

2: Arguments for Free Choice

In this chapter we present a detailed review of inadequate arguments for free choice. This review makes clear why previous arguments for free choice have failed, and thus makes clear some conditions an argument must meet if it is to establish *Sfc*. Also, in the course of the review, we clarify the moves open to a *PNfc* in defending his position, and thus show what obstacles a successful argument for *Sfc* must overcome.

In general, the problem faced by a *PSfc* in arguing for *Sfc* is to reach his conclusion without begging the question at issue—that is, without making assumptions which a *PNfc* need not accept. Of all the kinds of arguments for *Sfc* which we examine, that kind proposed by those who maintain that the assertion of *Nfc* is self-refuting seems most likely to be able to avoid this fallacy. But even the examples we have found of this kind of argument do not avoid assuming what should be proved.

Our review of unsuccessful arguments begins with the simplest line of argumentation: that immediate experience demonstrates that people do make free choices.

A. Argument from immediate experience

In his *Disputationes metaphysicae*, Francisco Suarez considers the question of freedom.¹ He points out that “necessity” and “freedom” have many senses. Even animals act freely in the sense that they are not compelled or necessitated by nature to act as they do. But the debate about free choice, Suarez says, concerns necessity only in the sense that “an action is necessary which cannot fail to be or to be done, assuming always the condition that all factors required for acting are given.”

Having set aside this kind of compatibilism, Suarez goes on to argue for free choice. His argument is based primarily on the evidence of experience. Human beings experience that they can do or omit doing something; that is why they use reason, inquiry, and consultation. The power of deliberation and counsel would be pointless if *Nfc* were true.

Suarez recognizes that it is possible to answer this line of argument by saying that it does not prove that people make free choices, since perhaps the rational processes which lead to choice are determined, and one might explain the use of rewards, punishments, exhortations, and advice as motivating principles of judgment, rather than as factors intended to elicit a free choice. To this objection, Suarez answers by admitting that the experience one has is not so clear and evident that it leaves no room for a really hard-headed opponent to wriggle out. Yet Suarez thinks that one immediately experiences the ability to sit or to stand, to turn one way or another, even while his awareness of the given situation remains constant. A person finds himself able to be moved by rewards or punishments, or to resist. And a person can take one means or another to an end, when he sees little difference between them, simply because he wills. Suarez takes these facts to show that the human manner of acting is essentially a matter of liberty or indifference, not a result of cognitional factors which, as the objection pointed out, could be determined.

Hume seems to be answering an argument similar to that of Suarez when he attacks the “false sensation, or seeming experience” which was used as “a demonstrative and even intuitive proof of human liberty.”²

We feel, that our actions are subject to our will, on most occasions; and imagine we feel, that the will itself is subject to nothing, because, when by a denial of it we are provoked to try, we feel, that it moves easily every way, and produces an image of itself (or a *Velleity*, as it is called in the schools) even on that side, on which it did not settle. This image, or faint motion, we persuade ourselves, could, at that time, have been compleated into the thing itself; because, should that be denied, we find, upon a second trial, that, at present, it can.

Hume’s response to this argument is brief and pointed. The motive of these actions is the “fantastical desire of shewing liberty.” A spectator, however, can predict someone’s future actions from knowledge of that person’s character and motives, and even when such an inference is impossible, the observer concludes that he might make it if he were more fully informed of the hidden springs of the person’s action.

Like Hume, Descartes was acquainted with scholastic philosophy. However, Descartes accepts the position that immediate experience establishes the freedom of the will and he fails to articulate the argument as fully as Suarez, or even Hume. In Meditation IV, Descartes says that the will is a quasi-infinite capacity, which particularly shows man to be made in the image and likeness of God. The unrestrictedness of the will is used by Descartes to explain the

possibility of error. He considers assent to be an act of the will and holds that men should, but need not, limit their assent to propositions within the bounds of their knowledge,³ In objection XII of the third set of objections it is said “that the freedom of the will has been assumed without proof, and in opposition to the opinion of the Calvinists.” Descartes replies: “Further I made no assumption concerning freedom which is not a matter of universal experience; our natural light makes this most evident. . . .”⁴ The position is spelled out more fully in Part I of the *Principles of Philosophy*, XXXIX: “Finally it is so evident that we are possessed of a free will that can give or withhold its assent that this may be counted as one of the first and most ordinary notions that are found innately in us.” And Descartes goes on to argue the point by saying that in the depth of methodic doubt he still perceived in himself a liberty to withhold assent from what is not perfectly certain and indubitable.⁵

Perhaps Descartes was moved to accept the self-evidence of freedom of the will because its reality was a supposition of his methodology. But what seemed evident to Descartes is far from evident to those who do not accept his method. Spinoza, for example, brusquely dismisses the alleged self-evidence of freedom: “. . . men think themselves free inasmuch as they are conscious of their volitions and desires, and never even dream, in their ignorance, of the causes which have disposed them so to wish and desire.”⁶

Hume and Spinoza make no attempt to reinterpret or deny the experience on which the claim of the self-evidence of freedom is based. They simply refuse to accept the experience as definitive.

Other authors press their attack against the experience itself. Joseph Priestley, for example, argues that “. . . all that a man can possibly be *conscious of* . . . [is] that nothing hinders his choosing or taking whichever of the fruits appears to him more desirable, or his not making any choice at all, according as the one or the other shall appear to him preferable upon the whole.”⁷ Mill likewise claims that what one finds in consciousness is merely the feeling that he could choose another course of action if he preferred it, but not that he could choose contrary to his preference.⁸

McTaggart claims that one’s sense of freedom is nothing else than the awareness that he can do as he chooses, without being coerced; the experience is sufficiently accounted for “by the fact that the action is determined by the will, and that there is no need to hold that the determining volition is itself undetermined.”⁹ Moritz Schlick says the following:

This feeling is simply the consciousness of *freedom*, which is merely the knowledge of having acted of one’s *own* desires. . . . The absence of the external power expresses itself in the well-known feeling (usually considered characteristic of the consciousness of freedom) *that one could also have acted otherwise*. . . . This feeling is not the consciousness of the absence of a cause,

but of something altogether different, namely, of *freedom*, which consists in the fact that I can act as I desire.¹⁰

Thus, these authors and many others propose that the experience of making a free choice is nothing more than an awareness that one can choose what one prefers, or that freedom is nothing more than an ability to do what one wills or desires.

