made a choice. Yet, as I shall argue shortly, the standard compati-

14. Note that there is no regress here. I am not saying that choice is an act, and that every act requires a prior choice. I am only saying that (normally) a choice is required for every act for which the question of what to do arises. We do not normally choose whether to choose. We virtually never choose whether to choose whether to choose. I return to this issue below.

15. Some skeptics go further, arguing that choice is never necessary or sufficient for action. Daniel Wegner, for instance, argues, in *The Illusion of Conscious Will* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), that choice is epiphenomenal. It seems to me that the burden of proof is very much against such a position: one would need very good argument to deny the efficacy of choice. I briefly sketch what I think wrong with Wegner's argument in a review of his book in *Mind* 113 (2004): 218–21. For some fuller, like-minded responses see E. Nahmias, "When Consciousness Matters," *Philosophical Psychology* 15 (2002): 527–42; and T. Bayne "Phenomenology and the Feeling of Doing," in S. Pockett, W. Banks, and S. Gallagher (eds.), *Does Consciousness Cause Behavior?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 169–85.

16. On this see W. Lycan, "Free Will and the Burden of Proof," in A. O'Hear (ed.), *Minds and Persons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 107–22.

bilist accounts of free will give no space for choice. To that extent then the standard accounts are inadequate.

Moreover, their inadequacy in this dimension gives one explanation of why incompatibilism can look so attractive. If I am right that choice is not determined by one's prior beliefs and desires, then there is an important sense in which, phenomenologically, it is not determined. It is very easy to move from this to the idea that one's choices are not determined *at all*; and hence to the idea that, if one's phenomenology is accurate, determinism is wrong. But that move is mistaken. Even if one's choices are not determined by one's beliefs and desires, it does not follow that they are not determined at all. Which takes us back to our opening point: our experiences might reveal something about our psychology, but they will not reveal the ultimate causal structure of the world.

The difficulty, if one accepts that choice is not determined by belief and desire, is to say why it is not just arbitrary—why choosing does not amount to mere picking.[17] But that is for later. Let us start by seeing how it is that the standard compatibilist accounts have no place for choice.

Compatibilism and choice

It is sometimes said that standard compatibilist accounts leave the agent out of the picture; where the agent should be, we get a passive vessel. This is what drives some to libertarianism. I will not be driven so far, but I think that there is something in the charge. The problem is clearest with desire-based accounts, those stemming from Hobbes, who, very roughly, took freedom to consist in the ability to get what one desires. His model of choice is that of the scales:[18]

> The objects, means, *&c.* are the weights, the man is the scale, the understanding of a convenience or inconvenience is the pressure of those weights, which incline him now one way, now another; and that inclination is the will.

Here we can see clearly the sense in which the decision-making process is passive: there is nothing more to the process of decision than letting the weight of one's desires for the various options press upon one. Indeed it is tempting to think that the decision machinery has no role at all. But that would be a mistake. To press the analogy: scales need to be true if they are to weigh fairly. The point then is not that the scales have no role; it is rather that they fail to *do* anything, they make no *discretionary* contribution to the output. This is the sense in which the inputs *determine* the output: once we know that the scales are true, we know how the scales will move simply by knowing the weight of the objects put upon them. Things are parallel on the simple Hobbesian model of action. Assuming that the agent is well-functioning, their actions will be determined by the force of the inputs, where these are their understanding of the utilities of the various options. There is no place for an independent contribution from an act of choice. There is just the risk of malfunction.

The same is true when we turn to the other main class of compatibilist models and add in a more substantial role for deliberation and belief. Such accounts characterize freedom as consisting in one's ability to get one's actions into line with one's beliefs about what is best.[19] So we might invoke a four-stage model that characterizes a typical exercise of freedom of the will unfolding as follows:

(i) deliberating: considering the options that are available, and their likely consequences; getting clear on one's own desires, and one's own prior plans and intentions; seeing how the options fit in with these desires and plans; establishing pros and cons.

17. For the contrast see E. Ullman-Margalit and S. Morgenbesser, "Picking and Choosing," *Social Research* 44 (1977): 757–85.

18. Hobbes, *Collected English Works* Vol. V, p. 326.

19. Frequently they also require that one's beliefs be true, or that one have the ability to get true beliefs—that one be, in John Martin Fischer's phrase, responsive to reasons. I don't think that this affects the substance of what I am arguing here.

(ii) judging (deciding *that*): making a judgment that a certain action is best, given the considerations raised in the process of deliberation. The upshot of the judgment is a belief.

(iii) choosing (deciding *to*): deciding to do the action that one judged was best. The upshot of this decision is an intention.

(iv) acting: acting on the intention that has been made, which involves both doing that thing and coordinating other actions and intentions around it.

