

From uus Wed Jun 11 11:56:54 1997
Subject: Re: The Libertarian Imperative
To: keith@imprint.co.uk

Dear Keith Sutherland:

Thank you very much for valuable suggestions concerning my paper on free volition. I will consider various possibilities of modifying the paper, and would like to ask your advice before making final selection between different alternatives.

With best wishes,
Undo Uus

PS: Unfortunately, I sent you 4 more copies of the manuscript a couple of days ago (I guess you have read the copy I sent you a month ago) so please feel free to throw them away.

From keith@imprint.co.uk Wed Jun 11 12:39:01 1997
From: Keith Sutherland <keith@imprint.co.uk>
Subject: Re: The Libertarian Imperative

In message <199706110856.LAA05838@cathy.obs.ee>, Undo Uus <uus@obs.ee> writes

>Dear Keith Sutherland:

>

>Thank you very much for valuable suggestions concerning my paper on
>free volition. I will consider various possibilities of modifying
>the paper, and would like to ask your advice before making final
>selection between different alternatives.

OK thanks. I got the Lowe book in the post to you yesterday -- I think you'll find it very helpful. I did a review of it for the Times Higher Education Supplement:

Subjects of Experience

by E.J. Lowe

Cambridge University Press, 210 pp., Price??

ISBN 0 521 47503 1

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In Charles Dickens' Hard Times, Mrs. Gradgrind remarks from her sickbed 'I think there's a pain somewhere in the room, but I couldn't positively say that I have got it'. Despite its manifest absurdity, such a remark would not be entirely out of place with current thinking in the cognitive sciences for, notwithstanding the recent interest in consciousness studies, theories of cognition still tend to deal with abstract disembodied processes. Even those writers who take consciousness seriously (unlike Dennett and his endlessly recycled Rylean metaphors), tend to explain perception and other cognitive processes in terms of computational functions and then are left to puzzle what on earth the experience is for.

E.J. Lowe, professor of philosophy at Durham University, has little time for such orthodoxies -- to him cognition cannot be explained without recourse to subjective experience. The book is both an outspoken attack on physicalism and a delightfully old-fashioned plea to take our

commonsense intuitions of personhood seriously -- the word 'confabulation' does not merit a single entry in the index, and folk psychology is not treated with derision. Despite its brevity (only 200 pages) and relaxed accessible style, Lowe offers a convincing demolition of a broad range of physicalist dogmas, including Fodor's modular theory of perception and the Frege-Wittgenstein theory of thought and language. The arguments that he employs are varied but are often based on pointing out the AI-based agenda of functionalism. For example he is particularly critical of David Marr's computational theory of perception, here quoting Steven Pinker:

[Subjective experience] is noncontroversially epiphenomenal if one subscribes to the computational theory of the mind in general. In no computational theory of a mental process does subjective experience *per se* play a causal role . . . subjective experience, if it is considered at all, is assumed to be a correlate of . . . processing.

Lowe argues that this sort of theory may be useful for designing AI devices, but tells us very little about human perception, which is based on conscious experience and general intelligence. He considers briefly the evidence from neuropsychology but concludes that blindsight and other visual agnosias fail to overturn an intelligence/experience based theory. The reason that AI theorists give so little emphasis to this is because general intelligence and conscious experience are so poorly understood and almost impossible to model.

So much for the hatchet job, but what about Lowe's own theory? He would describe himself broadly as a neo-Lockian empiricist, and is happy to defend Locke's volitional theory of action against its many critics. Consciousness and the self -- the subject of experience -- are strongly emergent properties of mind, language and culture (rather than in Searle's weak sense of non-causal emergence).

So far so good, but Lowe would also describe his theory of selfhood, along with a tiny band of authors including *pare et fils* Strawson, as 'non-Cartesian substance dualism', at which point the present reviewer began to part company. His dualism is based on the simple observation that a volitional act -- such as the raising of an arm -- is a discrete event, and the only discrete 'cause' that we are aware of is the act of willing itself. If we look into the brain all we find is a continuous, chaotic branching neural hotchpotch, with nothing that could be seen as

a discrete cause. However, he refuses to accept Descartes' doctrine of essences, whereby something has to be either extended or immaterial? But I don't see how this is compatible with the idea that the self is a simple substance -- he is quite clear that the self is not the body or part of the body, but never quite tells us what physical properties it does have.

