

# THE LIBERTARIAN IMPERATIVE

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**Abstract:** The prevailing trend of deeming subjective experiences causally idle obfuscates consciousness research as epiphenomenal entities cannot be studied. The most flexible way for conscious experiences to be efficacious is for them to serve as a basis for free action. Regrettably, no objective evidence testifies for this possibility. In this paper I shall explain that if we seek the truth we must, for purely logical reasons, irrespective of theoretical ideas and empirical data about the origin of our activity, follow the *Libertarian Imperative* — the demand to try always to act in accord with the belief that one exercises the *incompatibilist* free volition. The Libertarian Imperative urges us to try to reject any conception about our nature — including the modern scientific picture of human beings — which claims that we are entirely law-governed creatures.

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Our epistemic situation is agonising. On one hand, scientific observations strongly suggest that the world is thoroughly physical — a huge material system that ultimately consists of relatively simple fundamental physical entities which obey deterministic or probabilistic laws of dynamics. On the other hand, we are subjectively aware of undergoing phenomenal experiences and of being free originaive agents. But phenomenal consciousness and genuine, incompatibilist free volition have no place in the physicalistic world picture, and, given the immense theoretical and technical achievements of modern materialistic sciences, there is a tremendous psychological pressure to deny their existence. It is no wonder that the scholarly community has almost entirely succumbed to this pressure. Fortunately, the darkest years of dominance by radical materialism are over and the issue of consciousness has begun to attract the attention it deserves.

## The Tangled Rehabilitation of Consciousness

Although hardly anybody denies the existence of consciousness these days, many philosophers try to explain it away by redefining it in purely physicalistic formal-structural terms (see Churchland, 1995; Dennett, 1991; Hardcastle, 1995). However, there is an insuperable obstacle to these aspirations: the phenomenal qualitative character or *qualia* of conscious experiences. The attempts to treat qualia in the language of orthodox physics are utterly unconvincing and doomed to failure because qualia — including

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the most general quale *experientialness* or *something-it-is-like-to-be-ness* which is inherent to every phenomenon of consciousness — and the formal-structural concepts of physics — whether about simple or extremely complicated systems and processes — belong to entirely different categories. For that reason ever more philosophers admit that the phenomenon which has been traditionally called consciousness and is now often called phenomenal consciousness does not fit into the strictly physicalistic world scheme (see, e.g., Searle, 1992; Chalmers, 1995, 1996). They suppose that phenomenal consciousness is either like some sort of ‘field’ — the field of phenomenal experience — which exists over and above the physical fields and particles (see Libet, 1994), or it is the intrinsic qualitative essence of physical entities themselves, as panpsychists have always suggested (see Griffin, 1997). Both these positions amount to the abandoning of the belief that the world is ontologically thoroughly physical in the traditional sense.

Regrettably, the rehabilitation of consciousness has become tangled as the majority of scholars who acknowledge the existence of phenomenal experiences try, nevertheless, to save the most basic doctrine of the materialist world concept: they hold that the physically lawful dynamics of the material world is not disturbed by the nonphysical constituents and properties of reality. By assuming that the physical domain is causally autonomous, the causal behaviour of the physical world is theoretically safeguarded from any ‘marring’ impact from the extraphysical. Moreover, the physical domain is considered to be not only causally autonomous but also causally sufficient: it is held that the physical determines not only its own dynamics but also the entire existence of the nonphysical. Though the world is allowed to be ontologically heterogeneous, its causal thread is believed to be homogeneous — completely physical.

### *The idea of epiphenomenal consciousness*

The view that the nonphysical exists but is determined by the physical implies that consciousness is causally impotent. The thesis of the epiphenomenality of consciousness is explicitly advocated, e.g., by Frank Jackson (1982), David Lewis (1995) and David Chalmers (1995, 1996).

The epiphenomenalist theories of consciousness have been criticised by several authors (see Beloff, 1994; Elitzur, 1995; Hodgson, 1994, 1996; Lowe, 1995; Warner, 1996), most forcefully by Daniel Dennett (1991, pp. 398–406). The fatal defect of theories of epiphenomena is that they cut themselves off from any empirical basis. The fact-based theories of epiphenomena are impossible for logical reasons.

It is logically possible that our subjective experiences are causally inert. There is also nothing counterlogical in advancing a *theory* that we actually have certain epiphenomenal experiences. It can even be agreed that everyone of us knows that this theory

is correct, because everyone of us is necessarily aware of one's own experiences (Lowe, 1996, p. 190). But it is illogical to claim that this kind of consciousness can serve as an *empirical basis* for our theoretical speculations about it, or that we can make reports of *evidential value* about the existence and content of such a consciousness. A defender of epiphenomenal consciousness is justified to contend, as Chalmers (1996, p. 198) does: I *know* I am conscious, and the knowledge is based solely on my immediate experience. To say that the experience makes no difference to my psychological functioning is not to say that the experience makes no difference to *me*. But, on pain of self-contradiction, he cannot assure us that he asserts he knows he is conscious *because* he knows he is conscious. He has to concede that according to his own views his statement has been produced by his psychological (neurophysiological) functioning no matter whether he in fact *knows* he is conscious.