This might look to give a certain place for choice, but it is an unhappy one. What is the relation between the second and third stages? On an internalist account the choice is constrained by the judgment: the decision *to* perform an action will amount to no more than an echo of the prior decision *that*.[20] So, if we want to give a more substantial role to choice we will be forced into an externalist account, which is just to say that we could fail to make the echo. But now it seems that choice has become a *liability*: to give a substantial role to choice is just to say that we retain the possibility of failing to do that which we judge best. Once again choice consists in the possibility of malfunction. Wouldn't we be better off if we moved directly from judgments to intentions, cutting out choice altogether? So whilst choice can be squeezed into the standard picture, it is hard to see how it can be given any rationale. Let us explore some possibilities.

Three unsuccessful rationales

(i) Choice as a test

There is a well-established Christian line of thought that sees choice as a test: God gives us choice so that in failing to err we can pass. Even in a Christian framework there are familiar problems with the argument. In a secular context I can see no way of developing it.

20. I take the terminology, as applied to this issue, from G. Watson, "The Work of the Will," in S. Stroud and C. Tappolet (eds.), *Weakness of Will and Practical Irrationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 172–200, at pp. 177 ff.

(ii) The rationale for choice derived from the rationale for intentions

Many authors have pointed out that we do much better with intentions than with just beliefs and desires. Forming intentions enables us to curtail overlong deliberation, to coordinate, to resist temptation.[21] Then, given that the upshot of a choice is the formation of an intention, we might try to argue backwards. Since there is a rationale for intention, and intentions stem from choices, perhaps that rationale extends to choice. The problem with the argument is that choice is not the only way of forming intentions. It is easy to imagine an agent whose intentions are determined directly by their judgments about what is best, cutting out any need for choice. Choice would then only serve to divert the intentions; again it ends up looking like a liability.

(iii) Choice as resolving indifference and incommensurability

Midway between two equal piles of hay the ass has no belief that one is better: he judges both the same. If his actions followed only from his judgments, he would not move. His more conscientious sister is meanwhile torn between the need to care for her aged father and the need to defend her asinine tribe. Unlike her brother, she does not judge the two options equally good; she does not know how to rank them at all. But like her brother, if she were moved only by her judgments, she would not move.

These two situations—indifference and incommensurability—show a real advantage that accrues to an agent who can choose without a prior judgment of what is best. So does this give us a rationale for choice?[22] It points us in the right direction, but we are not quite there. We confront indifference daily: a trip to the supermarket, with its stacks of identical products, provides many instances. Yet we hardly think of this as a paradigm of choice. It is more like random

21. On the first two see M. Bratman, *Intention, Plans and Practical Reasoning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); on the third, see my "Intention and Weakness of Will," *Journal of Philosophy* 96 (1999): 241–62.

22. Raz suggests something like this picture in "Incommensurability and Agency," in R. Chang (ed.), *Incommensurability, Incomparability and Practical Reason* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 110–28.

picking than like choosing. In contrast, incommensurability brings us situations where we certainly choose. It is a contentious phenomenon, though, on which to build a theory; many have quite reasonably doubted that it exists.[23] We need a somewhat different approach.

Choice as enabling action in the absence of judgment

Let us think more carefully about the supposed cases of incommensurability. How often have you really been sure that two options are incommensurable? I don't recall it ever happening. Instead, I have known plenty of cases where I have been unable to compare, whilst at the same time lacking conviction that there is no comparison to be made. That is a good part of what makes such situations so troubling: one is constantly looking for the argument that will give one a handle on what is best. I do not deny that there may be some truly incommensurable options; it is just hard to think that one could ever be in a position to know that one had found one.[24]

This is to make incommensurability into a problem that is primarily epistemic: we do not know how to compare. Once we think that way, we can see that a similar phenomenon is at the heart of choice. We choose, I have claimed, when the question of what to do has arisen. That question has in turn arisen because we don't yet know what to do.[25] When we think about what to do, we may come up with a judgment that one option is best. But we may well not. We may instead come up with a judgment that certain options are equally good. More likely, we will see various reasons in favour of one option, and others in favour of another, without arriving at a judgment of which reasons are most important. This may be because we have no idea how, in principle, to go about ranking (incommensurability); or because we know how to do it in principle but can't in practice; or because whilst we can do it practice, we don't think any benefits that might be gained are worth the effort. Maximizing, as choice theorists have been telling us for a long time, is a difficult, cognitively expensive business. Coming to a judgment about what is best is a form of maximizing.

I suggest, then, that in very many cases we choose what to do without ever having made a judgment about what would be best—we decide *to* without deciding *that*. Now, though, we are back to our second problem: for if there is no judgment that one option is better than another, how can choosing ever be any more than arbitrary picking?

The answer lies in the fact that we can be good at doing something without making any judgments. The psychology literature is full of examples; particularly striking is an experiment by Lewicki, Hill, and Bizot.[26] Subjects were asked to play a rather basic computer game: the screen was divided into four, a cross would appear in one of the quadrants, and their job was to press the button corresponding to the quadrant. As time went on they got much quicker at responding. Why was this? We might speculate, as the players themselves did, that they were getting more skilful, reacting more quickly. The real answer was far more interesting. The location of each of a sequence of crosses was determined by a fairly complicated algorithm. The subjects had, quite unconsciously, learned to use this algorithm to predict where the next cross would appear. Change the algorithm, as the experimenters did, and their newly acquired skills evaporated, much to the players' bemusement.