However, the relevant data of experience, summarized in chapter one, sections C through F, show that these proposals are misleading. Keith Lehrer has pointed out, in support of the argument from introspection, that men do deliberate, that deliberation presupposes the conviction that it is within one's power to perform or not to perform an action according to one's choice, and that the only reason for doubting so universal a conviction is that it seems incompatible with determinism.¹¹ Moreover, various authors have said that in making choices men experience themselves as agents exercising power, as determining rather than as determined, as actively interposing the ego to settle conflicting motives.¹²

But even if the experience of deliberation includes the consciousness of alternatives each of which is possible and even if the experience of choice includes a sense of freedom, the question still remains whether these data prove that people make free choices. Brand Blanshard accurately points to the data and states that they involve something more than feeling free to do as one chooses. The feeling that is relevant is that of an open future. "After the noise of argument has died down, a sort of intuition stubbornly remains that we can not only lift our hand if we choose, but that the choice itself is open to us." Yet Blanshard thinks the data of consciousness are compatible with the reality of determinism. His explanation is that when choosing, one faces toward the future consequences which one act or the other will bring, not toward the past with its possible determining factors.¹³ This distinction of Blanshard's is not unlike Hume's distinction between the perspective of the agent and that of the observer reflecting upon action.

A *PSfc* might dispute Blanshard's explanation by pointing out that if there really are factors determining choice, those factors must be effective at the time of choice itself, not merely in the past, and that the sense of openness Blanshard himself admits also can be experienced at the moment of choice, not in the future.

But the argument from immediate experience is open to other objections. R. D. Bradley, among others, develops one such objection: One might be directly aware of himself acting, but one cannot be directly conscious that his actions are uncaused, since the absence of a cause simply is not the sort of thing of which one can be directly aware.¹⁴ Keith Lehrer, although he insists on the data of consciousness, nevertheless admits that a person's awareness of making his

own choice leaves open the question whether or not his choice is caused.¹⁵ Nicolai Hartmann, who does not himself deny free will, considers the consciousness of self-determination a subjective certainty, which clearly requires some objective ground. But he points out that the objective ground need not be the reality of free choice; the experience could be a universal illusion which has evolved in mankind because of its utility—perhaps in stimulating a sense of responsibility.¹⁶

Even C. A. Campbell, a strong proponent of free will, clearly states that immediate experience is not enough: “I have always explicitly recognised it to be in principle possible that the subjective assurance of contra-causal freedom which, in my view, introspection reports, may be illusory . . . and that various objections to accepting that assurance as veridical must be independently considered.”¹⁷

Finally, Hans Kelsen points out that even if at the moment of choice one cannot escape the subjective experience of feeling free and even if one cannot consider his own future acts determined, the theoretical issue between freedom and determinism remains a quite distinct issue. On this question, Kelsen’s own position is that the human will is causally determined.¹⁸

Thus it is clear that many who affirm freedom, many who affirm determinism, and many who take neither position agree upon the data of consciousness. These data have been used in efforts to settle *Sfc/Nfc* in favor of *Sfc*. But this use of the data can always be challenged.

Our analysis in chapter one, section G, of the common sense judgment that one has made a free choice reveals why the judgment seems self-evident to many people, but our analysis also shows that the experience of choice by itself does not justify the assertion that people make free choices. Thus, to assume that the immediate judgment that one has made a free choice is sufficient to prove *Sfc* is to beg the question; this assumption is precisely what is called in question by the *PNfc*.

B. Argument from moral responsibility

Christian thinkers often have argued for freedom of choice—if they considered the point in need of argument—by appealing to the fact that human beings have moral obligations and shall be rewarded or punished according to whether or not they fulfill these obligations. Bertrand Russell, while rejecting Christian morality, agrees: “. . . the conception of ‘sin’ is only rational on the assumption of free will.”¹⁹

This point is of considerable importance in the evaluation of arguments for *Sfc* based upon moral responsibility, and also of the attempts of the *PNfc* to meet such arguments. Such discussion is studded with references to “what we mean by ‘responsibility’,” “the *usual* meaning of ‘moral responsibility’,” and

“what the *ordinary man* means by ‘moral responsibility’.” Such references, we contend, do not advance the argument. Current meanings of moral language are still, in our culture, considerably influenced by the Judeo-Christian tradition. Those who wish to argue for *Sfc* cannot simply appeal to this tradition; a *PNfc* can frankly admit, as Russell does, that he is proposing an alternative outlook.²⁰

In such an alternative outlook, “free choice” and related expressions might have their uses. Of course, these expressions will not be used to refer to what we defined in chapter one, section B, as “free choice.”

For example, when Hume reconciles necessity and liberty, he asserts that the universally accepted meaning of “liberty” in reference to voluntary actions is nothing more than a hypothetical liberty which belongs to everyone not a prisoner in chains—“*a power of acting or not acting according to the determinations of the will.*”²¹ As we showed above, Francisco Suarez already knew about compatibilism of this sort and rejected it; he distinguished meanings of “necessity” and “freedom” and pointed out that animals also have liberty in the sense Hume here defines. As a matter of historical fact, Hume is mistaken in claiming that hypothetical liberty was the universally accepted meaning of “freedom.” However, Hume does make clear that there are senses of “free” and “necessary” such that the same act can be said to be both.

Following Hume’s lead, A. J. Ayer argues that the possibility of acting otherwise, which is accepted by all as necessary for moral responsibility, is not incompatible with determinism. Ayer claims that those who argue for free choice must suppose that actions chosen occur by chance and without reference to character.²² Ayer offers a deterministic analysis of “could have acted otherwise”:

. . . to say that I could have acted otherwise is to say, first, that I should have acted otherwise if I had so chosen; secondly, that my action was voluntary in the sense in which the actions, say, of the kleptomaniac are not; and thirdly, that nobody compelled me to choose as I did: and these three conditions may very well be fulfilled. When they are fulfilled, I may be said to have acted freely.²³

In a similar vein, Moritz Schlick defines moral freedom:

Freedom means the opposite of compulsion; a man is *free* if he does not act under *compulsion*, and he is compelled or unfree when he is hindered from without in the realization of his natural desires.