The biggest problem I found is with the idea of mental causation. Lowe is fully conversant with the physicalist objections -- conservation of momentum, causal redundancy etc. but concludes (rightly) that such critiques are basically circular -- the 'physical' is defined in terms of causal closure etc. The last thing I want to do is defend physicalist dogmas, but it did seem to me that this was the weakest part of the book. And yet all Lowe's observations of our sense of self, volition and agency are undoubtedly true, and shouldn't just be written off as 'folk psychology'. I was left with the feeling that 'non-Cartesian dualism' was not quite radical enough and that the answer might lie in the infinitely wilder theories of Spinoza or Schrödinger.

=====

Keith Sutherland is the publisher of the Journal of Consciousness Studies

Keith

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From uus Thu Jun 12 12:55:25 1997
Subject: Re: The Libertarian Imperative
To: keith@imprint.co.uk

Dear Keith Sutherland:

Many thanks for sending me E.J. Lowe's "Subjects of Experience".
This book is not (yet?) available here. (I sent a copy of my book
to Lowe two years ago.)

As I understand, you know well Schrödinger's philosophical views.
Could you tell is his position on free will problem persistently
compatibilistic or has he occasionally doubted whether free will
is at all possible if persons' bodies function as pure mechanisms
according to the laws of nature?

Yours,
Undo Uus

From keith@imprint.co.uk Thu Jun 12 14:33:52 1997

From: Keith Sutherland <keith@imprint.co.uk>

Subject: Re: The Libertarian Imperative

In message <199706120955.MAA07839@cathy.obs.ee>, Undo Uus <uus@obs.ee> writes

>As I understand, you know well Schrödinger's philosophical views.
>Could you tell is his position on free will problem persistently
>compatibilistic or has he occasionally doubted whether free will
>is at all possible if persons' bodies function as pure mechanisms
>according to the laws of nature?

I have to confess that my knowledge is second-hand -- through book reviews and other articles. I think you need to have a look at "What is life" for yourself (this should be widely available in most libraries). It was republished by CUP fairly recently along with another essay.

My impression is that his view is pure Vedanta -- ie free will is real, but the illusion is in attributing it to the finite individual.

--

Keith

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From uus Thu Jun 12 15:23:37 1997
Subject: Re: The Libertarian Imperative
To: keith@imprint.co.uk (Keith Sutherland)

Thanks. Schrödinger's "What is life" is indeed available here.
I will have a careful look at it.

Undo

From uus Fri Jun 13 14:22:49 1997
Subject: Re: The Libertarian Imperative
To: keith@imprint.co.uk

Dear Keith:

You made a number of suggestions concerning my paper on free will.
To meet these suggestions, I make the following proposals:

- (a) I will omit entirely the paragraph "On the metaphysical possibility of Free Will";
- (b) I will revise substantially the section on private honesty;

>From the paragraph "The implications of the Libertarian Imperative for consciousness studies"

- (c) I will exclude the passage on Crick's and Koch's studies, and
- (d) I will exclude the passage on free will and quantum indeterminism.

I would like to know your opinion about these proposals. Particularly, I am interested whether you think (i) that the entire paragraph "The implications of the Libertarian Imperative for consciousness studies" should better be withdrawn, and (ii) that the problem of private honesty need not be considered at all.

Yours,
Undo Uus

From keith@imprint.co.uk Mon Jun 16 15:55:04 1997

From: Keith Sutherland <keith@imprint.co.uk>

Subject: Re: The Libertarian Imperative

In message <199706131122.OAA10390@cathy.obs.ee>, Undo Uus <uus@obs.ee> writes

>(a) I will omit entirely the paragraph "On the metaphysical
>possibility of Free Will";

I rather liked this section, and it seems to me quite legitimate to discuss the metaphysical possibility of free will; I just felt that you need not ally yourself too much to some of the attempts to explain free will (QM etc.). Possibility is one thing, substantive explanation another, and I'm not sure that its necessary for one short paper to address both issues. Tell me if I am being inconsistent here?

>(b) I will revise substantially the section on private honesty;

Good, this is the area where you might cause unnecessary offence to a lot of good scientists.