The players in the quadrant game didn't make choices about which

23. In particular, if *A* and *B* are truly incommensurable, then shouldn't an action that is clearly much worse than *A* (and hence commensurable with it) be incommensurable with *B*? Yet that is not what we typically find. There are things that might be said to try to explain this (see the Introduction to Chang, *op. cit.*), but clearly the notion is more complicated than it initially appears.

24. Even where we think we have an argument for incommensurability, we should be cautious. The notion dates to Pythagorean mathematics and the supposed finding that the diagonal of a square was not commensurable with its side. The Pythagoreans were right that they cannot both be assigned rational numbers. But they can be compared when assigned elements of the reals.

25. Which is not to say that when it doesn't arise we do know what to do.

26. P. Lewicki, T. Hill, and E. Bizot, "Acquisition of Procedural Knowledge About a Pattern of Stimuli that Cannot Be Articulated," *Cognitive Psychology* 20 (1988): 24–37. I learned of this experiment, together with several others that I cite in this paper, from Timothy Wilson's excellent book *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

button to press; they were reacting faster than their conscious processes could track. In other cases, though, there is a choice, but still no realization of why it is being made. Consider a series of experiments by Bechara and others.[27] Subjects were confronted with four decks of cards; they were informed that they would make a number of plays (in fact 100, but they were not told this), each of which would consist in choosing a card from one of the decks. Each card would give a reward, but in addition a few cards would also bring a penalty. Subjects soon discovered that two decks, A and B, gave large rewards and large penalties; the other two, C and D, gave smaller rewards but smaller penalties. What was much harder to discover, as was shown by the subject's comments, was that in the long run C and D, with smaller rewards but smaller penalties, gave the greater net return. Subjects were interviewed about the game after 20 card turns, and subsequently after every 10. They were asked if they understood how the game worked. In addition their skin conductance responses (SCRs), indicators of emotional arousal, were measured. Initially (until about card 10, when they suffered their first losses) normal subjects chose cards predominantly from decks A and B. Then came a period (until around card 50) where their behavior changed so that they were slightly favouring decks C and D. During this time they began to show stronger anticipatory SCRs in the moments immediately preceding the choice of a card from decks A and B than they did prior to choosing a card from C or D: they were picking up on the fact that decks A and B were more risky. However, when interviewed they reported that they had no idea what was going on. Next came a period, from around card 50 to card 80, which Bechara *et al.* describe as the 'hunch' period: here their behavior changed so that they were choosing cards from decks C and D far more frequently than from A and B; their anticipatory SCRs before picking a card from A and B remained high; and they reported *liking* C and D, and *guessing* that they were safer, whilst remaining unsure whether they were. In the final period (typically from around card 80 on, though never reached in some subjects) they were ready to say that they knew which decks were the risky ones.

It appears that the emotional response was guiding behavior before the judgments were made. As Bechara *et al.* put it, "Our experiment indicates that in normal participants, the activation of covert biases preceded overt reasoning on the available facts."[28] Further evidence for this comes from the fact that subjects whose prefrontal cortices had been damaged did not show the anticipatory SCRs, and, though they eventually came to realize that decks A and B were more dangerous, they continued to choose more cards from those decks than from C and D. Not only does the emotional response influence behaviour before judgment is made; it appears that without the emotional response, judgment is powerless.

Other cases can be understood in a similar light. Here is one reported by Gary Klein: [29]

> It is a simple house fire in a one-storey house in a residential neighborhood. The fire is in the back, in the kitchen area. The lieutenant leads his hose crew into the building, to the back, to spray water on the fire, but the fire just roars back at them. "Odd," he thinks. The water should have more of an impact. They try dousing it again, and get the same results. They retreat a few steps to regroup. Then the lieutenant starts to feel as if something is not right. He doesn't have any clues; he just doesn't feel right about being in that house, so he orders his men out of the building — a perfectly standard building with nothing out of the ordinary. As soon as his men leave the building, the floor where they had been standing collapses. Had

27. A. Bechara *et al.*, "Deciding Advantageously Before Knowing the Advantageous Strategy," *Science* 275 (1997): 1293–95. See also A. Bechara *et al.*, "Insensitivity to Future Consequences Following Damage to Human Prefrontal Cortex," *Cognition* 50 (1994): 7–15; A. Bechara *et al.*, "Failure to Respond Autonomically to Anticipated Future Outcomes Following Damage to Prefrontal Cortex," *Cerebral Cortex* 6 (1996): 215–25.

28. A. Bechara *et al.*, "Deciding Advantageously" p. 1294.

29. *Sources of Power*, p. 32.

they still been inside, they would have been plunged into
the fire below.