Schlick thinks that people mistakenly argue from moral responsibility against determinism because they confuse the necessity of causal laws with compulsion.²⁴

These remarks are reminiscent of Aristotle’s account of “voluntariness.”²⁵ For Aristotle, voluntariness is common to men and ani-

mals. In fact, the element of knowledge of what one is doing, which Aristotle demanded for voluntariness, goes unmentioned by Ayer and Schlick. Moreover, one can provide an analysis of "could have acted otherwise" which incorporates still further elements of ordinary uses of this phrase without thereby committing oneself to *Sfc*. In addition to the requirements for voluntariness, one might require that the action follow deliberation in which other alternatives were seriously considered and thought possible. This would not necessarily imply that the outcome of deliberation was not somehow determined—a possibility Aristotle himself seems to have left open—but that the determining conditions were effective during the process of deliberation itself, actualizing one of the initially possible alternatives and ruling out the other or others.

In discussing responsibility, those who attempt to reconcile morality with *Nfc* typically provide an analysis along the following lines. To impute responsibility is to determine who is to be praised or blamed, rewarded or punished. Praise and blame, reward and punishment need not be pointless if *Nfc* is true. Their purpose can be to provide motivation, either by their prospect or by their effectuation, either to the individual himself or to others. As Schlick says: ". . . the question regarding responsibility is the question: Who, in a given case, is to be punished?"²⁶ Bertrand Russell offers the following formulation:

Praise and blame, rewards and punishments, and the whole apparatus of the criminal law, are rational on the deterministic hypothesis, but not on the hypothesis of free will, for they are all mechanisms designed to cause volitions that are in harmony with the interests of the community, or what are believed to be its interests.²⁷

A number of objections have been proposed against the attempt to reconcile moral responsibility with *Nfc*. C. A. Campbell, for example, argues that Schlick's analysis does not satisfy Schlick's claim to give us what we ordinarily mean by "moral responsibility." For, Campbell says, lower animals are not regarded as morally responsible; a person no longer living is sometimes regarded as morally responsible for a present situation; allowance for unfavorable circumstances is made in censuring someone; and the morally innocent sometimes are motivated in ways which Schlick would regard as punishment.²⁸

A number of points can be made in defense of the possibility of reconciling moral responsibility with the truth of *Nfc*; these points answer objections like Campbell's even if they do not save the version of the theory offered by Schlick and others.

In the first place, no *PNfc* need be embarrassed by his inability to give what "we" or the "ordinary man" mean by "moral responsibility." For one

thing, some people believe that *Sfc* is true, and understand responsibility accordingly. To a great extent, current laws and customs derive from a period in which almost everyone believed *Sfc*. The *PNfc* can admit these facts. Furthermore, even if a person's experience of his own choices does not justify asserting *Sfc*, for practical purposes many people tend to take this experience at face value and to base their estimate of their own responsibility and that of others upon it. The *PNfc* can admit this too.

In the second place, the *PNfc* need not attempt to provide an explication of praise and blame, reward and punishment, solely in terms of a utilitarian justification of such activities. Feelings of anger and hatred which lead to vengeful behavior are part of human nature; perhaps such feelings are unjustified, but they might nevertheless be an important component of one's reactions to other people's actions, and therefore of what "responsibility" often means. Moreover, people also admire and despise, praise and condemn in nonmoral contexts—for example, in esthetics. Such judgments of nonmoral value might well be entangled in many uses of "moral responsibility." The *PNfc* can admit such factors in the meaning of "moral responsibility" while denying them any role in the justification of the ascription of moral responsibility.

In the third place, men do praise and blame, reward and punish animals and small children; in some sense, they are held responsible. The *PNfc* can grant this and also that there is something more to *moral* responsibility, since it requires a context of discourse, an accepted system of standards or values, and a disposition to abide by or to violate these standards or values. But to admit that moral responsibility involves more than the responsibility to which men hold animals and small children might be merely to admit the complexity of adult human psychology; it need not be to admit *Sfc*.

In the fourth place, imputing responsibility to the dead need only mean that their behavior while they were alive was such that it would receive reward or punishment if they were still alive. Making allowances for someone need only mean that one's feeling that there is responsibility is limited when one imagines oneself in his place. But this feeling that responsibility is limited might be explained partly in terms of one's awareness of the sorts of freedom compatible with *Nfc* and partly in terms of a residual belief in *Sfc*—a belief which need not be removed even if one regards *Nfc* as theoretically true. Similarly, when procedures which would usually be called "punishment" are used to motivate someone regarded as innocent of moral evil, such procedures need not be considered punishment, because punishment by definition presupposes guilt. Moreover, the distinction between guilt and innocence can be explained in a way compatible with *Nfc*.

The strategy for responding to the arguments against *Nfc* based on moral responsibility should be clear. The truth of *Nfc* demands an adequate expla-

nation of “moral responsibility” but not a justification of moral responsibility as understood by the *PSfc*. And if a *PNfc* wishes, he can explain “moral responsibility” partly in terms of the concepts of morality which are compatible with *Nfc*, partly in terms of the residual beliefs in *Sfc* which general belief in *Nfc* has not yet eliminated, and partly by ideas and customs developed at a time when *Sfc* was generally accepted and *Nfc* generally assumed to be false.

Some *PSfc* might object to the foregoing analysis by claiming that it does less than justice to the nearly universal usage of the language of moral responsibility and to the nearly universal human experience of moral responsibility—for example, to the sense of outrage at injustices personally suffered at the hands of those whom one regards as free agents. The *PNfc* can respond by admitting the universality of such language and experience, but insisting that such language should be abandoned and such experience should be reformed, since this language and this experience depend upon an understandable but erroneous assumption—the assumption that *Sfc* is true.²⁹

Moreover, the *PSfc* must contend with accounts of the language and experience of moral responsibility which are both more nuanced than those we have considered so far and compatible with *Nfc*.

