

The Libertarian Imperative

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Our epistemic situation is agonizing. On one hand, scientific observations strongly suggest that the world is thoroughly physical. On the other hand, we are aware of our consciousness and our having of free will which don't seem to fit into the materialistic (physicalistic) world picture. Which world view — materialistic or non-materialistic — is, then, correct?

Regrettably, modern science is not impartial in trying to find an answer to this extremely important question. In the opinion of a typical contemporary scientist there is not the slightest reason to doubt that brains are anything other than machines with enormous numbers of parts that work in perfect accord with physical laws. There is claimed to be no such thing in our world as the true, libertarian Free Will. Though we have incontestable phenomenological evidence that we possess Free Will — a feeling of freedom — this evidence is discarded by present-day science on the grounds that it is subjective and thus not publicly verifiable. It would be therefore highly advantageous if it were possible to reason about Free Will on a firmer basis. There is such a possibility.

It is possible to justify by logical means the reasonability of the requirement: "One must always try to act in accord with the thesis that one has the libertarian Free Will." This requirement, which may be called a Libertarian Imperative, can be justified as follows.

Our volitional efforts are either nomic processes obeying at some fundamental level definite deterministic or probabilistic laws of dynamics, or they are non-nomic, Free acts exempt at any fundamental level of description from the laws of nature. If our volitional activ-

ity is nomic, then: if we maintain that our activity is nomic, we are right; and if we maintain that our activity is Free-Volitional, we are wrong, but we are wrong unavoidably, because we cannot then prevent our such behaviour. If our volitional activity is Free-Volitional, then: if we maintain that our activity is Free-Volitional, we are right; and if we maintain that our activity is nomic, we are wrong, yet we are wrong not unavoidably, because as Free agents we could have behaved otherwise, i.e. could have maintained that our volitional activity is Free-Volitional. Consequently, in order to behave in the most reasonable way possible (provided we uncompromisingly seek the truth) in respect to the Free Will problem, we must attempt to act always in conformity with the thesis that we are Free-Will beings, for if we actually are Free-Will beings, our such attempts cohere with the truth, and if we actually are not Free-Will beings, whatever attempts by us are not the kind of acts that can make things in the world either better or worse than they would otherwise be, because then these attempts themselves belong to nature's causal network and their lawful occurrence, either deterministic or random, cannot be avoided.

The Libertarian Imperative requires us to try to reject any philosophy about our nature which claims that we are entirely lawfully functioning creatures. Given the present philosophical situation in the world, the most topical ideological implication of the Imperative is that we must try to discard the materialistic world view together with all its specific impact upon our scientific research programs. In particular, we are justified to reject the thesis that brains are just very complicated physical organs whose dynamics obey the laws of physics, and accept, instead, the view that one of the main objectives of brain research should be elucidating how the Will modifies the activity of neuronal networks in defiance of natural causes.

We have absolutely nothing to lose but we may gain immensely if we dare to try to discard materialism and profess libertarianism.