

FREE WILL: TWO RADICAL PROPOSALS

Saul Smilansky

The free will problem and the basic alternative ways of dealing with it have been known for some 2000 years, and have engaged the greatest philosophers through the ages. In the last 50 years much philosophical progress has been added on top of that ancient cumulative understanding. Hence it would be natural to wonder why I think that any new proposal can be made on this classic problem, let alone two radical proposals.

However, it seems to me that in order to really understand the free will problem we need to cut two Gordian knots and opt for the two radical proposals that follow. To say that these proposals are complex, deeply counter-intuitive, and philosophically, socially and psychologically problematic would be an under-statement. It is understandable why these philosophical directions have not been taken, it is easy to provide here an “error theory”. But, as with contemporary physics, progress may fall to those who dare to be eccentric. This is not eccentricity for its own sake, but follows from the failure of traditional approaches. By now, we all should have little confidence in anyone trying to solve the free will problem in some simple, easy or pleasant way.

These two radical proposals are not simple to understand, and emerge in quite advanced stages of the problem. I propose to begin by making a quick survey of the free will problem and of why it is a problem, namely why we don't have metaphysical or libertarian free will. Then, to defend the two radical proposals. This paper crystallizes the position on the free will issue that I proposed in Free Will and Illusion (Smilansky 2000) and other previous writings.

1. What Is the Free Will Problem?

A helpful way to understand the free will problem is as a conjunction of three lexically ordered questions. This should not be controversial:

- i. The first question is whether there is libertarian free will, i.e. the libertarian Coherence/Existence Question. Libertarians think that there is libertarian free will, everyone else disagrees. This question is metaphysical, or ontological, or perhaps logical.
- ii. The second question concerns the implications if there is no libertarian free will. It is traditionally called the Compatibility Question, namely, are moral responsibility and related notions compatible with determinism (or with the absence of libertarian free will

irrespective of determinism)? Compatibilism and hard determinism are the opponents on the Compatibility Question. This question, in my opinion, is mostly ethical. The first radical proposal I offer, the Fundamental Dualism, is on this second, Compatibility Question

iii. The third question can be called the Consequences Question. It asks about the consequences of pessimistic answers to the first two questions - namely, that there is no libertarian free will, and that compatibilism is insufficient. An example of a familiar position best understood to be an answer to this question is the reactive-naturalism of P. F. Strawson's 'Freedom and Resentment'. The nature of this question is not clear. My second radical proposal, Illusionism on free will, is on this third, Consequences Question.

The traditional positions can be seen clearly from their answers to the first two questions:

First, libertarian free will. In a rough sense, we are all familiar with the idea of libertarian free will. For our purposes it can be characterised roughly as the ability to control one's action and actually do otherwise in exactly the same situation, with internal and external conditions held constant. Most people naturally assume that they have libertarian free will, and it has formed the basis of most of the ethical teaching of the Western religions and of major ethical systems such as Kant's. To help us intuitively hook on to it, it is the sort of freedom that determinism would preclude (although indeterminism would also not help and in fact the issue of determinism is mute). Libertarianism of course answers yes on the first question. Typically libertarians are incompatibilists, namely they think that if we didn't have libertarian free will there would not be moral responsibility. But luckily, we do have libertarian free will. In other words, the libertarian is demanding but optimistic.

Compatibilism is, roughly, the position that the forms of free will most people clearly have to some degree, such as the ability to deliberate and do as they wish, suffice to meet the requirements of morality and personal life insofar as they are affected by the issue of free will. In particular, the compatibilist rejects the idea that some sort of 'metaphysical' or 'libertarian' notion of free will, such as would be negated by a completely deterministic ontology, is necessary in order to have moral responsibility. Hence, the term 'compatibilism': the compatibilist insists that free will, moral responsibility, and their concomitant notions are compatible with determinism (or with the absence of libertarian free will). For example, the compatibilist will say that most people in the West choose a career with some measure of freedom, and are morally responsible for this choice, although it follows from their desires and beliefs. Lack of relevant freedom would result only from atypical causes eliminating or severely curtailing control (such as pathological compulsion or external coercion). It is important to stress that compatibilism is not utilitarian or consequentialist,

but maintains contact with the traditional paradigm requiring control for moral responsibility, and moral responsibility for blameworthiness and desert. Compatibilism thinks that the traditional paradigm can be sustained even in a deterministic world, and does not require libertarian free will. On the compatibilist level of deliberating, choosing, and acting most people are basically free, such matters are within their control, and it is this that matters. The compatibilist is non-demanding and hence optimistic.