The belief in the autonomy of the physical world spoils the endeavours to rehabilitate phenomenal consciousness. If a champion of phenomenal experiences believes in the causal sufficiency of physics, he must hold that the experiences are causally idle, and in doing so, he exposes himself to ridicule by his physicalist adversaries and strips the problem of phenomenal consciousness of any scientific import. If one argues like Chalmers (1995) that there is the really hard problem of experiences but that explaining (i) the access to one's own internal states, (ii) the production of reports about mental events, and (iii) the deliberate control of behaviour are all easy problems concerning only the neurophysiological mechanisms and processes, one falls an easy prey to his physicalist opponents who use an indefeasible logical argument to force him to admit that (i) the 'really hard problem' is, in fact, merely one of the 'easy' problems, since the reason why the intellectual wrestling with the 'hard problem' arises and leads to definite conclusions can be explained 'easily' as being the result of the neurophysiological processes alone, and that therefore (ii) the concept of epiphenomenal experiences presents only as negligible an interest to sciences as a hypothesis about the physical fields which surround material particles but exert no impact on anything.

The proponents of phenomenal consciousness hold overwhelmingly to the view that the nonphysical is causally idle, and for that reason most of the modern theories of phenomenal consciousness are demolished by materialists before they really get off the ground. The philosophy of consciousness is in a stalemate.

### **Can There Be a Science of Phenomenal Consciousness?**

From what has been said above it should be clear that any fact-based theory of phenomenal consciousness is incompatible with the doctrine of the causal closure of the physical universe as we know it. *The empirically grounded science of phenomenal consciousness*

*is possible only if the physical world as conceptualised by modern materialistic philosophy is causally open.* This proposition must be regarded as the cornerstone of any logically sound philosophy of phenomenal consciousness.

Those who assume that the fact-based science of phenomenal consciousness is possible are usually not aware that this assumption requires abandoning the modern scientific world view by denying the causal completeness of physics. The problem of experiences is far more serious than is generally realised.

We face the painful dilemma: either the contemporary scientific world concept is correct and there can be no empirically based theories of phenomenal consciousness, or there can be such theories but then the basic nature of the world is utterly misdescribed by modern science. The decision to forsake the well established and intelligible world view would be so radical that we cannot afford to be thoughtless here. It is wise to discard the materialist world picture only if there are *very* serious reasons to do so. Are there, then, any plausible alternatives to the physically determined world?

Experiences can be causally efficacious in two very different ways. One possibility is that phenomenal experiences are like some kind of field which is in mutual interaction with the physical world so that together they form a combined physical-mental reality with dynamics that obey a definite set of natural laws (Libet, 1994; Smythies, 1994). Such a composite physical-mental world

is of the same basic kind as the purely material one in the sense that it is entirely law-governed. The other, much more extravagant, possibility for phenomenal experiences to be causally effective is for them to serve as a basis for free-will activity.

The first option — that the world is a law-governed composite physical-mental system — is logically unproblematic, but we do not have any factual evidence in support of it. Amazingly, there *is* sufficient ground for preferring the second option — the view that we and other conscious creatures are free agents — to materialism, even though the concept of free volition is supernatural, hard to comprehend, and logically problematic. I shall show in this paper that for simple logical reasons we are justified in trying always to follow the thesis of being free agents.

### *Freedom of will and consciousness studies*

The term ‘freedom of will’ is used to denominate two quite different properties.

Traditionally — and this is still the commonsense custom — the property of the will called its *freedom* has been interpreted as the ability to select one actuality from several possibilities, as the ability, for anything one tries to do, always to have tried to do otherwise. Free will in this strong, libertarian sense is incompatible with causal determinism, for the latter rules out the possibility of a person’s trying to do other than

what he does try.

The other, modern tendency is to designate by ‘freedom of will’ the creature’s property to function autonomously, to be free of *outside* coercion and constraint. The freedom thus defined is compatible with the complete causal necessitation of behaviour. A decision is free in this compatibilist sense simply because it is one’s *own* decision, no matter how rigidly determined by one’s own internal state.

To avoid terminological equivocation, I shall refer to the property *free in the libertarian sense* by the term ‘Free-Will’, and to the property *free in the compatibilist sense* by the term ‘Self-Willed’.

We are, undoubtedly, quite autonomous Self-Willed beings. But are we *Free* agents, and which consequences our admittance of having Free Will would have for our conduct and undertakings? In particular, how is the Free Will problem related to consciousness studies?

We, people of modern scientific education, predominantly regard ourselves as material creatures lacking supernatural Free Volition. What would be different if we accepted the belief of being Free agents? Our everyday behaviour would probably not change at all: maybe we would only feel a bit more responsible for our deeds. However, our philosophical apprehension of the general character of the world and our own basic nature would certainly undergo a radical change. The belief in Free Will would also have a strong impact upon one essential field of our scientific endeavours — upon consciousness studies in general and investigations of conscious activities in particular.

If we hold of being Free agents, we have to discard the materialist notion of ourselves, so that there would be no ideological pressure any more to construe at whatever cost the phenomenal experiences as specific physical brain processes explaining away the existence of phenomenal qualia, and we can then analyse the enigmatic qualitative character of the content of consciousness with due scientific impartiality.

