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HOW FREE DOES THE WILL NEED TO BE?

by

BERNARD WILLIAMS



The Lindley Lecture
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The E. H. Lindley Memorial Lectureship Fund was established in 1941 in memory of Ernest H. Lindley, Chancellor of the University of Kansas from 1920 to 1939. In February 1941 Mr. Roy Roberts, the chairman of the committee in charge, suggested in the *Graduate Magazine* that

the Chancellor should invite to the University for a lecture or a series of lectures, some outstanding national or world figure to speak on "Values of Living"—just as the late Chancellor proposed to do in his courses "The Human Situation" and "Plan for Living."

In the following June Mr. Roberts circulated a letter on behalf of the Committee, proposing in somewhat broader terms that

The income from this fund should be spent in a quest of social betterment by bringing to the University each year outstanding world leaders for a lecture or series of lectures, yet with a design so broad in its outline that in the years to come, if it is deemed wise, this living memorial could take some more desirable form.

The fund was allowed to accumulate until 1954, when Professor Richard McKeon lectured on "Human Rights and International Relations." The next lecture was given in 1959 by Professor Everett C. Hughes, and has been published by the University of Kansas School of Law as part of his book *Students' Culture and Perspectives: Lectures on Medical and General Education*. The selection of lecturers for the Lindley series has since been delegated to the Department of Philosophy.

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How Free Does The Will Need To Be?

Bernard Williams

1 *The irrelevance of constraint*

Locke memorably said¹ that the question was not whether the will be free, but whether we have a will. *A fortiori*, it cannot be a question of how free the will may be. Locke's remark reminds us that the freedom of the will that has been the subject of the classical problem, if it comes at all, does not come in degrees. People's freedom, however, in more everyday senses, obviously enough does come in degrees.

This point raises a question not only about the classical problem of freewill, but also about the classical compatibilist answer to it, based on the idea that freedom is opposed to constraint and not to necessity. That position certainly deploys an idea of freedom, but of a freedom that may be more or less extensive, and that fact in itself should make us ask whether the position does not miss the point of the problem it is supposed to resolve. It is far from clear what exactly constraint² is, but in the kinds of cases usually invoked, somebody brings it about, by intentional application of threats or force, that an agent either cannot attain his original goal at all, or can attain it only at an increased cost. The agent may be confronted by a highwayman who (whatever the standard formula says) does not in fact offer him a choice between his money and his life, but rather a choice between losing merely his money, and losing his money together with his life; in that case, he cannot attain the goal of keeping his money at all. On the other hand, a man who possesses a valuable secret may be able to attain at least part of his objectives, and frustrate his captors, if their threat to kill him leaves him with the option of dying with his secret.

But what significance is there in the fact that the cases standardly invoked are cases of *constraint*—that is to say, cases in which the limitation of effective choice is deliberately imposed, for their own ends, by other agents? These are merely one sort of what Aristotle rightly and relevantly identified as “actions done through fear of greater evils”, such as that of the sailors who throw the cargo overboard to save themselves and the ship.³ In the cases that do not involve other people's hostile intentions, the agent's original objective may equally be made more costly, or it may become inaccessible, or his objectives may need to be modified in one way or another.

Now in all cases of things done through fear of greater evils, whether that fear is imposed by other agents or not, there is no loss of *freewill*, in

any sense that has to do with the agent's capacity to choose, or with his being held responsible. The agent is responsible for his action; he may not be responsible for the loss of the goods or whatever, just in the sense that a course of action that would have been unreasonable or blameworthy in ordinary circumstances is reasonable and not blameworthy in the constrained circumstances. This is very obvious when the agent's original objective is accessible, though at greater cost, but similar points apply to the cases in which a course of action usually or previously thought available becomes unavailable. People are indeed seen as responsible for their actions in such circumstances, as when Aristotle's sailors are complimented for their prudence, or alternatively told off for panicking. In such circumstances you can of course be excused for not doing something that you would otherwise be blamed for not doing; more than that, you can be complimented for not trying to do it.

If we look at the larger class of things done through fear of greater evils, we are not going to learn much relevant to freewill or to ideas of compatibilism. It might be said that these are things that people do "against their will". But things done against one's will, in such circumstances, are not even (except in a very everyday sense) things that one does when not wanting to do them—a possibility that might shed some light on compatibilism. They are things that one did not originally want to do, or which one would not want to do unless the circumstances were exceptionally disadvantageous, and their possibility does not shed any more light on the question of compatibilism than is shed by other actions that are performed under limiting circumstances.

If we are not to count as exercising freewill in cases of this kind, then we never exercise it, since all choices operate in a space of alternatives constrained by the contingent cost of various possibilities, and these exceptional cases are simply dramatic cases of that, where the space has been unexpectedly restricted. It makes no difference to this central aspect, so far as the agent's decisions and their status are concerned, whether the space of possibilities has been altered by a human being with the intention of doing just that. But the cases in which that is so are the ones that count as cases of constraint. So constraint is a red herring so far as freewill is concerned.

There are of course some important differences between actions done under constraint, and other actions done from fear of greater evils. If the restrictions are humanly imposed, they are likely to elicit resentment as well as frustration. Moreover, constraint is peculiarly related to the deliberative conclusion that one *must* or *has to* do a certain thing (a kind of conclusion I shall come back to in section 5 below).