Hard determinism, despite its misleading name, is not only a position on determinism or on the existence of libertarian free will (although of course it is that as well). Hard determinism is the opponent of compatibilism, which is sometimes called “soft-determinism”, on the second question. In other words, hard determinism is primarily a normative position according to which moral responsibility and desert are impossible. Libertarian free will is required, but does not exist. The hard determinist is the pessimist in our cast of characters: she agrees with the libertarian that compatibilist free will is insufficient and that we require libertarian free will; hence, both are incompatibilists. But, like the compatibilist, the hard determinist believes that libertarian free will does not exist. Consider again the example of the person who chose his career freely according to the compatibilist: the hard determinist will want to say that on the ultimate level the career-choice was not up to the person, who could not in the end form the sources of his motivation. These sources, the hard determinist will emphasise, are the basis for his ‘free’ choice on the compatibilist level. In certain cases – such as if the man chose a criminal career – this absence of ultimate control is what matters, and eliminates moral responsibility. The hard determinist is demanding and pessimistic.

2. Why Not Libertarian Free Will (Very Briefly)

The most ambitious conception of free will, which is commonly called ‘libertarian’ free will, is the best place to start. For, as we saw, if we have it we can rest assured – the Compatibility Question and the Consequences Question become unimportant. However, libertarian free will is impossible. The case against libertarian free will has been well stated before, and I have nothing substantially original to say about it. People wishing to see the argument in detail, can look at Strawson (2002) or (developed in an ethical direction) in Smilansky (2000: Ch.4).

The reason why libertarian free will is impossible, in a nutshell, is that the conditions required by an ethically satisfying sense of libertarian free will, which would give us anything beyond sophisticated formulations of compatibilism, are self-contradictory, hence cannot be met. This is so irrespective of determinism or causality. Attributing moral worth to a person for her

action requires that it follow from what she is, morally. The action cannot be produced by a random occurrence and count morally. We might think that two different things can follow equally from a person, but which one does, say, a decision to steal or not to steal, again cannot be random but needs to follow from what she is, morally. But what a person is, morally, cannot be under her control. We might think that such control is possible if she creates herself, but then it is the early self that creates a later self, leading to vicious infinite regress.

The libertarian project was worthwhile attempting: it was supposed to allow a deep moral connection between a given act and the person, and yet not fall into being merely an unfolding of the arbitrarily given, whether determined or random. But it is not possible to find any way in which this can be done. Libertarians may well not be satisfied with my cursory treatment, but such dogmatism should be accepted for the sake of this discussion, for we need to journey far. Most of the argument of this paper is addressed to those who accept that there is no libertarian free will, and goes on to ask what this means.

3. First Proposal: The Fundamental Dualism

3.1 The Assumption of Monism Is False

I will argue that a harmful Assumption of Monism has seriously impaired the debate, and this can explain why an explicit dualism such as I am presenting has not been previously developed. Before we proceed to explore the intuitive strength of both compatibilism and incompatibilism on the Compatibility Question, we should open our minds to the possibility that they are not mutually exclusive. Consider the following quotation, by Derek Parfit:

Some claim that only the Compatibilist View is defensible. Others make this claim about the Incompatibilist View. A third group believe that this disagreement has not been decisively resolved. These people might claim: 'Though these views contradict each other, and therefore cannot both be true, both are defensible. No one has yet produced an argument that decisively refutes one view, and establishes the other' (Parfit 1984: 325).

Parfit does not commit himself on the free will problem, but the point is that neither does he acknowledge the possibility of the existence of a fourth group, which is partly compatibilist and partly incompatibilist (i.e. if there is no libertarian free will, partly compatibilist, and partly hard determinist). Indeed, the inner quotation claims that these two positions 'cannot both be true',

without recognising that, while they cannot both be fully true, the possibility exists that they can be true together, i.e. that there is some truth in both, which can be combined. In fact, there is no conceptual basis whatsoever for thinking that the Assumption of Monism is necessary. The Compatibility Question might be answered in a Yes-and-No fashion, for there is no conceptual reason why it should not be the case that certain forms of moral responsibility require libertarian free will, while other forms could be sustained without it. There is nothing to prevent incompatibilists and compatibilists from insisting that real moral responsibility does, or does not, require libertarian free will, but their case must be made in ethical terms, and it may well turn out that there is no single or exhaustive notion of moral responsibility.