If we hold that we are Free agents, we must substantially revise also the methodological basis of the current research into the brain–consciousness relationship. This research (see Crick, 1994) is aimed at finding out where the neurones responsible for conscious awareness are located in the brain, and in what way they are firing. It is taken for granted (Crick and Koch, 1995) that the causal chain *stimulus-evoked brain processes—phenomenal experiences—behavioural reaction to phenomenal experiences* is realised physiologically, by neural networks. It is argued that if a group of neurones does not project to the brain’s motor areas responsible for our reporting on what we experience then the activities of these neurones do not contribute to conscious experiences directly. But if we accept the view that the impact of phenomenal experiences upon the creature’s overt behaviour is mediated by his Free Will, we must admit that a distinctive feature of consciousness-evoking brain processes is that normally they do not

cause our behaviour via neural (purely physical) mechanisms. This implication sharply contradicts the basic assumptions of current, materialistically motivated consciousness and brain research programs.

If we hold of being Free agents, we have to acknowledge that the most fundamentally important of all presently conceivable scientific inquiries is elucidating which brain events the Free-Will efforts evoke: how the Will modifies the activity of neuronal networks in defiance of natural causes.

Hence, the Free Will problem is of utmost scientific import and is most intimately related to questions about the ontological status and causal efficacy of phenomenal consciousness. I think this truth should be always stressed when discussing the Free Will issue, for there is a widespread sentiment to view the Free Will controversy as an esoteric metaphysical puzzle of academic interest for only a small group of philosophers. That is why I decided to add to the exposition of the title thesis this lengthy introduction, and preferred to submit the present article to the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* rather than to some ‘purely’ philosophical journal.

### **The Problem of Free Will**

In the Middle Ages European intellectual life was subordinated to religious ideology which concentrated upon the Free-Will aspects of existence and denied the importance of studying lawful regularities present in the world. With the rise of modern science when more and more laws holding in nature were discovered, and partly as an overreaction to religious dogmatism, the ‘scientific’ dogma of nomism — the view that the dynamics of the world are *thoroughly* law-governed — began to gain popularity. Already many scholars of the early modern scientific era, among them Spinoza, Hobbes, Leibniz and Kant, accepted this view, and in recent times the doctrine of the universal ruling of natural causality has won support by overwhelming majority of scientists. This has led to the denial of the Freedom of Will. Let us mention, for example, Albert Einstein’s firm antilibertarian convictions. In modern times only very few scientists have dared to defend the explicitly libertarian views. True, among those few have been such world-famous scholars as Sir Arthur Eddington, Sir Charles Sherrington and Sir John Eccles.

Some scientists, finding it implausible to deny our being Free agents responsible for our conduct, but believing at the same time that the dynamics of the physical world are entirely regular, have suggested that even a truly Free-Will activity may be compatible with the universality of lawful dynamics.

One of the ideas aimed at justifying this suggestion has been proposed by Erwin Schrödinger (1977). He sought to avoid a contradiction between the (allegedly) universal obtaining of the laws of nature and incontrovertible direct experience that one

oneself commands one's motions, feeling full responsibility for them, by assuming that every conscious mind controls the motion of the atoms according to the laws of nature. However, if this thesis were true, then whatever claims that we are aware of nonphysical aspects of our existence — including the claim that we, following our Free decision, direct the motion of the atoms according to the laws of nature — would be of no evidential import, because everything that we as material beings would in this case do would have been done by us in exactly the same way also if we were purely physical deterministically functioning creatures lacking phenomenal consciousness and Free Will. Our producing assertions that we are introspectively aware of possessing Free Will could be explained then as a result of *lawful* functioning of our material bodies regardless of whether this lawful functioning is deterministic or Freely evoked.

The other idea about how Free Will can be compatible with universally lawful dynamics is more sophisticated. It is argued (see, e.g., Hodgson, 1991, 1994, 1996) that the Will can exercise its Freedom by selecting between alternatives which quantum indeterminacy leaves open, preserving at the same time the physically lawful statistics of sets of quantum events, so that, when described from a physical perspective alone, Free Will looks like chance. However, in this case a Free agent cannot command its behaviour Freely according to its best discretion, but must merely play a role of a generator of random events. The issuing of claims that one knows of having Free Will would then be explainable as resulting from a combination of one's lawful and blindly random functioning, irrespective of whether such functioning is caused by the physical determinism and randomness, or by one's Free Volition. If the Will directed quantum chance in its own aims, the lawful statistics of quantum events would be violated — if not the low-order, then certainly the higher-order probability distribution functions: the correlations of outcomes of individual quantum events with the brain's global state as it is represented in the content of consciousness evoked by the brain.

The Free-Will behaviour I have in view when formulating a libertarian imperative is the *truly* Free-Will behaviour which is not compatible with any kind of physically lawful functioning of our bodies (brains). Our having of such Free Will is resolutely denied by modern science.

### **The Formulation of the Libertarian Imperative**

Two aspects of the Free Will problem are discussed intensively by philosophers: the conceptual aspect — what Free Will *means* and whether it is compatible with determinism — and the epistemic aspect — how we can get to *know* the truth about the presence of Free Will in the world. But a third important aspect of this problem is almost entirely neglected: the praxeological aspect — according to which belief about

possessing Free Will one should *behave*. I will give an answer to this practical question by formulating and substantiating a principle of behaviour which I call the Libertarian Imperative. The Imperative is a normative requirement that is reasonable or unreasonable relative to general aims of behaviour. In formulating the Libertarian Imperative I assume that the supreme principle of the person's conduct is absolute honesty so that any intentional lying, even by noble motives, is excluded.