>From the paragraph "The implications of the Libertarian Imperative
>for consciousness studies"

>(c) I will exclude the passage on Crick's and Koch's studies, and

>(d) I will exclude the passage on free will and quantum indeterminism.

Good idea

>I would like to know your opinion about these proposals. Particularly,
>I am interested whether you think (i) that the entire paragraph "The
>implications of the Libertarian Imperative for consciousness studies"
>should better be withdrawn,

I think that may well be wise.

> and (ii) that the problem of private
>honesty need not be considered at all.

You would need to be *very* careful about how you proceed and have very good cause for doing it. My own opinion is that a lot of the people working within the "new paradigms" are just as intellectually dishonest as many of the supporters of materialism.

I'm very keen that you should read Lowe's book and address some of the arguments there before resubmitting your paper.

best wishes

--

Keith

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From uus Wed Jun 18 14:24:21 1997
Subject: Thanks
To: keith@imprint.co.uk

Dear Keith:

Thank you very much for your e-mail of June 16 and for Lowe's book I received yesterday. I will make necessary copies and will return the book soon. I am also grateful for your correcting my manuscript.

Undo Uus

From keith@imprint.co.uk Wed Jun 18 18:39:33 1997

From: Keith Sutherland <keith@imprint.co.uk>

Subject: Re: Thanks

In message <199706181124.OAA05657@cathy.obs.ee>, Undo Uus <uus@obs.ee> writes

>Dear Keith:

>

>Thank you very much for your e-mail of June 16 and for Lowe's

>book I received yesterday. I will make necessary copies and

>will return the book soon. I am also grateful for your correcting

>my manuscript.

No hurry to return the book -- take as long as you like.

--

Keith

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From keith@imprint.co.uk Mon Jul 14 12:27:54 1997

From: Keith Sutherland <keith@imprint.co.uk>

Subject: Re: The Libertarian Imperative

Dear Undo

We are currently planning a JCS special issue on volitional action, which will include articles from physics, philosophy and neuroscience, and would like to consider your piece for this issue. How are the revisions coming on? (there's no real hurry)

One of the other articles gives an excellent defence of volition from the viewpoint of the technical physics involved, and there will be other physicists involved too, so I'd again encourage you to focus on the core philosophical and praxis issues.

Most of the papers in the issue will be defending free will from one viewpoint or another, and then we will invite a couple of prominent skeptics to respond.

--

Keith

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From uus Wed Jul 23 15:00:30 1997
Subject: Re: The Libertarian Imperative
To: keith@imprint.co.uk

Dear Keith:

I am sorry for not responding promptly to your message of July 14:
I was away from Tartu.

I would be very glad if my paper on free volition will be published
in a JCS special issue on volitional action.

In revising my article I have the following problem. If I will not
discuss in the article the implications of the Libertarian Imperative
for consciousness studies, should I then omit also the introductory
paragraphs "The tangled rehabilitation of consciousness" and "Can
there be science of phenomenal consciousness"? There are two
possibilities:

(a) I will withdraw these introductory paragraphs and will shorten
the heading of the article to "The Libertarian Imperative";

(b) I will retain these introductory paragraphs as well as the
present form of the heading (The Libertarian Imperative and its
implications for consciousness studies), and in order to justify
the heading and introduction, I will point at the end of the article
very briefly to main implications of the Imperative for consciousness
studies.

Which of these two options fits better with the general spirit of the
planned JCS special issue on volitional action?

I studied carefully Lowe's book "Subjects of Experience" and will
express my opinion about it in a separate message.

With best wishes,
Undo

From keith@imprint.co.uk Wed Jul 23 22:48:17 1997
From: Keith Sutherland <keith@imprint.co.uk>
Subject: Re: The Libertarian Imperative

In message <199707231200.PAA16925@cathy.obs.ee>, Undo Uus <uus@obs.ee> writes

>(b) I will retain these introductory paragraphs as well as the
>present form of the heading (The Libertarian Imperative and its
>implications for consciousness studies), and in order to justify
>the heading and introduction, I will point at the end of the article
>very briefly to main implications of the Imperative for consciousness
>studies.

I think this is the best option. I confess I can't remember why this is an issue (presumably in response to something I said earlier) -- sorry to be vague, but there are so many submissions going through. Of course we are interested in the implications for consciousness studies, one just needs to be sure that the argument is expressed in the best way and without causing gratuitous offence to people who sincerely hold a different viewpoint.