An economy of intuitions

Recognising and rejecting the Assumption of Monism allows us to stay close to the deepest intuitions on the free will issue. Not seeing conceptual space for a dualism incorporating their most basic intuitions, many free will philosophers did their best to avoid seeing the merits of the opposite case; this was unnecessary, and not very helpful. The intuitive attraction of the Assumption of Monism is great, but once we cross the ‘intuitive Rubicon’ and move beyond it we see that its parsimony is nothing but false economy. A true ‘economy of intuitions’ cannot afford to sacrifice the strength of either our compatibilist or incompatibilist instincts. The initially counter-intuitive step of rejecting the Assumption of Monism thus allows us to proceed along a new path that ultimately runs closer to the intuitive field than either of the conventional monisms.

3.2 Why Not Compatibilism?

I will now say a little bit on why I think that compatibilism, with all of its partial validity, is grimly insufficient. Firstly, compatibilism is a widely prevalent view, and hence it is necessary for me to show its inadequacy in order to defend my first radical proposal, the Fundamental Dualism requiring that we be, in a sense, both compatibilists and hard determinists. Secondly, I need to combat the complacency compatibilism encourages if I am to motivate the need for illusion later on, in my second radical proposal.

We can make sense of the notion of autonomy or self-determination on the compatibilist level, but if there is no libertarian free will, no one can be ultimately in control, ultimately responsible, for this self and its determinations. All that takes place on the compatibilist level, irrespective of the local distinctions in respect of control, becomes on the ultimate level ‘what was

merely there', ultimately deriving from causes beyond the control of the participants. If people lack libertarian free will, their identity and actions flow from circumstances beyond their control. People can change their character to a certain extent, but that which changes or does not change remains itself a result of something, and there is always a situation where the self-creating person could not have created herself, but was just what she was, as it were, "given". Being the sort of person one is and having the desires and beliefs one has, are ultimately something which one cannot control, which cannot be one's fault, it is one's luck. And one's life, and everything one does, is an unfolding of this.

Consider the following quotation from a compatibilist:

The incoherence of the libertarian conception of moral responsibility arises from the fact that it requires not only authorship of the action, but also, in a sense, authorship of one's self, or of one's character. As was shown, this requirement is unintelligible because it leads to an infinite regress. The way out of this regress is simply to drop the second-order authorship requirement, which is what has been done here (Vuoso 1987, 1681) (my emphasis).

The difficulty, surely, is that there is an ethical basis for the libertarian requirement, and, even if it cannot be fulfilled, the idea of "simply dropping it" masks how problematic the result may be in terms of fairness and justice. The fact remains that if there is no libertarian free will a person being punished may suffer justly in compatibilist terms for what is ultimately her luck, for what follows from being what she is - ultimately without her control, a state which she had no real opportunity to alter, hence not her responsibility and fault.

Consider the following example: -

The Case of the Fortunate Criminal

The person whom we are considering came from a well-to-do family, we may be inclined to say that he has had every opportunity to 'turn out good', he does not lack intelligence, is sane, identified with the life he chose to live, was free of inner or outer compulsion to act, and the like. Still, he has over a long period committed a highly unpleasant crime: cheating many people out of their life savings. He has done so for the sake of the money, although he was not in acute financial need. And he has been caught and given a long and harsh prison sentence.

I have purposefully chosen an example where our intuitions might rebel, and many would be inclined to deny any moral difficulty in punishing our criminal. He has had all the choice one could want, knew the consequences, and chose freely. After all, had he gone on to live freely on the spoils of his crime no one would have considered him a victim. Even in such a case, the conclusion that, if we lack libertarian free will, great inflicted suffering itself suffices to make one a victim, seems irrefutable.

We must focus here on the individual being harmed. Even if our criminal significantly shaped his own identity he could not, in a non-libertarian account, have created the original ‘he’ that formed his later self (an original ‘he’ that could not have created his later self differently). If he suffers on account of whatever he is, he is a victim of injustice, simply by being. Even if people can be morally responsible in compatibilist terms they lack ultimate responsibility: this lack is often morally significant, and in cases such as the one we have considered having people pay dearly for their compatibilistically-responsible actions brings forth injustice.