By definition, the Libertarian Imperative is the requirement:

*One must always try to act in accord with the  
thesis that one has the libertarian Free Will.*

I am not entirely content with the given wording of the Imperative. Although I assure that by Freedom of Will I mean the *incompatibilist* variety of freedom, I am nevertheless afraid of claims that any kind of Free Will may be compatible with universal determinism and that therefore the Imperative need not work against the doctrine of nomism. I will therefore rephrase the Libertarian Imperative so that it would be firmly safeguarded against such misconstruings.

In principle, the Free-Will activity may be strictly regular, but it is natural to think that a Free agent will hardly give up the possibility to act Freely rather than, without exception, according to certain rigorous universal rules. Hence, we can regard the Free-Will activity as a non-nomic activity, i.e. an activity that is not universally lawful, and reformulate the Libertarian Imperative as follows:

*One must always try to act in accord with the  
thesis that one is not a law-governed creature.*

The Imperative expressed in this form is narrower by its content than it is in its original formulation for it does not cover the case of universally regular Free-Will activity, and is, in the first place, not a requirement to defend the Free Will thesis, but *a call for attacking the nomist assumption* — the view that all processes in the world, including brain events, obey at some basic level certain rigorous deterministic or probabilistic laws of dynamics. It would be even better to call the Libertarian Imperative so formulated an Anti-Nomic Imperative. It is just this Anti-Nomic Imperative that I have in view when I speak about the Libertarian Imperative below.

### **The Justification of the Libertarian Imperative**

In order to understand the explanation why the Libertarian Imperative must be observed one has to master only two simple concepts: one of the basic concepts used by science — the meaning of ‘lawful dynamics’ — and one of the basic commonsense concepts — the meaning of ‘to try’ in everyday practical sense.



## *The concept of lawful dynamics*

What is lawful dynamics is easy to understand in general, but the variety of it that has most to do with the determinism–libertarianism issue — the deterministic choice-making between alternatives — is occasioning much confusion. It is argued that determinism does not preclude the making of choices, but it is often not realised that the deterministic choice is fundamentally different from the Free-Will choice. The Free-Will choice is free in the sense that one could have selected a distinct alternative from that which one actually selected. Quite otherwise, the deterministic ‘choice’ is not a choice between genuine alternatives. But many philosophers are muddling the issue by trying to produce an impression as if there were no essential difference between deterministic and Free-Will choice.

Various tactics are used for selling deterministic choice for a genuine one. Some argue that deterministic decision-making is not blind obeying of the rules, because the latter evolve in the course of the system’s functioning. Others claim (see Ho, 1996) that organisms free themselves from the laws of physics by being coherent wholes whose parts participate in the coordinated action. But however ‘dynamic’ or ‘holistic’ a *deterministic* process may be, at the basic level it is always determined by blind following of fundamental rules — the laws of nature.

A vigorous effort to argue for compatibilism is made by Dennett (1984). His tactics are ingenious. Not believing in libertarian free will, he finds it reasonable to redefine the meanings of words and expressions traditionally used for discussing the free will problem — unavoidable, inevitable, possibility, necessity, open future, can, could have done otherwise, deliberation, free choice, free will, etc. — by assigning them ‘useful’ content applicable only in the realm of lawful dynamics. Then a talk about our allegedly nomic functioning sounds as a good old talk about Free-Will behaviour and is likely to provoke no protest by unsophisticated common sense. And more importantly, further arguing about Free Will is rendered impossible because you now lack any words for relevant concepts — your tongue is amputated. However, Dennett’s exertions to please common sense while staying faithful to physicalism end, at a closer look, in fiasco. Admitting that we rightly dread such confining circumstances where our options are reduced to one, he offers us two varieties of open future: the epistemic one (being nescient of what will happen) and the probabilistic one (being dynamically partly stochastic). To be free is to be ignorant or at the mercy of blind chance — that is how we can have free will and science too, in Dennett’s opinion.

If one’s behaviour is deterministic, then at *every* moment one has only *one* option of acting, for this is what determinism means. The outcome of one’s deterministic deliberation is fixed both in its process and its ultimate product, and thus one cannot

prevent its occurrence. This truth is particularly clearly explained by Peter van Inwagen (1983).

If one's behaviour is partly probabilistic, then one produces also purely random acts. In principle, one can, without violating the probabilistic law of dynamics, behave in very many different ways, provided, however, that the actual behavioural pattern produced would have a blind-chance character satisfying this law.

Consequently, if one's decision-making and other behavioural acts are law-governed, one cannot prevent their regular or purely random occurrence.

### *The commonsense meaning of trying*

To understand what 'to try' means in an everyday pretheoretic sense is to understand what one must do to obey such orders as: Try to raise your hand; Try to utter 'Physicalism is fallacious'; Try to imagine a circle; etc. This presupposes possessing practical abilities to evoke various volitional efforts. This does *not* presuppose having any knowledge about the brain processes (or soul processes if such exist) involved in voluntary acts of trying.

### *The peculiarity of justification of the Libertarian Imperative*

The scheme of argumentation I will apply in justifying the Libertarian Imperative doesn't belong amongst standard methods of scientific ratiocination. Therefore many scholars may overlook the argument altogether, and others may wonder why the pragmatic and narrowly logical mode of reasoning is used instead of approaching the problem from a natural science perspective. It is necessary to explain in what sense the scheme of reasoning applied is peculiar. Due to its distinctive character this mode of arguing enables one to arrive at conclusions not attainable by traditional scientific methods.