Looking forward to seeing the revised paper.

best wishes

--

Keith

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From uus@cathy.obs.ee Sun Jul 27 19:05:01 1997
Subject: Lowe's book "Subjects of Experience"
To: keith@imprint.co.uk

Dear Keith:

Thank you for your response to my query concerning the revision of my paper on free will. I hope I can send you a revised version of the paper in a couple of weeks. In this message I would like to share with you my impressions about Lowe's book "Subjects of Experience".

My general opinion about Lowe's book concurs with that of yours written for the Times Higher Education Supplement. Lowe attacks convincingly the physicalist dogmas, but he is not radical enough, so that, at closer inspection, his position seems to be either logically inconsistent, or quite physicalistic. In what follows I try to explain why his essay has produced such impression.

I entirely agree with Lowe that physicalism is inadequate, even in its mildest non-reductionist guises, as a basis for a scientifically and philosophically acceptable account of human beings, as subjects of experience, thought and action (p ix), and that it is **persons** or **selves** who think, feel and act intentionally, not their bodies or their brains (p 1).

I fully share also Lowe's understanding of the nature of conscious experience, i.e. that experiences are individuated by their subjects (p 187), that no two different subjects can be subjects of one and the same thought or experience, that we have 'privileged access' to our own, and only our own, present conscious thoughts and experiences (p 190), that all and only **the self's own** present conscious thoughts and experiences are available to it as possible objects of direct demonstrative reference (p 187).

I, too, hold that a person or subject of mental states must be regarded as a **substance** of which those states are modes (p 32), that the self must be conceived of as having the status of a substance vis-à-vis its thoughts and experiences, that bodies are shareable between selves but thoughts and experiences are not (p 195).

I agree that from the fact that I am not identical with my body it by no means follows that I am wholly distinct and separable from it (p 8), though my brain is as alien to me as a stone or a chair (p 38) and the capacity for perception and agency does not of its nature *reside* in any sort of cerebral condition (p 44).

I wholly side with Lowe when he claims that he is only concerned to discuss *interactionist* dualisms, not epiphenomenalist or parallelist theories, which avoid the problem of psychophysical causation (p 53), and when he rejects both token-token identity theories and supervenience theories of mental events and processes (p 54).

I also agree with Lowe's views on perception. It is, indeed, important to recognize the conceptual distinction between *perceiving* and *having perceptual experiences* (p 92). Any remotely plausible philosophical theory of perception must be a `causal' theory (p 102). A perceptual experience qualifies as a *visual* experience purely by virtue of its intrinsic phenomenal or qualitative character (p 103). I, too, am convinced that it is impossible to endow a computer with genuine cognitive states without equipping it with suitable sense modalities (p 119), that in no computational theory of a mental process does subjective experience *per se* play a causal role (p 123), and that the computer that displays 'I am ready' on its screen is not on that account to be regarded as a self, because it is *not* thereby expressing the thought that it itself is ready, nor indeed any thought at all (p 183). I completely agree with Lowe's argumentation that "Nor does the fact that I myself have little to offer by way of an explanation for the phenomenon of consciousness, and more particularly for the genesis of qualitative states of visual awareness, constitute the basis of a legitimate objection to my own approach to visual perception: for at least I do justice to the inescapable fact that such states *occur* and play a vital role in the process of seeing" (p 132).

I am happy to say that I agree with very much what Lowe writes in his book. I think Lowe is one of very few philosophers whose views are so close to my own views. I thank you once again for sending me this Lowe's book.

Particularly, I appreciate Lowe's courage in emphasizing that the actions which are `original' in causal chains of human action must be *mental* acts of some sort (p 145), that *there are* volitions or acts of will,

since undoubtedly human agents do sometimes voluntarily cause things to happen (p 146), and that he is only concerned to discuss *interactionist* dualisms, not epiphenomenalist theories. In so doing he makes one more essential step away from physicalism as compared with Chalmers's position.

However, if one wants to be a logically consistent interactionist dualist, one has to admit that the laws of physics must be violated to a definite degree in processes involving mental causation. If the laws of physics are strictly obeyed, there would be no intrinsically mental causation over and above specific (biological, neurophysiological, etc) patterns of physical causation. In this respect Dennett is absolutely right: if at the basic (atomic, sub-atomic) level the laws of physics hold without exception, our defense of nonphysicalist views cannot be empirically based. But in the present intellectual atmosphere it is psychologically extremely difficult to dare to assert that the laws of physics don't hold universally. And Lowe also balks back from making such an "unscientific" assertion.