A similar criticism applies to other moral and non-moral ways of perceiving and treating people. The compatibilist cannot maintain the libertarian-based view of moral worth or of the grounds for respect, and what she has to offer is a much shallower sort of meaning and justification. It is those two charges, of shallowness, and of a complacent compliance with the injustice of not acknowledging lack of fairness and desert, and in particular ultimate-level victimisation, which form the backbone of my case against compatibilism.

3.3 Why Not Hard Determinism?

If there is no libertarian free will and compatibilism is insufficient, should we not then opt for hard determinism, which denies the reality of free will and moral responsibility in any sense? I will now briefly defend the need to retain some of the “form of life” based on the value put on distinctions made in terms of compatibilist free will. I share with most free will philosophers the belief in the at least partial validity of compatibilism. In broad outline, the basis for this position combines the reality of distinctions in terms of local free choice even in a world without libertarian free will, such as a deterministic world, and the possibility to ethically motivate the making use of these distinctions.

The kleptomaniac and the alcoholic differ from the common thief and common drinker in the deficiency of their capacity for local reflective control upon their actions (see e.g. Glover 1970, 136; Fischer 1994). Here everyone should agree. But the point is that such differences are often

morally significant. Consider, for instance, the notion of a valid Will and Testament made by a person wishing to arrange the distribution of her property after her death. The idea of a valid Will requires that it be made of one's "free will". The use of the same term is not, after all, accidental. There are likely to be borderline difficulties, but in general we are able to identify what it is about the agent and the situation when signing a document which makes the signatory's action free in a sense we care about (even without libertarian free will), and what limitations of free will (coercion, insanity etc.) invalidate the Will. And it is fairly obvious why we want to make use of these factors in our ethical judgements, reactions and social practices. We want our last wishes to be respected, as well as defence if our will is tampered with, and an ethically decent social order will follow the compatibilist distinctions.

The central concept in the free will problem is that of desert, and it is the greatest challenge facing the compatibilist. For it seems that, if people are in the end ultimately just randomly "given", and have no ultimate control on the sources of their behaviour, then they cannot truly deserve. But I think that this is too quick, and that we can defend a compatibilist-level sense even of desert.

Consider: -

The Case of the Lazy Waiter

Take the example of a waiter working in a cafe. He is young and healthy, his pay is reasonable, the hours not too long. There is also a shortage of waiters, so he may reasonably feel certain that he can keep the job as long as he wishes. In short, our waiter has an agreeable job. Part of his earnings depend on tips, and let us assume that the level of tips is directly related to how he serves his customers. This waiter, however, usually does the minimum, is slow and inattentive to the customers, and makes little effort to be helpful or pleasant. There is nothing extreme in his behaviour or in the motivation behind it, and he is quite capable of behaving differently, for example when his relatives come to the cafe or when a customer known to be particularly generous appears. But normally he is prepared to make no more than the very minimal efforts required.

It seems to me that there is nothing wrong with a situation in which part of the waiter's pay depends on the tips of reasonable customers, and it is perfectly acceptable for those who have been badly served to make him 'pay' for exercising his 'up to usness', by reducing his tip. We can see from his varying daily behaviour that it is within his control, and no deep moral concern is aroused if he receives part of his pay in accordance with his choices. He does not deserve the full tip. The

intuitive strength of the compatibilist perspective in such a case does not seem to depend on actually seeing the waiter benefit from his laziness; it suffices that such behaviour is in normal cases up to the person in question in any compatibilist sense that seems relevant. Moreover, if another waiter is more attentive but it is stipulated that tips cannot vary, then we may want to say that the effort-making waiter is not getting what he deserves.

This is not to deny that in many cases complex factors make it difficult to agree with compatibilist justice. Particularly with extremes of environmental deprivation, or when people's negative behaviour does not seem to serve any obvious purpose, the reasons why some make an effort and others do not will cause us to mitigate our judgement of people. Cases such as our lazy waiter, however, show that there is a legitimate compatibilist basis for talk about desert and justice. In certain cases it is the compatibilist perspective that is morally salient: the 'givenness' of the initial motivation set is not so morally worrisome, as long as the person can evaluate it and choose as he wishes. Respect for persons can be satisfied if people get the life they reflectively want in conditions of opportunity for the free exercise of compatibilist control.