The natural scientific approach to the world is, in principle, quite simple. By means of observations a set of empirical data is obtained about the structure of some segment of reality. The task is to describe this structure in a perspicuous way and to discover all kinds of regularities and irregularities present either in this structure itself, or in the structure of that part of reality which is supposedly the cause of, or underlies, the empirically established structure. The natural scientific treatment of the Free Will problem would consist in investigating the spatiotemporal structure of brain processes, and in elucidating whether it obeys the laws of physical dynamics at atomic level.

A characteristic feature of the natural scientific method is its applicability from the third-person point of view. If I want my own brain processes studied, it is scientifically preferable to let that be done by other persons — by a team of skilled neuroscientists — than by myself.

It may seem that any scientific justification of the conformity of our behaviour with the thesis of our having Free Will must be based on results of natural scientific research into brain dynamics. Such opinion is rooted in a plausible-looking assumption that it is sensible to try to act in accord with the thesis *A* only if we have first established, or have at least some ground to suppose, that *A* is true. It seems unbelievable that there can be a class of situations when it is unconditionally reasonable to act on the basis of the thesis *A*, while having no reason for holding that *A* rather than *not-A* is true. But there are such situations. Here is a simple example.

Suppose an expedition has been sent to an alien planet with a task to explore its ionosphere. By accident, all measuring equipment gets crushed in landing. However, in spite of having learned absolutely nothing about the physical characteristics of the planet's ionosphere, the research team is, nevertheless, justified in trying to forward to the Earth the reports of the following type about these characteristics: 'The planet's ionosphere transmits radio waves of the frequency used in sending this message'. The issuing of such messages is justified because they don't reach the addressee if false. The attempts to send such messages can make things in the world only better (if the messages are true) in the sense of how much true knowledge its inhabitants possess, but not worse (if the messages are false).

The reason why in specific cases it is unquestionably sound to perform certain acts in accordance with a premise of which we don't know if it is right or wrong, is purely logical: if the actual states of affairs are in these cases such that our premise is wrong, these same states of affairs prevent our acts from being efficacious. In such a case a proposition can be accepted as a basis for sensible behaviour solely because of the situation's specific logical structure *regardless of any knowledge as to whether this proposition is true or false*. This logical structure is rendered peculiar by a self-referentiality present in it.

That kind of justification of behaviour is narrowly logical rather than *natural* scientific, but as far as it is based on sound logic, and logic is deemed a scientific discipline, it is definitely a specific variety of *scientific* justification. The ideal limit of the cases where such kind of substantiation of behaviour is possible is the unique situation of being faced with the problem of *one's own* Freedom of the Will. In this case the peculiarity of the logical structure of the situation — the presence of self-referentiality in it — is warranted by the fact that one has to reason about the character of this reasoning itself. The relevant reasoning can be performed only from the first-person point of view — it can be used for justifying only one's own behaviour — and so it contrasts sharply with standard scientific argumenting which can always be applied from the third-person perspective.

## *Why the Libertarian Imperative should be obeyed*

The reason why we should always try to act as if we know that we are Free agents even if we actually don't know this, is rather simple. I think most people are aware of that reason subconsciously. Such awareness is implicitly evident in claims like: 'Any discussion is meaningless if there are no freely willing agents', 'Be kind to the determinists for they have had no choice about what they think and write', etc. I shall explicate this reason as clearly as I can.

Any of our volitional efforts is either a nomic process obeying at some fundamental level definite deterministic or probabilistic laws of dynamics, or it is a non-nomic, Free act exempt at any fundamental level of description from the laws of nature.

If our volitional activity is, and has always been, nomic, then: (i) if we maintain that our activity is nomic, we are right; and (ii) if we maintain that our activity is not nomic, we are wrong, *but we are wrong unavoidably*, because we cannot then prevent the regular or purely random law-governed occurrence of our mental and behavioural acts. If the laws of dynamics are strictly deterministic, any other course of our behaviour could not, out of *nomic necessity*, have taken place. And if the laws of dynamics are, at least partly, fundamentally probabilistic, various courses of our behaviour might have realised, but then only by pure chance over which nothing and nobody can have control in order to avoid any particular way of behaviour.

If our volitional activity is not nomic, then: (i) if we maintain that our activity is not nomic, we are right; and (ii) 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 not nomic.

Consequently, in order to behave in the most reasonable way possible (provided we seek the truth) in respect to the Free Will problem, we must attempt to act always in conformity with the thesis that our functioning is not law-governed, for if our activity is, in fact, not nomic, our such attempts cohere with the truth, and if we actually are law-governed 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. It is reasonable to try to behave as a libertarian by maintaining that our functioning is at no level of description strictly lawful.

## **The Specific Features of the Libertarian Imperative**

The justification of the Libertarian Imperative is easily understandable because what is justified in the first place is not one's attempt to claim that one's behaviour is Free-

Volitional, but one's trying to deny that one's behaviour is lawful (unavoidable), and the concept of lawful dynamics is much more easily comprehensible than that of Free-Will activity. The simplicity of justification of the Imperative may even create an impression that it is a cheap sophistry.