W. David Ross, for example, argues:

I am inclined to think that the only account we can give of responsibility is this: that bad acts can never be forced on anyone in spite of his character; that action is the joint product of character and circumstances and is always therefore to some extent evidence of character; that praise and blame are not (though they serve this purpose also) mere utilitarian devices for the promotion of virtue and the restraint of vice, but are the appropriate reactions to action which is good or is bad in its nature just as much if it is the necessary consequence of its antecedents as it would be if the libertarian account were true; that in blaming bad actions we are also blaming and justifiably blaming the character from which they spring; and that in remorse we are being acutely aware that, whatever our outward circumstances may have been, we have ourselves been to blame for giving way to them where a person of better character would not have done so.³⁰

But does even this account of “moral responsibility” do justice to most people’s experience of moral obligation? If a person ought to do *x*, then he can do *x*; if he is determined by character and circumstances to choose *y* at the end of his deliberation, then *he* could not choose *x*, and so he can have no obligation to do *x*.

The standard response of the *PNfc* to this line of reasoning is that there are propositions expressed by sentences such as “I ought to do *x*” and “*x* ought to be done” which are not inconsistent with *Nfc*. For our present

purpose, it is not strictly necessary to sort out such uses of “ought.” However, since the distinction of various uses of “ought” will be important in chapter six, section C, we shall be more expansive here than is required for our present purpose.

One use of “ought” is in sentences such as the following: “The answer to this problem in algebra ought to be: $x = 5$.” This proposition entails nothing optional—it leaves no room for choice—but rather states what cannot fail to be the case if the premises are true. The normativity of “ought” in sentences of this type bears upon a reasoning process which could go wrong, not upon options among which one can deliberate and choose.

Another use of “ought” is in sentences such as the following: “If you desire x , then you ought to do y .” The proposition expressed by this sentence does not entail that doing y is optional. The proposition can be true while one has no choice about doing y . If one’s desire for x is an overwhelming urge, and if y is the only available means to satisfy that urge, then doing y is not optional. And even if one cannot do y , it still may be true that if one desires x he ought to do y , in the sense that y may be the only possible means for achieving x .

Another use of “ought” is in sentences such as the following: “The face of the Madonna in Michelangelo’s *Pieta* ought not to be quite so sweet.” The proposition expressed by this sentence, insofar as it expresses a criticism of the work, clearly implies no option; the work cannot be otherwise than it is. The proposition expressed by this sentence, insofar as it expresses a criticism of Michelangelo’s creative activity, also leaves open the question whether Michelangelo was personally in a position to act otherwise. This proposition could be true even if it was psychologically or technically impossible for him to make the Madonna’s face less sweet.

Another use of “ought” is in sentences like the following: “The baby ought to be walking soon.” The proposition expressed by this sentence does not entail that the baby’s walking is optional. “Ought” here points to what is regarded as normal and is expected of individuals of a given type.

C. D. Broad points out the relevance of this last use of “ought” to *Sfc/Nfc*, using the example: “A fountain pen ought not to be constantly making blots.” As Broad points out, this meaning of “ought” is surely applicable to human action, and in this application enjoys a further development. For in the case of men, unlike the case of fountain pens, the individual has the power of reflexive cognition; he can be aware of the ideal. Moreover, it can be part of the ideal that one should have a desire to approximate it and not to fall short of average. Individuals can compare their own acts and the acts of others with this ideal and can criticize some such acts as falling short of what they “ought” to be. This fact does not show that the

individual on the particular occasion could act otherwise than he did, nor that he could have a different ideal, nor that he could try harder to live up to his ideal—taking all of these “coulds” in a categorical sense.³¹

The sense of “ought” developed by Broad seems to fit quite well with the notion of moral responsibility outlined by Ross, and with an account of “could have chosen otherwise” compatible with *Nfc*. We think that this sense of “ought” expresses the normativity of moral goodness as Aristotle understands it. The other senses of “ought” which we have mentioned might also be proposed as providing the meaning of “obligation” in moral contexts.

Of course, the *PSfc* is likely to insist that none of these uses of “ought” expresses what he has in mind when he speaks of moral obligation. For him, the moral “ought” makes an unconditional demand, rather like a rule of logic—though perhaps modeled on a categorical divine command—but at the same time makes this demand in such a way that the person to whom it is addressed can choose either to comply with it or to disregard it. In the latter respect, the moral “ought” is somewhat like that of a conditional norm.

In summary. Anyone who argues for *Sfc* by appealing to the language and experience of morality begs the question. “Morality” can be understood in a way compatible with *Nfc*. If this understanding of morality does not reflect common opinion, this fact merely shows that common opinion in our present culture is not shaped by a coherent philosophy based on *Nfc*. Nevertheless, *Nfc* might be true. And so anyone who wishes to argue against it should avoid assuming as a starting point interpretations of moral experience incompatible with *Nfc*. If such assumptions are avoided, however, then no argument from moral responsibility for *Sfc* will succeed.

C. William James’s argument

William James maintains that there can be no cogent demonstration of *Sfc*. Nevertheless, he believes in free will; he holds that there are pragmatic grounds which make it reasonable to believe in it.