It turned out that the source of the fire was in a basement. The lieutenant had picked up on various indicators of this — especially the great heat of the fire and the lack of noise relative to this heat — and this produced an emotional response to the situation that influenced his action. But he didn't realize that he had picked up on these factors. He put his action down to ESP. It was only many years later, when Klein's team analyzed what must have happened, that he came to see why he had chosen to act as he had.

I suggest that cases like this are very common, whether we have to act quickly or we have plenty of time for reflection. Very often when we make a choice, and can see no compelling reason why we should act one way rather than another, our choice will turn out to be effectively random.[30] But very often it will respond to features that we have registered but of which we are unaware. It will not be random picking, though we shall be in no position to know that it is not. So, although the process of choosing (i.e., the process that meets the three conditions outlined earlier) is conscious, the mechanisms that determine that choice are frequently not.

It might be objected that these are cases in which we do make a judgment about what is best, but this is an unconscious judgment, influenced by unconscious beliefs. To this I have two replies. First, in many cases I doubt that the unconscious states that influence our choice should be classed as beliefs at all. Perhaps someone might think that the fire lieutenant had unconscious beliefs that guided his actions, but the states involved in the gambling game are surely too modular, too unavailable to the agent's other thought processes, to properly count as beliefs.[31] I doubt even more that they give rise to unconscious judgments of what is *best*, since to judge something best is to rank it as better than the other options — exactly what modularity prevents one from doing. This is true in the fire case just as much as the gambling game. The lieutenant would not have chosen differently if someone had told him that his hearing had become impaired, because he didn't realize that the lack of noise from such a hot fire was determining his choice. It is easy to think that unconscious beliefs are just like conscious beliefs — except, of course, that they are unconscious. Perhaps this is the legacy of Freud. The reality appears to be rather different. Many of the unconscious states that influence or action are very unlike beliefs as we normally think of them.[32]

These claims about modularity are controversial, and it may well be that our notion of belief is too elastic for us to come to a definitive resolution of the debate. My second response does not trade on the modularity claims. Even if it is true that the agents in these cases are moved by unconscious judgments, that does not undermine my main point. I have been arguing that choice in the absence of judgment is not essentially random; but I am happy to restrict that to the claim that choice in the absence of *conscious* judgment is not essentially random. My inquiry has been into the experience of choice; that is, into the nature of a conscious process. So what is of interest is choice in the absence of conscious judgment. My contention has been that that need not be random.

Judgment as subsequent to choice

"Still," a critic might object, "it would be foolish to deny that there are conscious judgments around: the lieutenant surely judges that he should get his crew out." It would indeed be foolish to deny it, so I shan't. What I say instead is that very often the judgment *follows* from the choice. Or, at least, let us start with that strong version of the claim.

30. "Effectively" in that it may be controlled by some non-random mechanism that should have no bearing on the choice, as in the case of right-bias discussed below.

31. More precisely, they are, in Fodor's terminology, informationally encapsulated (knowledge from outside can't get in) and cognitively impenetrable (not under the control of central processes). J. Fodor, *Modularity of Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

32. See T. Wilson, *op. cit.*, for a nice discussion.

I shall qualify it later to the claim that very often the judgment *doesn't precede* the choice.

We have seen something like this already in the Bechara experiment. There the judgments come at the end of a sequence of choices, where the consequences of the choices can be understood as providing evidence for the judgments (the agents got to see how they fared when they chose from the C and D packs). But I want to argue that the phenomenon arises even in the case of a single choice, and where the consequences of the choice provide no further evidence for the judgment. If there is evidence here, it is just that provided to the agent by the knowledge that they have chosen. The basic idea is that agents can come to find out something about the world—in particular about which choice is best—by looking at what they have chosen.[33]

Consider the discussion of right-bias in Nisbett and Wilson's seminal article on self-knowledge. Their exact wording is revealing. Under the heading "Erroneous Reports about Position Effects on Appraisal and Choice" they write:[34]

> [P]assersby were invited to evaluate articles of clothing—four different nightgowns in one study (378 subjects) and four identical pairs of nylon stockings in the other (52 subjects). Subjects were asked to say which article of clothing was the best quality and, when they announced a choice, were asked why they had chosen the article they had. There was a pronounced left-to-right position effect, such that the right-most object in the array was heavily over-chosen. For the stockings, the effect was quite large, with the right-most stockings being preferred over the left-most by a factor almost four to one. When asked about the reasons for their choices, no subject ever mentioned spontaneously the position of the article in the array.

Are we talking here about judgments ("appraisals", "evaluations")—the judgment that a particular pair of stockings is best? Or are we rather talking about choices—the choice of a particular pair of stockings? Nisbett and Wilson's prose moves, quite naturally, between the two. Did the subjects have a brute tendency to judge the right-most best? Or did they rather have a brute tendency to choose the right-most, from which they inferred that the item they had chosen must be the best? The latter explanation is surely more plausible. The subjects behaved like shoppers faced with a choice of what to buy. As Nisbett and Wilson conclude, "It is possible that subjects carried into the judgment task the consumer's habit of 'shopping around,' holding off on choice of early-seen garments on the left in favor of later-seen garments on the right." Then, having made that choice, they inferred that it must have been made for a reason, and so judged what they had chosen to be the best.