I think you, too, noticed this particular weakness of Lowe's position: you mention in your review that the biggest problem you found is with Lowe's idea of mental causation. And, indeed, Lowe's conception of mental causation is actually a (nonreductionist) *physicalist* conception. Let us see what Lowe says in chapter "Mental causation".

In section "Groundwork for a new system of interactionism" Lowe assumes, in accordance with the doctrine of universality of physical causation, that *every* physical event in a causal tree has purely physical antecedent causes (p 66), that "every event in that tree has, as its immediate causes, other wholly physical events -- which is why we can in a sense allow that a principle of physical causal closure is satisfied and discern no threat to the physical conservation laws" (p 67). But this is exactly the physicalist position about mental causation. When now, onwards, Lowe asserts that his "proposal is not compatible with a supervenience theory of mental states, for its implication is that mental states such as volitions or desires have genuinely independent causal powers -- that they make a difference to how the world goes over and above any difference made by physical events" (p 68), and that "mental events must be endowed with independent causal powers" (p 71), he is logically inconsistent because if every event has purely physical causes, there is never a mental difference without an underlying physical difference, and therefore mental events have no *independent* causal powers. Lowe's claim that causal

explanation in mentalistic terms can still be regarded as autonomous with respect to physical explanation, on the grounds that mentalistic explanations invoke generalizations which are not at all salient at the purely physical level (p 74), is a classical nonreductionist physicalist claim.

Lowe tries to justify his position by means of 'spider and its web' analogy. But this analogy is entirely misplaced. The relation between spider and its web is a causal one, whereas the relation between mental causation (as Lowe conceives it) and physical causation is a relation of logical entailment, not of causation.

Lowe, in trying to deny that he holds to a physicalist causal view of the world, applies a discrimination between the physical reality and the nonphysical reality that is entirely unacceptable. He says, for instance: "I reject the view that a tree can simply be regarded as being nothing over and above an assemblage of sub-atomic particles, even though we now believe that the ultimate constituents of trees are indeed such particles. ... But that these particles constitute a *tree* rather than an entity of some quite different non-biological kind crucially depends upon their organization. ... Biological laws are laws about living organisms qua living organisms, and since talk of living organisms is not reducible to talk of assemblages of sub-atomic particles, neither are biological laws reducible to the laws of nuclear physics" (p 4-5). However, no sane physicalist is so stupid as to argue that a tree is merely an unstructured assemblage of sub-atomic particles. Every physicalist regards a tree as a *specifically organized* system of sub-atomic particles in a *specific dynamical state*. It is nowadays a quite widespread custom to first caricature physicalism as a foolish concept and then present a correct physicalist position as a nonphysicalist position. Regrettably, Lowe has also taken this path in respect of the problem of mental causation. It is therefore symptomatic that in his book he doesn't even mention the problem of *freedom* of the will.

To summarize: While I entirely agree with Lowe that physicalism is inadequate as a basis for an acceptable account of human beings, I resolutely reject his claim that an attribution of independent causal powers to the mental states of human subjects is perfectly consistent with a thoroughly naturalistic world view. I rather believe, like you, that in order to understand the basic nature of human beings (and other

conscious beings) we must rely on infinitely wilder theories. I am convinced that human subjects are supernatural beings (of certain rank).

If I would like to concern in my article on free will Lowe's this book, I would have to criticize his physicalist sentiments. But I would not feel happy in doing so: I regard Lowe as an ally, not as an opponent. I feel more easy in criticizing diehard physicalists like Dennett and the Churchlands. I think that if Lowe overcomes the fear of recognizing that our world is at least partly supernatural, he would be able to defend the truly nonphysicalist positions very effectively.