In his *Principles of Psychology* James argues that the opposition between belief in free will and belief in determinism is reducible to an opposition between a moral postulate “that what ought to be can be, and that bad acts cannot be fated, but that good ones must be possible in their place”; and a scientific postulate that the world is one large, unbroken fact. The issue between the two postulates will never be settled except by choice, according to James: “Freedom’s first deed should be to affirm itself.”³²

In *Pragmatism* James puts the argument briefly. Both advocates of free will and of determinism have argued for their positions on the pragmatic ground that

otherwise the imputation of acts would be impossible. James dismisses this exchange as a pitiful wrangle, noting that whichever side is right, we will continue to ascribe responsibility for actions to those who perform them. Yet James himself wishes to argue pragmatically for free will, on the ground that it is a melioristic doctrine—that is, a doctrine which admits the possibility that in some respects in which things are bad the future need not resemble the past. Thus, James believes that free will is a theory of promise and a doctrine of relief.³³

James's fullest development of his argument is in his address, "The Dilemma of Determinism." He begins his presentation by saying that he will point out two necessarily implied corollaries of determinism, which might lead his audience to join him in disbelieving in it. The most he can hope for, however, is that his argument might induce someone to assume free will to be true and to act as if it were true. The need for choice, James says, is involved in the strict logic of the situation: ". . . our first act of freedom, if we are free, ought in all inward propriety to be to affirm that we are free."³⁴

Determinism, James goes on, implies a monism in which the whole universe is a solid block. If we accept as real the evil we experience—for example, the regrettable act of a brutal murderer—then the whole universe stands condemned, and a hopeless pessimism is the result. If we deny that evil is ultimately real and regard it as a good necessary for the whole, then our judgments of regret are mistaken. But, then, such mistaken judgments, paradoxically, are not what *they* ought to be. The only way to justify there being such judgments, James thinks, is to adopt a position he characterizes as "subjectivism"—a metaphysics which rationalizes and justifies everything by fitting all of it into one dramatic narrative, the significance of which is not in the objective process itself but in the observing consciousness.³⁵

The position which James calls "subjectivism"—he refers to Hegel in philosophy and to the romantic movement in literature—seems to him worthy of rejection on the ground that it undercuts moral seriousness and responsibility. In practical life, James claims, this position leads either to a nerveless sentimentality or to a sensualism without bounds.³⁶

It seems James's argument begs the question when he assumes that evil must be regarded with moral seriousness and that human life must be held meaningful in a way which is impossible if *Nfc* is true. Yet James might protest that it is unfair to criticize him for begging the question here; he presents his argument as a persuasive appeal, not as a demonstration.

Yet James does claim that his argument reveals necessary implications of determinism, and even this modest claim can be challenged. Surely one might be saddened by natural evils, such as the death of animals in a forest fire started by lightning, and might make a "judgment of regret" about such happenings. Even if one regards the event as wholly determined by natural causes, one can

think that the suffering and death of these animals was an evil and that it ought not to have been. Yet recognition of such evils in nature need not lead to a general pessimism; one need not *impute* natural evils in parts of the universe to the whole, although one can regard parts of physical nature as deterministically bound up with the whole of nature. What is more, a worldview which includes *Nfc* need not include the proposition that the universe will remain as bad as it is or get worse; a determinist also can propose a melioristic hypothesis. He can maintain, for example, that evolution is necessarily toward what is better.

It might be objected that a deterministic account is satisfactory for natural evils, but not for the evils which James thought generated a dilemma for the determinist—the evils of human wrongdoing and error. However, unless one assumes *Sfc* to be true, the evils of human wrongdoing and error also must be regarded as natural evils, ones particularly interesting to human beings, of course, and ones having their own complexity and specific character, but evils in principle the same in kind as other evils in the universe.

Obviously, some deterministic accounts—for example, Spinoza's—are based upon a monistic metaphysics of the sort James had in mind. Yet it is coherent to maintain *Nfc* in a universe which allows chance and novelty, but confines indeterminacy to the level of subatomic particles. In such a universe, nothing will be able to generate the “character of novelty in fresh activity-situations” which James wishes to defend.³⁷

James's view is not, in the end, so different from that of St. Augustine.³⁸ Both assume that everything in reality must either be justified or imputed to some agent as his sin. Just as Augustine was unwilling to impute evil to God, James does not wish to impute evil to the universe as a whole. Both, therefore, attribute to man a capacity in virtue of which he can be a first cause of evil. Any argument of this sort for *Sfc* fails. The *PNfc* can admit the reality of evil, deny that attempts to justify it make sense, and refuse to impute it either to man, or to God, or to the universe as a whole.

D. Thomas Aquinas's argument

In several of his works Thomas Aquinas considers questions bearing on whether *Sfc* is true.³⁹ Typically, he offers a version of the moral argument first, and then proceeds with an exposition of various senses in which the will is undetermined. In *De Malo*, question six, for example, he begins by stating the position that the will, while not coerced, is moved to choose by natural necessity. He rejects this position as heretical, inasmuch as it removes the ground for merit and demerit, and also as alien to philosophy, inasmuch as it subverts all the principles of moral philosophy. He then proceeds to his explanation, beginning with the words: “Ad evidentiam ergo veritatis. . . .”

One might take this phrase either as an introduction to an *explanation* (reading “evidentiam” as “clarification”) of a point otherwise known to be true, or as an introduction to an attempted *proof* (reading “evidentiam” as “rational ground”). We here take what follows this introductory phrase to be an attempted proof, but we ask the reader to bear in mind that our criticism of the argument might not be fair to Aquinas if, as is possible, he intended it only as an explanation. Our present interest in Aquinas’s treatment of free choice is not historical; we consider it only because it suggests a distinctive line of argument for *Sfc.*

In view of our present purpose, we summarize the argument proposed by Aquinas in *De veritate*, question twenty-two. In article five of this question, Aquinas explains that the will is not forced but is by its nature naturally and necessarily inclined to will the last end, happiness, and whatever is included in it—to be, to know, and the like. In article six, he proceeds to the further question: “Does the will necessarily will whatever it wills?”

Aquinas defines necessity as unchangeable determination which excludes alternatives. The will is not so determined except to that to which it is naturally inclined. A person also wills many other things. Therefore, he does not will of necessity everything he wills. The indetermination of the will is threefold: in respect to its object, its act, and its ordination to its end.

In respect to the object of the will—that is, to *what* one wills—the will is not determined to a particular means. While a person wills the end by natural inclination, there often is a wide choice of means for reaching the end, and some ways of reaching the end are more suitable to some people than to others. By contrast, subhuman entities have a fixed end and a fixed way of reaching it, so that for them there is no means in regard to which they are undetermined.

In respect to its act, the will is undetermined because a person can act or not act as he wishes, even in regard to a determinate object. Being animate, the will moves itself.⁴⁰ Inanimate things, by contrast, are moved by other things; a heavy body, for example, always falls unless prevented.