It is easy to think that such judgments are just rationalizations; that is clearly so in this case, and it is the approach that has dominated cognitive-dissonance theory. But in other cases it might be held that they provide a path to knowledge. Certainly it has long been recognized that they may provide a path to *self*-knowledge: agents can come to discover something about their attitudes and emotions as a result of looking at their own choices.[35] I am arguing, though, for something stronger: if the competences described above are characteristic, agents can also come to know something about the world from looking at their choices, and so they can form, rather than just discover, their judg-

33. Note that I am not saying that the choices come to be best for them because they have chosen them; I am merely making the more modest epistemic claim that choosing can be a way of discovering what is best. I remain open minded on the ontological claim. For discussion see P. Winch, "The Universalizability of Moral Judgments," in *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1972), 151–70, esp. pp. 165ff.

34. R. Nisbett and T. Wilson, "Telling More than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes," *Psychological Review* 84 (1977): 231–59, at pp. 243–44.

35. See D. Bem, "Self-Perception Theory," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 6 (1972): 162. Note that this isn't a modern-day behaviorism: although the stress is on publicly observable behavior, there is no hostility to mental states and acts. On Bem's view one can gain self-knowledge by looking at one's choices even if one hasn't yet done anything.

ments on that basis. It is some procedure like that, I suggest, through which the fire lieutenant went. He was picking up on cues that were not available to consciousness. Other evidence suggests that choosing that is not done on the basis of conscious judgment can be better in some cases even if the factors are all available to consciousness. The cases arise when there are many factors to consider. Thus, subjects choosing a car on the basis of twelve attributes did better if they were distracted for the period before making their choice than if they were allowed to concentrate on it.[36]

I said that I would sketch the position starkly and then retreat a little. So now the retreat.[37] I have spoken as if choices were sudden: we make a abrupt transition from having no intention to having the intention fully formed. Often, perhaps normally for important choices, things are not like that. We contemplate an intention, try it on, see what it feels like. At the beginning of the week it is a fanciful idea, by the end a firm resolve; even if the stages of the shift were conscious, there is no point that we recognize as the decisive shift. In tandem, we see a change in our judgment of what is best: we start with nothing, or perhaps with the kind of hunch that Bechara found in his subjects, and end with a full-blown judgment. In such cases, intention and judgment interact, each reinforcing the other. At other times, rather than providing reinforcement, one can undermine the other. It is exactly the impossibility of making the corresponding judgment that kills the nascent intention, or the inability to form the intention that kills off the hunch.

The formation of an intention involves a host of complex interactions, not just between intention and judgment, but also between conscious states and the unconscious reactions and abilities that I spoke of before. A growing intention provokes an emotional response, which modifies the intention, which triggers an unconscious pattern recognition, and so on.[38] Forming an intention can sometimes seem more like a rolling ball finding its equilibrium settling point, and less like the tripping of a switch. Even though the choice is something of which we are conscious (it is not like the process involved when an action is performed automatically), the mechanism by which we arrive at it can involve a drawn-out process of which we are not aware. Sometimes we will be responding to important features, as in the card-game case. At other times the choice will be random, or influenced by irrelevant considerations, as in the right-bias case. We do not know which.

None of this, however, undermines my main contention. My point was not to establish that judgment is always subsequent to choice. It is rather to establish that, in many cases, it is not prior to it.[39]

Choice generalized

Earlier I sketched a four-stage model: a model that involves deliberation, judgment, choice, and action. My argument in the last few sections has been that we are frequently in no position to take the second of those steps: we are frequently unable to form a judgment about what is best, not because we come to a judgment that no one thing is best, but because we come to no judgment. As a result I concluded, then, that we must be able to move directly from deliberation to choice. So the model is flawed as a general account.

36. A. Dijksterhuis *et al.*, "On Making the Right Choice: The Deliberation-Without-Attention Effect," *Science* 311 (2006): 1005–07.

37. Thanks to Ken Winkler for pointing out the need to make it.

38. The Bechara experiments, mentioned above, make clear the importance of emotional responses in choice. For a more general discussion see A. Damasio, *Descartes' Error* (New York: Putnam, 1994). Damasio discusses a patient, Elliot, who, as a result of damage to his ventromedial region, is unable to make choices. After laying out a set of options, Elliot remarks, "And after all this, I still wouldn't know what to do" (p. 49). What is unclear from Damasio's discussion is whether Elliot is unable to make judgments ranking options or unable to choose one on the basis of a ranking. On the account I am suggesting the unclarity is unsurprising, since the two come together.