A few words about Schrödinger's views on free will. Schrödinger defends the existence of free will, but tries to avoid a contradiction with the principle of the causal closure of the physical world by admitting that the dynamics of atoms, though under our voluntary control, are always lawful. But if one holds to such a view, one must concede that then whatever our claims that we are aware of nonphysical aspects of our existence (including the claim that one knows, by incontrovertible direct experience, that one is freely directing the motions of one's body) are of no empirical (evidential) value, because everything that we in this case do would be done by us in absolutely the same way also in the case if we were purely physical and purely physically functioning creatures lacking any freedom of the will and any kind of phenomenal consciousness. I will discuss briefly Schroedinger's position on free will in the revised version of my article.

Yours,
Undo Uus

From keith@imprint.co.uk Tue Jul 29 18:09:06 1997

From: Keith Sutherland <keith@imprint.co.uk>

Subject: Re: Lowe's book "Subjects of Experience"

Dear Undo

Many thanks for your very careful analysis of the arguments in Lowe's book. I suspect you are probably right in your criticisms, although its some time since I read the book. As I recall he is an advocate of "strong emergence", which I agree sounds like the magician pulling the rabbit out of the hat.

I think its important to at least refer to his book in your article. If you preferred you could just add in a few citations where they support your own argument, rather than a full critical analysis.

>A few words about Schroedinger's views on free will. Schroedinger defends
>the existence of free will, but tries to avoid a contradiction with the
>principle of the causal closure of the physical world by admitting
>that the dynamics of atoms, though under our voluntary control, are
>always lawful. But if one holds to such a view, one must concede that
>then whatever our claims that we are aware of nonphysical aspects of
>our existence (including the claim that one knows, by incontrovertible
>direct experience, that one is freely directing the motions of one's body)
>are of no empirical (evidential) value, because everything that we in
>this case do would be done by us in absolutely the same way also in the
>case if we were purely physical and purely physically functioning
>creatures lacking any freedom of the will and any kind of phenomenal
>consciousness. I will discuss briefly Schroedinger's position on free
>will in the revised version of my article.

As I mentioned earlier, I haven't read Schrodinger in the original. As I understand it (from the secondary sources I've seen) the problem would have to be rephrased in terms of divine freedom, as "we" are the same being who created the laws of nature in the first place. So in this sense God has no freedom, once he has set the ball rolling.

But maybe I've misunderstood all this.

Anyway, I'm much looking forward to seeing the revised article. Ben Libet has agreed to co-edit the special issue and we are going to dedicate it to Sir John Eccles. The format will be a few articles from physicists, a few from neuroscientists and your own (all subject to peer review). Then we will ask Dennett, Lowe and Metzinger to do a commentary.

best wishes

--

Keith

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From uus Thu Jul 31 14:44:44 1997

Subject: Re: Lowe's book

To: keith@imprint.co.uk

Dear Keith:

Thank you for your message of July 29. I found it appropriate to refer to some of Lowe's views presented in his book in my article since what concerns the character of conscious experiences and the nature of "I", our positions are very similar. (By the way, have you got back your copy of the book I posted for you a week ago?)

I understand Schrödinger's position the same way as you do. He has the same kind of problem with the freedom of "we"=God as Leibniz has with his concept of God's freedom: although, in principle, both Gods are free, they always act according to definite strict rules. Some freedom, many say.

I think I will be ready to send you the revised version of my article next week.

With best wishes,
Undo

From keith@imprint.co.uk Thu Jul 31 17:39:37 1997

From: Keith Sutherland <keith@imprint.co.uk>

Subject: Re: Lowe's book

In message <199707311144.OAA04048@cathy.obs.ee>, Undo Uus <uus@obs.ee> writes

>Thank you for your message of July 29. I found it appropriate to
>refer to some of Lowe's views presented in his book in my article
>since what concerns the character of conscious experiences and the
>nature of "I", our positions are very similar. (By the way, have
>you got back your copy of the book I posted for you a week ago?)

Yes, thanks very much. I'm on holiday next week, so no great rush to get the revised article in.

--

Keith

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Dr. Keith Sutherland, Publisher
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August 11, 1997

Dear Keith,

Herewith I send you three copies — one JCS-formatted and two double-spaced — of the revised manuscript of my article.

The section "Private Honesty and Scientific Progress" (length: 1 JCS-format page) may well be omitted.

One minor comment. The expression 'the obscure and panicky metaphysics of libertarianism' which I use in my article is a clause from P. F. Strawson's book "Freedom and Resentment" (1974, p. 25), and is referred to by Dennett in his "Elbow Room" (1984, p. 76).

Yours,

Undo