In respect to its orientation to its end, the will can desire what really is the end or what only seems to be. This possibility arises from the will’s indetermination in respect to what can be taken as a means and from the indetermination of human apprehension. One can consider as a human good what is not really conducive to happiness, but only to pleasure, which is a sort of imitation of happiness. From indetermination in these respects, there follows the possibility of doing either good or evil.

Aquinas concludes the argument by pointing out that inasmuch as the will is free to the extent that it is not necessitated, its freedom in respect to its object and its act holds for man in any condition, while its freedom in respect to its ordination to the last end—the freedom which is the ability to do evil—holds for man in this present life, but not in heaven.

Confronted with this argument and assuming—however Aquinas intended it—that it is an attempt to establish *Sfc*, one is likely to ask a number of questions. How does one know there is a will? How does one know it is an animate, immaterial, self-moving power? How does one know that the natural necessity with which the end is willed, combined with the facts of situations in which men find themselves, do not necessitate the choice of means? How does one know that the indetermination of human apprehension of goods, true or apparent, is not settled by heredity and environment, nature and nurture?

Turning back to article four, one begins to find answers to some of these questions. The title of the article is: “In rational beings, is will a distinct power from sense appetite?”

Aquinas answers that will is a distinct power, differentiated by its more perfect way of tending. Being closer to God, who moves all things without being moved, the human will is less inclined by anything extrinsic to itself and more capable of inclining itself than is the tendency of lower beings.

A nonsentient entity has certain natural tendencies, but its inclination is completely passive. An animal has an intrinsic principle of inclination, the apprehended object of appetite, yet an animal does not have mastery over its own desires and actions, because its sense appetite has a bodily organ and so is material. Therefore, it is moved by something else and is not an active mover.

A rational creature has a natural inclination, the object of which is given from without, “but also has its inclination within its own power such that . . . it can incline or not incline.” This power belongs to the will inasmuch as it requires no bodily organ; in this respect it is closer to the nature of what moves and acts and more remote from the nature of what is moved by something else. Not being determined by anything else, the will follows the apprehension of reason, for reason knows the end and the bearing of the means upon it.

In short, when Aquinas undertakes to distinguish will from sense appetite, he does so by locating it in a metaphysical hierarchy. The will’s place in the hierarchy is established by the fact that it is an immaterial, self-determining power. On the other hand, when he undertakes to explain the freedom of the will, Aquinas appeals to its nature and attributes. The argument—assuming it is intended to be a proof—is circular. Any argument for *Sfc* which proceeds from the nature of the will or the nature of man will likewise beg the question.

E. The argument that determinism is self-refuting

Each of the four ways of arguing for free choice examined thus far is question-begging. The data of experience, morality and responsibility, the cosmic significance of evil, and the nature of the will yield seemingly conclusive arguments against *Nfc* only if they include the assumption that *Sfc* is true.

Attempts to resolve philosophical disputes often turn out in this way, because philosophical arguments often invoke prior principles, and any assumed theoretical framework can be called into question.

Thus, the only way to settle a philosophical issue seems to be to work from the one set of assumptions which an opponent cannot consistently deny—that is, the assumptions he makes in maintaining his own position. The simplest case is one in which it is possible to show that someone is being inconsistent, according to criteria for consistency which he accepts. A less direct approach takes the form of drawing out the implications of a position, applying these implications to the position itself, and concluding that the position is self-refuting.

The promise of this method of argumentation is that it need not be question-begging. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that attempts to argue in this fashion will not as a matter of fact beg the question.

There have been a number of attempts to argue that the affirmation of determinism is self-refuting.⁴¹ Those who have attempted this line of argument maintain something like the following: If determinism is true, then its affirmation, like every other human act, is a determined effect; thus determinism comes to be held on account of the same sort of factors which accounts for the holding by others of the opposite position. The conclusion drawn is that determinism itself undercuts its proponents' claim that their position ought to be preferred to its opposite. By means of this line of argument, determinism is rejected, not because it contradicts principles assumed by those who defend *Sfc*, but because it is self-refuting.

There is no consensus among philosophers that self-referential argumentation against determinism is cogent.⁴² Here we examine some arguments employing this method of argumentation, and we conclude with their critics that these attempts are not cogent—in fact, that they beg the question. Later, in chapter five, we clarify the logic of self-referential argumentation; in chapter six, we propose a self-referential argument against *Nfc* which we think avoids begging the question.

In “Determinism’s Dilemma,” James N. Jordan articulates an argument typical of the best recent attempts to show that the assertion of determinism is self-refuting.

Jordan argues that if one accepts determinism as true, then one must admit that all theses, including the determinist’s thesis, are effects of antecedent causes. It follows that whether the thesis is true or false, one’s holding the thesis is wholly explicable in terms of antecedent causes. Thus the determinist and his opponent are equally determined to hold the positions which they do hold. And so one’s assent to whichever position he holds has no necessary relationship to the fact that one position is true and its contradictory false.

Jordan does not deny that rational judgments have necessary causal conditions. But he argues that if someone wishes to maintain that rational judgments have sufficient conditions he

. . . would need to produce evidence which is seen to conform to criteria of reasonable trustworthiness and which is recognized to confer, by virtue of some principle of deductive or probable inference, certainty or sufficient probability upon it. But if the proposition [of the determinist] is true, this could never happen, for it implies that whether anyone believes it and what he considers trustworthy evidence and acceptable principles of inference are determined altogether by conditions that have no assured congruence with the proposition's own merits or with criteria of sound argumentation whose validity consists of more than that we accept them.⁴³

Jordan's point is that on deterministic grounds the correspondence between one's knowing the truth of a proposition and the causal factors which determine one's belief is accidental. Thus, if determinism is true, it is never possible to ascertain whether any statement—including the statement of determinism—is true.