More generally, we want to be members of a Community of Responsibility where our choices will determine the moral attitude we receive, with the accompanying possibility to be morally excused when our actions are not within our reflective control, e.g. when they result from a brain tumour. The exceptions and excuses commonly presented by compatibilism should in general continue to carry weight. For if people are to be respected, their nature as purposive agents capable and desirous of choice needs to be catered for. We have to enable people to live as responsible beings in the Community of Responsibility, lives based largely on their choices, to note and give them credit for their good actions, and to take account of situations in which they lacked the abilities, capacities and opportunities to choose freely, and are therefore not responsible in the compatibilist sense.

3.4 The Joint Perspective: Combining Compatibilism and Hard Determinism

Both sides of the dualism have a certain strength, which is why I think that any 'monistic' position is inadequate. However, once we make the conscious attempt to rid our minds of the Assumption of Monism, we begin to see that there are aspects of the compatibilist case that the hard determinist cannot plausibly deny, and likewise with the hard determinist case. Since people tend to be immediately inclined in one way or the other, and to be over-impressed by it, each of you will have to work on himself or herself in order to see the side he or she are blind to. One has to try to conquer one's blind side.

However deeply we might feel that all people are ultimately innocent, it is unconvincing to deny the difference between the control possessed by the common thief and that of the kleptomaniac, and to ignore the moral inadequacy of social institutions that would fail to take account of this difference. We have an intimate experience of control (or its lack). If a man believes that he is Napoleon then he is deluded, and his belief is false. But a woman's belief that her decision to see a movie and not a play is up to her is, even in a deterministic world, well founded on the compatibilist level. She did not ultimately create the sources of her motivation, and this hard determinist insight is sometimes important, but her sense of local control is not illusory, although it is only part of the truth about her state. Irrespective of the absence of libertarian free will, the kleptomaniac is simply not in a condition for membership in a Community of Responsibility of which most people, having the required control, can be, and would want to be members. The eradication of free will-related distinctions does not make the hard determinist more humane and compassionate, but morally blind and a danger to the conditions for a civilised, sensitive moral environment.

Similarly, once we grant the compatibilist that his distinctions have some foundation and are partially morally required, there is no further reason to go the whole way with him. If we reflect upon the fact that many people are made to undergo acute misery while the fact that they have developed into criminals is ultimately beyond their control, it is hard to dismiss this matter in the way compatibilists are wont to do. Given the absence of libertarian free will, the appropriate notion of justice incorporates pity into the very fabric of justice. There is a sense in which 'compatibilist justice' is very often, at best, 'justified injustice', and in which the proper compatibilist order can be seen as, in one way, morally outrageous. The valid requirement to form, maintain, and enhance this moral order is hence tragic.

In sum, we have to be both partial compatibilists and partial hard determinists, and to try to integrate their insights while avoiding their inadequacies. The Community of Responsibility based upon distinctions made in terms of local compatibilist control is at once morally imperative and deeply unfair. Philosophically, respect for persons requires both the establishment and maintenance of a basically-compatibilist moral order, and the acknowledgement that this order is morally problematic, and attempts must be made to mitigate its harshness. To be blind to any one of these two perspectives is to fail to see the case on free will.

4. Second Proposal: Illusionism

The Fundamental Dualism, saying that we must be both compatibilists and hard determinists, was my first radical proposal. Now let us take a deep breath and move on to the second radical proposal. I will attempt to defend a novel position, based on the descriptively central and normatively crucial role of illusion in the free will issue. Illusion, I claim, is the vital but neglected key to the free will problem. It is not claimed that we need to induce illusory beliefs concerning free will, or can live with beliefs we fully realise are illusory – both of these positions would be highly implausible. Rather, my claim is that illusory beliefs are in place, and that the role they play is largely positive. We cannot live with a complete realisation of the truth on the free will issue, and morally and personally ought not to try.

4.1 The Problem: Examples

In order to see how illusion is crucial, we must deepen our understanding of the difficulties which (would) prevail without it. Why is there an urgent problem requiring illusion? I will give a number of illustrations.

The Question of Innocence

The danger concerning respect for moral innocence is serious. Even in a world without libertarian free will, the idea that only those who deserve to be punished in light of their free actions, may be punished, is a condition for any civilised moral order (cf. Hart 1970). “Punishment” of those who did not perform the act for which they are “punished”, or did so act but lacked control over their action, is the paradigm of injustice. Yet, while the justification for these values does not require libertarian free will, in practice they might be at risk were the lack of libertarian free will internalised. Consider Anscombe's passionate remark that “if someone really thinks, in advance, that it is open to question whether such an action as procuring the judicial execution of the innocent should be quite excluded from consideration - I do not want to argue with him; he shows a corrupt mind” (Anscombe 1981, 40). Surely, if a moral system which seeks to preserve and guard vigilantly the common conception of innocence is to function well, such a sentiment should be prevalent, almost instinctive. But if this is to be so, the worse thing one could do would be to point out that, ultimately, none of this makes sense - because the “guilty” are, ultimately, no more guilty

than others. In a world imbued with a deterministic outlook the ethical-emotional weight of the Dreyfus affair, for example, is scarcely comprehensible.