The Libertarian Imperative is not an epistemic statement: it doesn't assert that one *knows* that his activity is not law-governed. However, for the reason that the Imperative requires one to try to behave on the basis of the thesis that he possesses Free Will, obeying the Imperative is — by its consequences to one's activity — equivalent to the acceptance by him of the belief that he *knows* he has Free Will.

The Libertarian Imperative is ontologically general in the sense that it requires the attempting to deny not only the *physical* (materialistic) universal determinateness of one's behaviour, but also *any other kind* of such determinateness, be it purely spiritual, or forced by some kind of divine power, or whatever.

From the logical form of the justification scheme of the Libertarian Imperative it is evident that it can be applied extremely restrictedly — only for justifying those of one's own occurrent volitional efforts which are aimed at presenting or investigating *these same efforts* as the exemplars of non-nomic events. The logical basis of the Imperative does *not* justify my trying to regard my other volitional acts, let alone the behaviour of other individuals, as non-nomic. Any suggestions about the wider domain of the Free-Will behaviour can only be scientific-hypothetically motivated.

### **The Libertarian Imperative, William James' Will to Believe, and Pascal's Wager**

My justification of the Libertarian Imperative may seem to have much in common with William James' stance toward free will as presented in his essay 'The Will to Believe' (James, 1979, pp. 13–33). In fact, there is not much similarity between my and James' positions.

Strictly speaking, my position is identical to that of James' only in the following sense: we both hold that there are propositions which cannot be ignored for the reason that we don't have any grounds whatsoever for judging whether they are true or false. James argues for the right of turning certain specific propositions of this kind into beliefs. I claim that it is reasonable to try to act as if some of these propositions were true. There is a difference between (i) accepting a proposition as a belief and (ii) acting as if the proposition were true without believing it to be true. I admit that this difference is a rather subtle one, therefore I will not object much if one says that I argue like James for justifiability of accepting belief in certain propositions the truth value of which is not known. But with this the similarities between James' and my positions end.

There are two substantial differences between James' and my arguments.

(1) James claims that our passionate nature is a lawful determinant of our choice if there is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; that we have the right to believe at our own risk any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt our will. I, on the contrary, do not appeal to our 'non-intellectual nature' but to our 'purely judging mind', to our 'dispassionately judicial intellect with no pet hypothesis'. True, as James has emphasized, one has to admit the first steps necessarily on emotional grounds: 'Science herself consults her heart when she lays it down that the infinite ascertainment of fact and correction of false belief are the supreme goods for man'. However, from this onwards I take 'no farther passionate step' but rely exclusively upon our merely logical intellect, upon our pure rationality, by presenting a sensible proof, a coercive demonstrative argument. I show that the problem I address is *intellectually* decidable, without any need to let our *passionate nature* decide the answer. The James' sort of argument justifies belief in Free Will on *pragmatic/psychological* grounds, while my defence of the Libertarian Imperative is purely *logical*.

(2) The realm of problems to which James' approach is applicable is rather wide, whereas my way of argumentation can be applied *extremely* restrictedly: for justifying only *very* specific beliefs (roughly speaking). For justifying the other beliefs which are justifiable in James' sense, my method does not work at all. This is because my way of reasoning derives its logical power from the fact that it selects as the proposition *A* in the task 'Please justify a voluntary acceptance of belief in proposition *A*' the precondition of this task itself: 'you have a power of voluntary decision-making'.

Since my way of argumentation addresses a judging mind, it is also apt to compare it with Pascal's Wager type of reasoning which likewise appeals to intellect.

Pascal advised us to believe in God, for if we did and God indeed exists, we would gain eternal beatitude, while we risk only a finite loss if God does not exist, and a possible finite loss is reasonable, if there is but the probability of infinite gain.

The arguments of Pascal's Wager type are entirely sensible. Particularly, Pascal's Wager type argument in defence of Free Will is quite powerful. Free Will is so important phenomenon that, even if one has not yet any convincing evidence for its existence, it is unreasonable to ignore the possibility that Free Will may, after all, exist in the world, and to declare the Free Will issue solved and closed.

My defence of the Libertarian Imperative is not, however, of Pascal's Wager type. My logic of reasoning may seem to be closely related to the logic of Pascal's Wager because I stress a truism that the Free Will issue is not an unimportant minor problem that doesn't deserve serious attention. But here the resemblance ends.

There are two essential differences between my argumentation and Pascal's Wager type of reasoning.

(1) Pascal's Wager type of reasoning consists in weighing gains and losses of alternative decisions, and its conclusions depend on how large or small are those gains and losses, and how reliable is our assessment of them. Such reasoning is of game-theoretical type. My argumentation is not of game-theoretical type. Its conclusion doesn't depend at all on how large or small are gains and losses of alternative decisions, or whether there are any gains and losses at all.

(2) Pascal's Wager type of reasoning can be applied to making decisions about a very wide class of alternatives: we use this kind of reasoning quite often in our everyday life. My scheme of argumentation can be applied extremely restrictedly: only in the case of one very particular kind of problems. The problem about one's own Free Will is one of them due to its unique logical structure. One is not asked to choose whether he believes or not that God exists, or that people have immaterial souls, or that there is afterlife, etc., but one is asked to *choose* whether he believes or not that he is *able to choose*. Just owing to this self-referentiality present in the task it is possible to solve it by purely logical means.