Others who have developed an argument along the same lines have put the point in a similar way. A. E. Taylor: "If the determinist thesis is sound, then, it must follow that it is never possible to consider any issue, however purely speculative, with an 'open mind,' intending to pronounce one way or the other strictly, 'according to the worth of the evidence.'"⁴⁴ Paul Weiss: "If a determinist is willing to affirm that his theory is true, he must affirm that it is something which can be freely considered and responsibly adopted, and thus that those who know it are so far not determined by an alien power."⁴⁵ Lionel Kenner: Once the determinist "has asserted that our nervous system and physical environment are the sufficient and necessary conditions of all our thoughts and activities—that we are only very advanced electronic computers—he has relinquished the right to say that the arguments which appear cogent to us are valid arguments."⁴⁶ Malcolm Knox: "A theory claims to be true; its sponsors ask us to choose it and to reject as false a theory that contradicts it. Determinism is a theory which denies the possibility of choice, and it therefore refutes itself."⁴⁷ J. R. Lucas: "Determinism, therefore, cannot be true, because if it was, we should not take the determinists' arguments as being really arguments, but as being only conditioned reflexes. Their statements should not be regarded as really claiming to be true, but only as seeking to cause us to respond in some way desired by them."⁴⁸ A. Aaron Snyder: The inconsistency of determinism "arises out of the fact that the universal operation of physically sufficient causes would leave no room for the conceptual sufficiency of reasons."⁴⁹

A *PNfc* certainly will object that arguments like these beg the question, because these arguments assume that certain factors cannot legitimately lead to

assent if those factors are determined—factors such as “criteria of reasonable trustworthiness,” “the worth of evidence,” rational responsibility in considering and adopting an argument, the cogency of valid argument, the choice of a position on the basis of evidence, truth claims, and sufficient reasons. To exclude these factors betrays assumptions inherent in a point of view which the *PNfc* can consistently reject. The *PNfc* can find ways within his framework to explain the causal efficacy of factors which these arguments assume his position cannot explain.

Adolf Grünbaum, for example, claims that arguments of this sort gratuitously assume that if our beliefs are caused, they are forced upon us. Such an assumption, according to Grünbaum, confuses causation with compulsion and prevents proponents of the argument from seeing that the decisive cause of the determinist’s belief might well be his consideration of the available evidence. Grünbaum goes on to argue that the causal generation of a belief in no way prevents it from being true:

In fact, if a given belief were not produced in us by definite causes, we should have no reason to accept that belief as a correct description of the world, rather than some other belief arbitrarily selected. Far from making knowledge either adventitious or impossible, the deterministic theory about the origin of our beliefs alone provides the basis for thinking that our judgments of the world are or may be true. Knowing and judging are indeed causal processes in which the facts we judge are determining elements along with the cerebral mechanism employed in their interpretation. It follows that although the determinist’s assent to his own doctrine is caused or determined, the truth of determinism is not jeopardized by this fact; if anything, it is made credible.

More generally, both true beliefs and false beliefs have psychological causes. The difference between a true or warranted belief and a false or unwarranted one must therefore be sought *not* in *whether* the belief in question is caused; instead, the difference must be sought in the particular *character* of the psychological causal factors which issued in the entertaining of the belief; *a warrantedly held belief, which has the presumption of being true, is one to which a person gave assent in response to awareness of supporting evidence.*⁵⁰

Grünbaum’s point is that determinism by no means implies that the causes which determine one to hold a proposition true need exclude the factors invoked by those who try to argue that determinism is self-refuting.

In his article, Jordan responds to somewhat similar objections raised by A. J. Ayer.

Ayer contends that the hypothesis that all human behavior is governed by causal laws is not self-defeating. He holds that it is mistaken to assume that acting from reasons is incompatible with acting from causes. Believing a proposition because of certain brain processes is not incompatible with believing it because of rational grounds for it; the word “because” here is used in two

senses which are not mutually destructive. Thus Ayer can hold both that he would think differently if his brain were constituted differently and that he actually thinks as he does for the reasons he gives.

Ayer points out that a calculating machine can operate both causally and according to logical laws. From this observation he draws the conclusion that the question of the adequacy of reasons for a belief is independent of the question whether there are necessary and sufficient conditions for holding that belief.⁵¹

Jordan responds that his argument does not assume that there is an incompatibility between acting from reasons and acting from causes. His argument only assumes the following conditional statement: If our rational assessments are causally determined, then we cannot know or rationally believe that any judgment is correct.⁵² Jordan's reply, however, does not escape the point of Ayer's objection—that rational belief and causal determination are compatible. The assumption that they are incompatible is implied by Jordan's conditional statement. Moreover, Jordan's argument cannot be formulated without employing the premise that rational assent is incompatible with causal determination of that assent.

A. E. Taylor neatly sums up the view of those who have undertaken a line of argument similar to Jordan's: "To be a function of antecedent events is one thing, to be a function of logically relevant evidence is quite another," and Taylor assumes the determinist must deny this.⁵³ But a *PNfc* can grant this distinction, while at the same time maintaining that the evidence itself, the conviction it engenders, and even the perception of logical laws are all necessary effects of wholly determined causes. A *PNfc*, after all, does not have to maintain that the only kind of relationship is that between causes and their effects; he can, therefore, allow that there are also logical relations—being a "function of evidence"—and that these logical relations are a product not of choice but of determining conditions.

Thus, the *PNfc* can argue that when Taylor says that if determinism is correct it is impossible to consider any issue with an "open mind," he is equivocating.⁵⁴ To consider with an "open mind"—in the sense in which this is an intellectual obligation—means to reach a conclusion only after consideration of evidence and reasons, and then to be determined by them; it hardly means that one approaches a theoretical problem as if he were free to choose the position he will hold. If there is any choice involved, the *PNfc* will conclude, it might be to consider the problem with an open mind or not, and there seems to be nothing which would prevent such a choice from being determined—for example, by one's intense desire for truth.