The Ultimate Conclusion as a Practical Threat to the Taking of Responsibility

We cannot say to people that they must behave in a certain way, that it is morally crucial that they do so, but then, if they do not, turn and say that this is (in every case) excusable, given whatever hereditary and environmental influences operated in their formation. Psychologically, the attribution of responsibility to people so that they may be said to justly deserve gain or loss for their actions requires (even after the act) the absence of the notion that the act is an unavoidable outcome of the way things were, ultimately beyond anyone's control. Morality has a crucial interest in confronting what can be called the Present Danger of the Future Retrospective Excuse, and in restricting the influence of the ultimate level. To put it bluntly: people as a rule ought not to be fully aware of the ultimate inevitability of what they have done, for this will affect the way in which they hold themselves responsible. The knowledge that such an escape from responsibility, based on retrospective ultimate judgement, will be available in the future is likely to affect the present view, and hence cannot be fully admitted even in its retrospective form. We often want a person to blame himself, feel guilty, and even see that he deserves to be punished. Such a person is not as likely to do all this if he internalised the ultimate perspective, according to which in the actual world nothing else could in fact have occurred, he could not strictly have done anything else except what he did do.

Failure

It might also be interesting to reflect upon failure. The threat of failure is central to the widespread motivation to study, work, and in general make an effort, i.e., in motivating achievement. The sense of achievement and the self-respect it generates are in everybody's interest: unfortunately these ideas make no sense without the notion of failure. Hence we need the idea of failure in order to be given the opportunity to succeed. However, by now it will be obvious that the ultimate perspective poses a great threat here. If the boy at fifteen is to make something of himself, it cannot be the case that, were he to fail, at 60 he would have an easy way of dismissing his plight as all along beyond his control, for hard determinist reasons. Moreover, such an easy erasure of failure cannot but affect the fate of the sense of achievement: it cannot be that failure is thought not to be in the end up to

one, while attainment miraculously remains so. A cultural climate of guaranteed excuse is not conducive to effort and for encouraging success, nor is it a firm foundation for (self-)respect.

A Sense of Value

From the ultimate perspective all people, whatever their efforts and sacrifices, are morally equal: i.e. there cannot be any means of generating “real” moral value. There is a sense in which our notion of moral self-respect, which is intimately connected with our view of our choices, actions and achievements, withers when we accept the ultimate perspective. From the latter any sense of moral achievement disappears, as even the actions of the “moral hero” are simply an unfolding of what he happens to be. No matter how devoted he has been, how much effort he has put in, how many tears he has shed, how many sacrifices he has willingly suffered. True appreciation, deeply attributing matters to someone in a sense that will make him worthy, is impossible if we regard him and his efforts as merely determined products. All that the compatibilist can offer us in terms of value, although important in itself, is meagre protection from the cold wind which attacks us when we come close to reaching the luck-imbued ultimate level. There is an obvious practical danger here to our moral motivation, which can be named the Danger of Worthlessness. But the concern is not only to get people to function adequately as moral agents, but with the very meaning we can find in our lives.

Remorse and Integrity

If a person takes the ultimate perspective it is not only others who seem to disappear as moral agents - but in some way the person herself is reduced. In retrospect her life, her decisions, that which is most truly her own, appear to be accidental phenomena of which she is the mere vehicle, and to feel moral remorse for any of it, by way of truly owning up to it, seems in some deep sense to be misguided. Feelings of remorse are inherently tied to the person's self-perception as a morally responsible agent (see Taylor 1985, 107).

