

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