In discussing Ayer's example of a calculating machine, Jordan states that if determinism is true then there is only a fortuitous connection between the conditions governing one's belief and the standards governing what ought to be

believed. Calculating machines are built in conformity with such standards. If men are determined as calculating machines are, there is no way to tell whether human beliefs conform to such standards. Jordan says that on the determinist hypothesis, if men “make mistakes, they cannot recognize them; if they believe themselves mistaken in any instance, their belief is fortuitously correct if correct at all.”⁵⁵

As Grünbaum shows, such a response is question-begging. It assumes that a causally determined awareness of the evidence cannot be among the factors which legitimately determine and rationally alter belief. This assumption comes out even more clearly in Lionel Kenner’s formulation of the argument: environment are the sufficient and necessary conditions of all our thoughts and activities—that we are only very advanced electronic computers—he has relinquished the right to say that the arguments which appear cogent to us are valid arguments.”⁵⁶

Of course, no one can be certain without qualification that arguments which appear cogent to us are valid arguments. Whether *Nfc* is true or not, epistemological problems remain always with us. And a *PNfc* need not necessarily maintain that a man is nothing but an advanced computer; the analogy was only brought into service to make the point that determination by logic and by physical causality are not mutually incompatible. Most fundamentally, Kenner is assuming that there can be for the *PNfc* only one sense of “sufficient and necessary” conditions. But a *PNfc* can maintain that while a set of logical rules are the necessary and sufficient *formal* conditions of the theorems which can be deduced in a certain system, the necessary and sufficient conditions for the behavior of the mathematician are ultimately determined. The mathematician’s cognitional behavior, then, would not be dependent upon any free choice on his part and would not be independent of the factors which account for natural events and processes in general.

It is fair to ask a *PNfc* how it happens that human cognitive equipment, functioning according to natural laws as he thinks it must, has a capacity for arriving at truth. The *PNfc* could plausibly answer this question in various ways—for example, by suggesting a scientific account of the survival-value of this particular capacity. C. S. Lewis tries to rule out such an answer by arguing that one cannot know such an explanation except by inference, and so unless one knows inference to be valid, one cannot even begin an argument for its validity.⁵⁷ But this objection fails. Lewis assumes what a *PNfc* can deny, namely that an account of inferential processes consistent with *Nfc* casts doubt upon the validity of such processes.

In summary, the preceding attempts to show the affirmation of *Nfc* self-refuting are unsuccessful. Even if *Nfc* is true, still the determining causes of knowledge might arise from the interaction of organism and environment—in

other words, the facts might determine what we think about them. Nor would the truth of *Nfc* exclude there being criteria of adequacy logically independent of the causes of belief. The *PNfc*'s admission that his own and his opponent's position are equally products of necessary and sufficient causal conditions is not self-refuting. Obviously, the concrete causes of different beliefs are in fact different, but which belief is correct is independent of how each originates.

A *PNfc* might argue that *Nfc* is true on the supposition that all relationships are cause-effect relationships. However, he also can argue for *Nfc* on the supposition that there are logical and epistemic relationships which are irreducible to causal relationships. The former argument is perhaps susceptible to the charge that it is self-refuting. The latter clearly is not. The *PSfc* himself might wish to hold (and many on this side of the controversy have held) that there are self-evident truths, evident data of experience, and necessary conclusions—and that free choice has no place in a person's cognition of any of these, except, perhaps, to the extent that he can attend to them or not.

A proof of the irreducibility of epistemic and logical relations to cause-effect relations does not establish free choice. The irreducibility of human cognition to natural mechanism is not the same as the irreducibility of choice to natural mechanism. Aristotle certainly considered the human intellect to be transcendent to natural causality, but it is by no means clear that Aristotle's voluntariness involves free choice. The preceding arguments that the assertion of *Nfc* is self-refuting do not take this distinction into account. Even if they were successful, they would prove only that human cognition is irreducible to natural mechanism.

F. J. R. Lucas's argument

In *The Freedom of the Will*, J. R. Lucas articulates an ingenious argument against determinism based on self-reference. He characterizes his argument as self-referential, but contrasts it with arguments of the sort discussed in the preceding section.⁵⁸ Lucas's characterization of his argument might suggest that he has developed a new variant of the argument that determinism is self-refuting. But the arguments discussed in the preceding section and Lucas's argument are not self-referential in the same sense.

The argument that determinism is self-refuting seeks to show that the determinist is refuted by his very act of claiming to know his position true. Such an argument is based on the reference which the determinist must make to his own act of affirming determinism; he must make reference to this act inasmuch as he is making a universal claim about human behavior. The attraction of such an argument, as we have noted, is that it seems able to avoid assuming anything which the determinist need not grant.

Lucas's argument, by contrast, is based on the fact that there is a legitimate

kind of self-reference—namely, the kind of self-reference involved in Gödel's theorem. Lucas regards this type of self-reference as an expression in mathematical terms of the reflexivity of human self-consciousness.⁵⁹ He argues that no material system—which he assumes the human mind would be if determinism were true—can prove every Gödel-type theorem, while some human persons can in principle do so.⁶⁰

It is clear, then, that Lucas's argument is not a new variant of the argument that determinism is self-refuting. His argument does not seek to "hoist the determinist on his own petard." Rather, he points to a given human ability. This fact involves the phenomenon of self-reference, which Lucas thinks no physical system can embody. Thus, Lucas's argument does not have the advantage which the argument that determinism is self-refuting would have if it were successful. Lucas's argument begins with a description which a *PNfc* can reject.

One assumption of Lucas which a *PNfc* might reject is that no physical system can embody the kind of self-reference involved in Gödel's theorem. We do not feel competent to criticize Lucas's assumption, but it seems to us that he presents little evidence for it; rather, he articulates it as if it were intuitively evident. Thus, this assumption seems to function in Lucas's argument very much as the assumption that reasons for judgment cannot be determined functions in the argument that determinism is self-refuting. Like the latter assumption, Lucas's assumption is a general thesis about the nature of the physical universe. It is unlikely that a *PNfc* would grant this limitation upon what a physical system can do, and it is not clear to us that he needs to grant it.

Even if Lucas's argument can meet the preceding objection, however, it fails to establish what Lucas sets out to prove: that man has free will. At best, Lucas demonstrates the irreducibility of human self-consciousness to physical processes. As we have explained above, this not to show that choice is irreducible to wholly determined conditions.

Thus Lucas's argument, whatever one might think of it, is not directly relevant to *Sfc/Nfc*.