It sharpens our focus not to dwell upon those happy to escape accountability, but rather upon those who have good will. Here we confront what can be termed the Danger of Retrospective Dissociation, the difficulty of feeling truly responsible after action. One can surrender the right to make use of the “ultimate level excuse” for normative reasons, and yet perhaps not be able to hold oneself truly responsible (e.g. to engage in remorse), if one has no grain of belief in something like libertarian free will. One can, after all, accept responsibility for matters that were not up to one in

any sense, such as for the actions of others, for normative reasons. But here we are dealing with a different matter: not with the acceptance of responsibility in the sense of “willingness to pay”, but rather with feeling compunction. It is the sort of feeling which may give rise to a sense that one ought to do penitence, as a condition of maintaining one's integrity. Compunction seems conceptually problematic and psychologically dubious when it concerns matters that, it is understood, ultimately one could not in fact help doing. But such genuine feelings of responsibility (and not mere acceptance of it) are crucial for being responsible selves!

4.2 The Problem: An Elucidation

The difficulties we have seen can be divided into two types. Firstly, reactions and practices that are at least partially valid (have compatibilist grounding) will not be sufficiently adhered to if the absence of libertarian free will is realised. The compatibilist categories are not erased by the absence of libertarian free will, but over-reaction to this absence may in practice occur. Secondly, the absence of libertarian free will is in itself grimly significant, hence its realisation is potentially problematic irrespective of the danger to the compatibilistically-valid reactions and practices. Even if people continue to respect the compatibilist categories, they may come to see that the lack of libertarian free will is (say) corrosive of their self-respect. As we shall see shortly, illusion assists us with these two problems.

In more orderly fashion, we see that from the absence of libertarian free will and the Fundamental Dualism emerge two general types of problems, which we require illusion to help us cope with:

Dissonance Problem: illusion is required indirectly, as flowing from the Fundamental Dualism. If the absence of libertarian free will is realised, working with the control compatibilist and ultimate level truths is potentially catastrophic. Given that they are contrary, either conceptual and practical confusion or a tendency to abandon to some extent one of the sides may develop. Primarily, there is the grave danger that people will simplistically see the hard determinist perspective as eliminating the control compatibilist basis for distinctions based upon free will, or as overriding the ethical importance of following these distinctions (e.g. concerning ‘punishment’ of the innocent). People are likely to over-react to the absence of libertarian free will, because the tacit libertarian assumptions ‘carry on their back’ the compatibilistically-justified moral and personal beliefs and reactions. Belief can be fairly stable concerning libertarian free will, but if this current (false) stability-point is broken, it is not the partially valid compatibilist categories that will be upheld. Rather, the risk is that belief will collapse to its next “natural” stability-point, to the denial

of meaning to free will and moral responsibility: as it were, “If all is determined, everything is permitted”. Serious harm to the recognition of moral requirements and to moral motivation can be envisaged here. Both the inherent limitations of compatibilism and the danger that even that limited viability will not be respected, combine to make the situation ominous. Moreover, the very image of a world without libertarian free will is liable to pose a threat to our adequate functioning, affecting the strength of our moral commitment in the present, or our feeling that our actions matter to our value (the Present Danger of the Future Retrospective Excuse; the Danger of Worthlessness). The threat is not limited, however, to the compatibilist perspective, for the implications of the ultimate perspective are also liable to be discounted in light of the compatibilist side. The contrariety of the two perspectives is so fundamental that no simple reconciling project has hope. Whichever balance between the elements occurs, complex patterns of confusion and unwarranted dismissal of one or both perspectives are very likely to emerge.

Insufficiency Problem: in addition, there is the direct difficulty caused by the absence of libertarian free will in itself, in that our moral and personal conceptions lack an ultimate level grounding. Here the problem is not that one contrary (compatibilist or ultimate hard determinist) true perspective is confronted with the other, but that the ultimate level truth falls short of defending our central moral and personal needs and beliefs. The poverty of the best that the compatibilist has to offer in terms of worth and desert is disheartening, and this grim situation can be realised to some extent. Matters such as our capacity to adopt a deep ethical view of people, for feeling truly worthy of respect, and perhaps even our very sense of identity as distinct individuals, are actually threatened by an illusion-free confrontation with the implications of the absence of libertarian free will. To a large extent, we cannot have these crucial things without belief in libertarian free will, and we cannot continue believing in libertarian free will without illusion. The Insufficiency Problem follows directly from the absence of libertarian free will, hence exists irrespective of the Fundamental Dualism, and will be recognised by anyone not lacking in ethical and personal depth.

4.3 Illusion As A Solution

The sense of “illusion” I am using combines the falsity of the belief with some motivated role in forming and maintaining that belief, as in standard cases of wishful thinking or self-deception. However, it suffices that the beliefs are false and that this conclusion would be resisted were a challenge to arise, it is not necessary for us to determine the current level of illusion concerning free will.