### **Complementarity of Logical and Natural Scientific Approaches to the Free Will Problem**

The narrowly logical approach to the Free Will problem cannot replace the natural scientific research into the general character of living beings' functioning. The logical reasoning, unlike empirical investigations, cannot give us any *knowledge* about whether our functioning, or that of other creatures, is lawful. This truth is very easy to understand.

It is not so easy to see, however, that natural scientific studies of our activity cannot, in turn, replace the narrowly logical approach to it.

Let us consider first the case when our activity is non-nomic at any level of description. Can we ascertain this fact by means of empirical inquiries? Obviously not. Suppose it has been established that at the most basic level accessible to investigations at a given time our functioning is not entirely nomic. This gives us, however, no guarantee that at some deeper level of description our dynamics may not be fully lawful. By way of natural scientific explorations it is in principle impossible to find out that our activity is *not* law-governed. If we remain satisfied with natural scientific reasoning only, we will never have a firm justification for behaving in accordance with the view that our activity is not nomic. The logical approach to the problem does give us such a basis.

But how would matters stand if empirical research showed our functioning to be fully lawful? It may seem that in this case the logical reasoning applied in justifying

the Libertarian Imperative recommends to act contrary to what scientific knowledge implies, and is, therefore, not complementary to natural scientific reasoning but plainly defective. However, this is not the case. Let me remind you that the logical argument doesn't justify regarding acts already accomplished by oneself as non-nomic; it justifies only one's trying to maintain that this same trying, and its results if it succeeded, are not nomically determined. Since the act of trying, that one is going to evoke is not an accomplished event about which there can be scientific knowledge, the acceptance of conclusions of the logical argument can bring one into conflict not with empirically established facts, but at worst only with a hypothetical suggestion that one's activity which has been law-governed in the past would remain law-governed also in the future.

The thesis 'It is always reasonable to try to behave as a libertarian' should not be interpreted as follows: Of all *logically* possible states in which a person of a given kind might be, it is epistemically more advantageous for him to be in a state of trying to behave, or behaving, according to the belief of having Free Will. It is undoubtedly epistemically disadvantageous to be a libertarian when one's functioning is deterministic in fact. The libertarian thesis should be understood as follows: *Given that one is the way one actually is*, if one behaves or will try to behave as a libertarian, one's such activity is epistemically the most advantageous of all *actually* possible — that is: both *logically* and *nomically* possible — ways of behaviour even when one's functioning is in fact deterministic, because in the latter case there simply are no actually possible alternatives to one's factual behaviour.

The praxeological approach, complementary to the natural scientific one, to the problem of one's own Freedom of Will is possible for the reason that we can exercise our Freedom of Choice, if we have it, even while ignorant of whether we have it. Such an approach — trying to obey the Libertarian Imperative — is, in essence, an *experimental* settling of the Free Will controversy. The Imperative can be viewed as the following call: let us not speculate whether Free Will is theoretically possible; let us also not ask whether we have any empirical evidence in support of or against our possessing of Free Will; let us take, instead, a straightforwardly experimental approach to this problem — let us try to behave as is appropriate to Free agents and see if we succeed in it. Such experimenting is subject to a reliable protection mechanism: if it is foredoomed to failure, it spoils nothing because it can't be then executed at all. If our behaviour is law-governed, we cannot experiment with it because we cannot then act otherwise than we are forced to act according to these laws.

### **On the Metaphysical Possibility of Free Will**

Although the possibility of Free Will is not a precondition for justifying the Liber-



tarian Imperative (as I explained above, obeying the Imperative is reasonable even in the strictly deterministic world), it is, nevertheless, appropriate to wonder whether Freedom of Will is at all conceivable. This question is a pressing one because of the plausible-looking logical (metaphysical) argument against the possibility of Free Will. It is contended that Freedom is not possible in any kind of possible world because our actions which are not necessitated by prior states of the world have no cause and are thus fortuitous, and a fortuitous event is no kind of Free choice. The libertarian view that a choice is Free only if it is not causally determined by preceding events is regarded as obscure and obscurantist, if not incoherent.

I shall combat the metaphysical argument against Free Will from two angles. First, I stress that the impossibility of devising an easily understandable definition or explanation of what Free Will is is not decisive evidence that the concept of Free Will is incoherent. There are universally accepted concepts that are, likewise, not explicable in a simple way. Secondly, I show that the concept of natural causation, even if applied to the most simple cases of the physically deterministic causation processes, is rather controversial, and that a relevant analysis reveals that the concept of natural causation is closely reminiscent of the concept of agent-causation used to explain the meaning of Free-Will activity.

### *Irreducibility of the concept of Free Will*

Some aspects of reality and concepts of these aspects are simple and easy to understand. Identity, difference, natural numbers, linear sequence, flat space, regular order, randomness, and the like are relatively simple, low-grade concepts. However, there are also higher-grade concepts such as infinity, time, consciousness, Free-Will activity, omnipotence. It is impossible to downgrade the high-grade concepts to the level of low-grade ones. This impossibility must not be regarded as a mark of incoherence of high-grade concepts. I shall give an example.