39. There are empirical reasons for taking this kind of approach for desires too. As Shafir and Tversky put it, "the experimental evidence suggests that preferences are actually constructed, not merely revealed, in the elicitation [i. e. decision] process, and that these constructions depend on the framing of the problem, the method of elicitation, and the available set of options." "Decision Making," in D. Osherson and E. Smith (eds.), *Thinking: An Introduction to Cognitive Science* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1990), 77–99, at p. 97.

But what of the cases in which we do form a judgment about what is best? Do we retain the ability to choose even there? We could imagine beings who were not like that: beings who, once they formed a judgment that a certain option was best, were compelled to act on that judgment, even though they could make choices in the absence of such a judgment. But we are not like that. The faculty of choice that I have argued is essential in the absence of judgment is also available to us in the presence of judgment.[40] That is why *akrasia* is possible; though, given our tendency to form our judgments in the light of our choices, I suspect it is rarer than philosophers tend to think.[41]

To this extent, then, we might think of our *generalized* choice as a liability. If that is right, then it is perhaps best explained as the price we pay for the times when we need it. On this view, it would have been optimal if we had evolved into creatures that could choose only in the absence of judgment. But the outcome of evolution is rarely optimal: just as our immune system makes us vulnerable to hay fever, so the system of choice that we have makes us vulnerable to *akrasia*.

However, even here things are far from clear. Sometimes our akratic choice might be governed by the same unconscious registration of reasons that can occur when we act without judgment. So sometimes we may do better if we are moved by those reasons than if we do that which we judge best.[42] It is a difficult empirical question whether, overall, our capacity for akratic action is a liability or not.

Further, we can exercise choice in circumstances in which we would normally act without choice. Once we focus on habitual or unthinking actions, we can raise the question of whether to do them, a question that we do not normally ask. And once we have asked that question, choice is available. In sum, then, the model I am proposing is a messy one. Sometimes we form a judgment first and then choose. Sometimes we choose and then form a judgment. Sometimes we do both together. And sometimes, as in the case of habitual action, we act without choice at all. We should not prejudge, of any action, into which class it is going to fall.

Choice as action

I said that we experience choice as an action: that we think of choosing as something that we do, rather than as something that just happens to us. Though I have gone on speaking in this way, I have done nothing to show that it is accurate. Indeed, if, as I have argued, our choices are often determined by processes of which we are unaware, it might seem that I have undermined their claim to be actions. Let me say something to counter that impression.

What are actions? One characteristic feature is that they are chosen. So a first thought might be that choices are actions if they are themselves chosen. But as a general account that is clearly hopeless: it leads immediately to the regress of which Ryle complained. So we should question the thought that actions must be chosen if they are to count as actions. That is something I implicitly did at the beginning of this paper, when I distinguished the experience of agency from the experience of choice. If we can have the former without the latter, then we can presumably have actions without choice. This is just what happens with habitual or otherwise automatic actions. When I turn to take my familiar path home, that is an action of mine, but it is not one that I choose. I suggest that choices are typically similar: they are

40. Interestingly, there is some empirical evidence that people feel less free when they make a choice between two apparently equal options than they do when one option is clearly better. See M. Westcott, *Psychology of Human Freedom* (New York: Springer, 1988), and discussion in E Nahmias *et al.*, "Surveying Freedom," *op. cit.*; and E. Nahmias "Close Calls and the Confident Agent," *Philosophical Studies*, forthcoming. I take this as evidence of just how many things are bound up in our ordinary notion of freedom. I should be very surprised if the subjects questioned had thought that the close calls involved less of a choice.

41. For discussion see my "Rational Resolve," *Philosophical Review* 113 (2004): 507–35.

42. A point that Nomy Arpaly has made well; see "On Acting Rationally Against One's Best Judgment," *Ethics* 110 (2000): 488–513.

typically unchosen actions. This is not to say that we can never choose to choose: sometimes, frustrated with my own dithering, I decide that I will make a choice by a certain time. But choices are not typically chosen, and, on pain of regress, cannot always be.

So if we are to understand how choices can be actions, we need to know more about what agency without choice consists in. Let me start by saying something about agency. As a first move we need to distinguish movements of the agent's body that have their causal origin within the agent and those that don't. If I throw myself on the ground, that is one thing; if the wind blows me over, that is quite another. It is only movement of the first kind — behavior, as we might term it — that can exhibit agency.[43] Clearly, though, that distinction is not enough. A sneeze has its origin within the agent but doesn't exhibit agency. We thus need to distinguish, within the class of behaviors, between those that exhibit agency and those that do not.

A thin proposal is this: agency consists in, or, at least, requires, the *capacity* to choose. Then we can say that agency without choice consists in the *unexercised capacity* to choose. Automatically taking my habitual path home is an action because I have the capacity to choose which path to take, even though I do not exercise that capacity. It is tempting to cash this out as a counterfactual: if I had chosen to take another path, I would have done so. But if recent work has shown anything about capacities, and dispositions more generally, it has shown that simple-minded counterfactual analyses will not do.[44] So I rest, instead, with the bare statement of the capacity.