In the light of the problems we have seen, we require the assistance of illusion. If libertarian assumptions carry on their back the valid compatibilist distinctions, which would not be adhered to sufficiently without them, an illusion that defends these libertarian assumptions seems to be just what we need. Illusion is, by and large, a condition for the actual creation and maintenance of adequate moral reality.

Illusion not only functions in motivated resistance to threats to our beliefs, but also offers a positive view underlying our attitudes and practices. The affirmation of the responsible self is furthered by the vague tacit belief that one was and is able to do otherwise in the libertarian sense, and can have no general escape from the burden of responsibility. It is not that we find out the truth and then say ‘let’s keep quiet about this’, but that illusion is intimately entangled with our free will-related beliefs, reactions and practices. However, some awareness of deterministic elements can be useful, mitigating resentment of others or self-recriminations. Illusion allows us the advantages of the libertarian picture together with the mitigating element, without full awareness either of the incoherence of the libertarian picture or of the contrariness of the compatibilist and ultimate perspectives.

An experiment

Anyone remaining doubtful whether illusion can work can conduct an experiment: try arguing with your acquaintances, ‘selling’ them a deterministic world. Simply attempt to show them the absence of libertarian free will and its implications from the ultimate perspective, in relation to their basis for self-respect and praiseworthiness for past accomplishments. The human proneness to illusion will, I trust, not be slow to emerge.

4.4 Alternatives to Illusion?

In theory, alternatives to the concern with free will also present themselves: for example, a purely aesthetic view of life that does not treat achievements as reflecting on a person's value, except for a merely quasi-aesthetic ranking. Such an abandonment of value and of self is at best a marginal possibility, at least within the framework of anything resembling Western forms of thought. Note that this extends beyond those with deep moral concerns. A true understanding of what is at stake concerning non-moral self-respect, for example, would lead one to the same conclusion. There is no

real substitute for the framework of achievement, desert and value based on free action. And within that framework, a deep view not diverted by illusion will find itself face-to-face with darkness.

The only significant alternative to the second radical proposal that I have presented, “Illusionism” on free will, is the ‘Reactive-naturalism’ presented by P. F. Strawson in his classic ‘Freedom and Resentment’ (1982). This sort of “Humean” naturalism considers scepticism as idle in view of the natural inclinations of humanity, given which there is no need for countering the sceptic or, indeed, for offering any justification at all of our basic beliefs and attitudes (P. F. Strawson 1987, 38-41). I have considered this issue in some detail elsewhere, and here will just say a few words (see Smilansky 2000: Ch.9; Smilansky 2001). I do not think that Strawson’s position is convincing, and that what we have seen above already shows this: there is no reason to take a “don’t worry” attitude to the implications of the absence of libertarian free will, nor to what can happen if people were to realise the inadequacy of the prevalent tacit view about free will underlying our beliefs, attitudes, and practices. Despite the role of the reactive attitudes, the free will problem can be important in practice.

5. Conclusion

The importance of free will for morality in the wide sense and for our view of ourselves is great: it is so great that illusion is required. Illusion keeps, and ought largely to continue keeping, our moral and personal worlds intact. There is partial non-illusory compatibilist grounding for many of our central free will-related beliefs, reactions, and practices, even in a world without libertarian free will. But in various complex ways, we require illusion in order to bring forth and maintain them. Illusion is seen to flow from the basic structure of the free will issue, the absence of libertarian free will and (our first proposal) the Fundamental Dualism concerning the implications. Revealing the large and mostly positive role of illusion concerning free will not only teaches us a great deal about the free will issue itself, but posits illusion as a pivotal factor in human life.

In a way, much of the story of the growth of human knowledge, and possibly of human progress, can be told in terms of the overcoming of comfortable illusions - from Copernicus to Darwin and to Freud, many of our pleasant illusions about ourselves and the world have been realised as such. Perhaps it is just our increasing powers that enable us to face our weaknesses; our relative social and political stability which allows us to consider dangerous truths; our increasing ability to live a tolerable life which enables us to confront life's non-poetic aspects.

A striking outcome of shattering the illusions in the free will case is the very realisation of our inability to live without substantial illusion. Important illusions have been successfully

confronted before, but perhaps here we have reached bedrock, where the scope of our illusions defies us: we confront here the illusoriness of the belief that we can live, in practice, totally without illusion.

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