It is easy to understand what ‘to be actually the case’ means. The concept of *actual existence* is easily comprehended. But if we try to explain what time is, we have to use, in addition, the concept of *past existence*. Now, everything that belongs to the past does not exist actually, in the same sense as what belongs to the present does. Neither is the past a mere fabrication of fantasy. Some philosophers insist that there can be no third possibility between actual existence and nonexistence, and therefore time cannot have the property commonly regarded as intrinsic to it: that only the present exists actually, while the past does not exist *any more* and the future does not exist *yet*. They argue that time is like space, all its moments/points — those of past, present and future — existing actually, ‘at once’, in exactly the same way. However, there is no reason to

think that from the irreducibility of high-grade concepts of past and future existence to the level of lower-grade concepts of actual existence and nonexistence it follows that the traditional intuitively well-comprehensible concept of time is incoherent and therefore only the continua of spatial type can exist.

Likewise, there is no reason to think that from the irreducibility of the high-grade concept of Free-Will behaviour to the level of lower-grade concepts of lawful and stochastic dynamics it follows that the intuitively well-comprehensible commonsense concept of Free Will is incoherent. It is illegitimate to maintain that all basic aspects of reality *must* be categorially trivial. Longing for a categorially simple world must not blind us to the extent that we deny our most subtle intellectual capacities — our abilities to comprehend the content of high-grade concepts.

### *The nontrivial character of the concept of natural causation*

Those who argue that the concept of Free-Will behaviour is incoherent because the only intelligible varieties of behaviour are allegedly the deterministic and random ones, think that the concept of causally deterministic dynamics is simple. They have hardly ever been interested in what causality really means and how it is metaphysically possible.

The objective, natural sciences explore only the spatiotemporal formal structure of the world: its abstract form and not its content (see Russell, 1927, p. 163; Carnap, 1969, pp. 19, 28, 107). The task of sciences is to discover the laws of nature — the universal structural regularities present in the world — whereas the problem of whether these laws are sustained, e.g., by the divine will or by the essence of the material substance, is not the business of science but of metaphysics. Given that the laws of nature as they are do hold firmly, the knowledge of how they are sustained has no pragmatic significance whatsoever. To extinguish the metaphysical curiosity, it is suggested to rely upon the principle of parsimony by looking first for the simplest reasons, and to accept therefore the belief that the world's order, including the causal one, is guaranteed by the material substance itself. As the fundamental laws of physics are relatively simple, people consider this belief to be reasonable, yet they never wonder seriously how the causal process might work. Let us ask this question then.

The causal sequence of the simplest type can be conceived as follows. There is some state of affairs  $S_1$  at the moment  $t_1$ . Because of causality,  $S_1$  gives rise to the state  $S_2$  an instant later, at the moment  $t_2$ . How can this happen? Will  $S_1$  cease to exist at  $t_1$  and  $S_2$  arise from nothing at  $t_2$ , so that cause and effect would be temporally separated? Hardly so. Rather, it is reasonable to assume that the causal process is continuous: the state  $S_1$  *changes* into the state  $S_2$ . Admitting that the change is something more than the mere possession of a sequence of different properties at different times, i.e. that the pace of

change of a state is itself a definite characteristic of that state, we reach the following conclusion. While the transformation of the state from  $S_1$  to  $S_2$  is determined purely logically by the state's pace of change, the causality in its substantial sense concerning the physical causal 'activity' of the material substance itself is effective in determining one aspect of the state — its pace of change — by other aspects of that state *at the very same moment*. All fundamental equations of physical dynamics express just this dependence, both sides of the equations referring to the physical situation at one and the same moment. *The substantial causal process consists not in the determination of the present by the past, but in the self-determination of the present independently of preceding conditions*. Sounds like the 'obscure and panicky' metaphysics of libertarianism? If one contends that the libertarian notion of an originaive agent capable of contributing something independently of antecedent causes and conditions is obscure to a discomforting degree, if not positively mysterious, one has to concede that then the ordinary concept of causation should also be regarded as 'obscure'. It is useful to bear in mind that the most traditional concept of causation is not trivial, and is reminiscent of the libertarian concept of agent-causation according to which the Free agents self-determine their own character partly independently of their antecedent properties, being the prime movers or first causes of their own actions. The libertarian Free activity is not so disparate from the natural causal process as it seems to be at the first glance. Causation may well be compatible not only with the deterministic choice but also with the Free-Will choice.

### **The Peirastic Rejection of Materialism**

There are various empirically grounded arguments which question the validity of materialism (see, e.g., Lowe, 1996; Uus, 1994). The argumentation used in justifying the Libertarian Imperative gives us, in addition, a firm *logical* basis for challenging materialistic ideology.

The Libertarian Imperative requires us to try to reject any philosophy about our nature which claims that we are entirely lawfully functioning creatures. This means that we must also try to regard materialism as fallacious. Such abandoning of materialism, if we succeed in it, would not be epistemic: the Imperative is not based on *knowledge* that our behaviour is not law-governed. Rather, such discarding of materialism may be called *peirastic* (from the Greek word *peirastikos*: involving, or performing, an attempt) because it is based on our ability, if we have it, to *try* to act and act in this way, and is logically justified for the reason that if this our ability is guaranteed by our Free Volition, we would be right in dismissing materialism, and if our abandoning of materialism has taken place in the course of our physically lawful functioning, then we were forced to act

just this way in order not to spoil the materialistically lawful character of the world's dynamics.

The Libertarian Imperative urges us to discard the materialistic world view together with its dogmatic impact upon our scientific research programs. In particular, the Imperative urges us to try 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 the impact of phenomenal experiences upon the creature's overt behaviour is mediated by his Free Will.

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

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