On such an account, though, it is unclear quite how to understand the experience of agency. What is it like to experience an unexercised capacity? One thing we might say is that the experience comes in the breach: it is not that we have a direct experience of agency, but rather than we have a direct experience of *loss* of agency. The anarchic hand presents this experience of loss because the sufferer discovers a lack of capacity: the choice *not* to move the hand doesn't stop it.[45] Other cases are more mundane: having one's hand physically moved by another, or, slightly more exotic, having one's leg jerk as the doctor taps one's knee. Such an approach need not deny that there is an experience of agency; what it would be denying is that this experience amounts to something like a perception. The experience of agency would rather be understood as the default for the movements of one's own body: it is how things feel when one moves one's body *unless* there is there is an experience of loss of agency. If this were right we might expect that the experience of agency could be engendered in subjects even when they were not really acting. And that is exactly so. In their "I-Spy" experiments, Daniel Wegner and Tanya Wheatley managed to induce in subjects a sense of agency for acts actually performed by others,

43. For the classic development of this approach see F. Dretske, *Explaining Behavior* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press 1988), Ch. 1.

44. They don't work because there might be some other factor that blocks exercise of the capacity, whilst leaving the capacity in place. The insight came with Charlie Martin's work on finkish dispositions, finally published as C. B. Martin, "Dispositions and Conditionals," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (1994): 1–8. This, I think, is the real lesson of Frankfurt's argument against the Principle of Alternate Possibilities ("Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 66 [1969]: 829–39); though it took a remarkably long time for people to link the two literatures. For some links see K. Vihvelin, "Freedom, Foreknowledge and the Principle of Alternate Possibilities," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 8 (2000): 1–24; and, especially, M. Smith, "Rational Capacities," in S. Stroud and C. Tappolet (eds.), *Weakness of Will and Practical Irrationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17–38.

45. How do we know when we fail to implement our intentions? It could be simply that we remember what we intend, and we look and see what we do. Or it could be that there is some more complicated unconscious system that monitors our intentions directly and compares them to our actions as indicated either visually or by proprioception. The most influential model along these latter lines has been proposed by Christopher Frith, motivated largely by an attempt to explain the delusions of control experienced in schizophrenia, where subjects do appear to have intentions to act as they do, but nevertheless have the illusion that they are not acting. Frith argues that each intention gives rise to a prediction of the sensory consequences of the action involved; we only become aware of the sensory consequences if they differ from this prediction. In schizophrenia the system misfires, so that, although the consequences are those predicted, the agent reacts to them as though they were not, and so judges that the action is not their own. See C. Frith, D. Blakemore, and D. Wolpert, "Abnormalities in the Awareness and Control of Action," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* B 355 (2000): 1771–88.

by getting the subjects to think about the actions in the five second interval beforehand.[46]

There is much more that should be said in order to develop such an account of agency, but I shall not say it here. My aim is just to paint enough of a picture to show how choices can plausibly be thought of as actions. They are typically unchosen actions, which is to say that when an agent chooses they have the unexercised capacity to choose both how, and whether, to choose. That is, they have the capacity, which they typically do not exercise, to make an effective choice to choose differently, and to make an effective choice not to choose: to put the choice off, perhaps never to make it at all.[47] As before, there is no regress here: I do not say that for every act of choice there has to be an act of choosing to choose. In fact such acts are very rare. Nor is there an implicit rejection of determinism. If determinism is true, then it will be determined how I exercise my capacities. It does not follow that I fail to have them.

I suggested above that the direct experience of agency for bodily acts is felt in the breach: one feels it when it is lacking. Could we make

46. D. Wegner and T. Wheatley, "Apparent Mental Causation: Sources of the Experience of Will," *American Psychologist* 54 (1999): 480–92. The experiment involved subject and confederate jointly holding a computer mouse, which controlled a cursor on a screen populated with pictures of objects. The confederate would stop the cursor on various objects; if the subject had heard the object described over headphones just before the stop, they were much more likely to experience the illusion that they had stopped it. Note that precedence of thought is not sufficient for an experience of agency, not even when coupled with the other factors—consistency with the action, and lack of other explanations—that Wegner and Wheatley introduce. For those are all present in the schizophrenia case. It seems that we must at least add that the subject does not have the experience of loss of control, even if this experience is illusory. See J. Hohwy and C. Frith, "Can Neuroscience Explain Consciousness?," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 11 (2004): 242–54.

47. The existentialists are surely right to insist that to choose not to make some particular choice is itself to make a choice. But it is not, as is sometimes suggested, a self-defeating choice. What I have made is a higher-order choice, not the first order choice that I chose not to make. (Which is not to deny that it may be *behaviorally* tantamount to the first order choice: to choose not to choose whether to pursue my creditors is behaviorally tantamount to choosing not to pursue them; but it is quite a different mental act.)

the same suggestion for mental acts? There is some plausibility to the idea. Addictive or compulsive actions provide the most likely examples. The alcoholic who takes another drink may have chosen to take it; yet perhaps the choice itself is not an act. He may think that he has no capacity to effectively choose not to make that choice—that any other choice he tried to make would be one he would rapidly overturn. And we might think that the same phenomenon can arise without addition. Desperately thirsty at the end of a hot day, the hiker chooses to take the water that is offered; but perhaps she too lacks the capacity not to choose. There are, however, dissimilarities between these cases and the physical acts discussed earlier. When the doctor triggers your patellar reflex, you have no choice but to make that very jerk. In contrast, both the alcoholic and the walker can certainly choose exactly *when* to have their drinks, and, if there is a choice of drinks, *which* one to have. At most what they lack is the capacity to choose to have some drink or other within a certain period. Yet even that seems too strong. After all, around a third of alcoholics do give up. If there is an experience of loss of agency for choice, it looks as though it may be illusory.

Still, even if it is illusory, the impression of loss of agency for choice may still be real. It would be an instance of the impression of loss of agency for mental acts in general, and something along those lines—thought insertion—certainly seems to be a real symptom of schizophrenia.[48] And that suggests that there is something to the idea of an impression of agency for mental acts, perhaps, again, some kind of default impression. However, in the absence of substantial empirical work, philosophical speculation as to its nature probably won't get us very far.[49] Let me instead conclude this section by pointing out that, even if there is no impression of the agency of choice, that does not

48. For some philosophical discussion of the phenomenon and how to explain it see G. L. Stephens and G. Graham, *When Self-Consciousness Breaks* (Cambridge: MIT Press 2000), Ch. 6; S. Gallagher, "Neurocognitive Models of Schizophrenia," *Psychopathology* 37 (2004): 8–19; and C. Frith, "Comments on Shaun Gallagher," *Psychopathology* 37 (2004): 20–22.

49. For some suggestions as to the directions that the relevant empirical work might take, see Frith, *ibid*.

refute the account I have been developing. I have argued that choice is an act; and I have argued that we have an experience of choice. It does not follow that we have an experience of choice as an act. Our knowledge that choice is an act could come from other sources: from our knowledge of the capacity we have to control it, of the effort it takes, and so on.

Consequences for an account of free will

I claimed at the outset that our experience of choice imbued it with three characteristics: it is an act, one that is undetermined by our (conscious) beliefs and desires, and one that has effect on our actions. The account I have outlined indicates that our experience is right on all three. Choice is a real process. It is necessitated, in a sense, by our ignorance — by our inability to form judgments about what is best. But it is not an illusion that is engendered by our ignorance.[50]

The experience of choice is a central factor in our experience of free will. This is emphatically not to say that getting clear on choice will remove all of the puzzles and difficulties surrounding free will. As Nietzsche complained, the concerns contained in the notion are legion,[51] and only some of them have to do with choice. I doubt, for instance, that understanding choice will help much in understanding moral responsibility.[52]

What it does help to explain is why free will feels the way it does; and that is important. The failure to give choice a place is a major reason that compatibilist accounts have seemed phenomenologically thin. Equipped with an account of choice they become more persuasive. Moreover, the account makes libertarian accounts less persuasive, for it explains how our knowledge of choice could be mistaken for knowledge of a grander metaphysical claim. Our experience tells us that our choice is not determined by our beliefs and desires, or by any other psychological states — intentions, emotions, etc. — to which we have access. Those could be the same, and yet we could choose differently. From there it is easy to move to the thought that we could be just the same in our entirety, and yet we could choose differently: that the world is indeterministic. That, I think, is one of the pressures towards libertarianism. It is not the only one: there are others, from considerations of moral responsibility and the like, that need different responses. But it is the most immediate. I hope I have gone a fair way to blocking it.[53]

50. It is perhaps also true that if we knew what we were going to do — if we had a *Book of Life* — we would not experience choice as we experience it now; in that sense too it requires our ignorance. But if we knew what we were going to do I suspect that our phenomenology would be very different altogether. (For a brave attempt to argue otherwise, see Velleman, "Epistemic Freedom," *op. cit.*)

51. *Beyond Good and Evil* §19.

52. Though even here there may be some work to do. Aristotle held that there was something specially revelatory about the choices we make: "decision seems to be something highly germane to excellence, and to indicate the differences between people's characters more than actions do" (*NE* 1111b5).

53. Versions of this paper was given at the Free Will Conference at the University of London in 2001, at the Moral Psychology Workshop at the University of Edinburgh in 2004, at the Origins and Functions of Causal Thinking Conference at Caltech in 2005, and at seminars at the University of Manchester, Wellesley College, MIT, and the University of Texas at Austin. Many thanks to the audiences on those occasions, and to Rae Langton, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, David Velleman, and the referees for the *Philosophers' Imprint*.