Conclusions reached under constraint are not always of that form, but they often are. When such conclusions are reached in other situations, they characteristically express some project or objective with which the agent is deeply identified, for instance (though by no means exclusively) requirements of morality. What is peculiar about these conclusions when they are reached under constraint is that they witness to the agent's vital interests or deepest needs only negatively, as things to be protected: the actions required are the expression of someone else's intentions and can lie indefinitely far away from anything with which the agent is identified.

Such considerations can indeed help to explain why constraint is perceived as specially opposed to freedom, and more so than the nasty choices, or lack of choices, laid in our path by nature. But the very fact that decisions taken under constraint are decisions, and can take the form of practical necessity, a form that belongs to some of the most serious and responsible decisions we take, itself shows how constraint has nothing to do with the question of freewill.

2 What the reconciling project must be

The old compatibilism made a lot out of the opposition between freedom and constraint. If the argument of section 1 is right, it was looking in the wrong direction. But that is not the only reason why we have to recast the question of compatibilism, or, as we may say, the reconciling project. As it is usually described, the reconciling project involves an important, structural, misconception. Its task is explained in terms of taking two recognizable items—determinism (or something like that), on the one hand, and on the other hand, something that is often called “moral responsibility”—and trying to reconcile them with one another. But this account of the task underdescribes it, because there are not two, but three items or sets of items to be accounted for. They are, first, determinism (or something like that); second, a class of psychological items, such as choice, decision, or rational action; and, third, some ethical items such as blame or responsibility. Since there are three items or classes of items involved, there is more than one way of understanding what would be involved in reconciliation. It may be thought that what need to be reconciled are determinism and choice, where choice is understood as a psychological item, and that if this can be achieved, the ethical notions will be able to live with determinism. Alternatively, it may be thought that even if the psychological items can be reconciled with determinism, this may not be enough to save the ethical notions, which require something more—something that excludes determinism.

If this further demand is put in terms of *choice*, it might be expressed by saying that responsibility and similar ethical notions require real choice, and real choice is not a purely psychological notion, but a metaphysical one. I shall come back to this idea.

As well as undercounting the items involved, reconcilers have tended to make the further mistake of thinking that we understand the ethical items at least as well as we understand the psychological items. A similar mistake is often made by their opponents as well. Of course, the reconcilers and their opponents do not necessarily think that they have the *same* determinate understanding of the ethical notions— notions such as, in particular, “moral responsibility”. Because of these differences, the opponents sometimes say that the reconcilers have failed to show that our actual ethical notions are compatible with determinism, but, rather, have changed the subject and brought in a reductive and inadequate version of those notions. Both parties, however, do tend to agree on two things: that we have a determinate understanding of the relevant ethical notions, and that what we have to worry about, if anything, is just the relation of those notions to determinism (or something like that).

The truth is that we have other reasons to worry about many of our moral notions, and if we have come to have difficulty in understanding ideas such as “moral responsibility”, this is not simply because of our suppositions, hopes and fears about naturalistic explanations of action. It is to some extent because of this, and inasmuch as compatibilism was, like its opponents, wedded to “moral responsibility” as the ethical term that had to be reconciled to naturalistic explanation, it has failed. But, more significantly, we have reasons *anyway* for being doubtful about “moral responsibility”.

The reconciling project has surely had some success. The immense literature on these subjects seems to me to have established some things beyond reasonable doubt. One is that determinism is not what the problem is about. There may have been a time when belief in a universal determinism looked like the best reason there was for expecting strong naturalistic explanations of psychological states and happenings, but, if that was once the case, it is no longer so. It now looks a great deal more plausible and intelligible that there should be such explanations than that the universe should be a deterministic system, and it is the possibility of those explanations that itself creates the problem. “Strong naturalistic explanation” is an extremely vague phrase, and it may be said that a good deal more needs to be known about what it means, before we can know what the problem is supposed to be. It may be said, in particular, that only tight nomological explanations can generate the problem, because only they can introduce *must*. I doubt that this is

correct. As Dennett,⁴ has pointed out, the chance of being able to cash in the nomological claim at the only level to which it could apply, that of a repeatable micro-state, is vanishingly small. Equally, the mere failure to do so (because of randomness, for instance) would be uninteresting in itself, while strong psycho-physical explanations that did not meet that standard could equally create unease for the ethical items, if anything of that sort could.

It certainly remains unclear what the strongest kind of psycho-physical explanation might be like. But I do not think that so far as these questions are concerned, it matters a great deal what exactly it might be like. It must in any case be sensible to test the psychological and ethical notions against the strongest hypotheses we could possibly entertain about psycho-physical explanation. Further, there is a substantive reason for this policy. So far as these issues are concerned, the answers to questions about psycho-physical explanation will matter only if the outlook for the psychological and the ethical items is sensitive to those answers. But a second thing that, as I see it, has now been established beyond reasonable doubt is that the outlook for the psychological items is not sensitive to those answers. Work by O'Shaughnessy⁵ and others seems to me to have shown that those concepts can function compatibly with the strongest hypotheses about explanation. We have good reason to believe that, insofar as they are psychological notions, all the following are compatible with any conceivable possibility of naturalistic explanation: choice; reasoned choice, and decision; action; intentional action; reasoned intentional action; and what is entailed by that, trying.

These arguments seem to me to have achieved the reconciling project so far as the relevant psychological items are concerned, and if that is right, the remaining work should lie in bringing the ethical items into an intelligible relation with the psychological items. However, opponents of the reconciling project may complain that to go about things in this way is to beg the question. They may say that to treat choice as a merely psychological notion is to miss the point of the freewill problem, which lies in our needing, for our ethical conceptions, an idea of choice that has metaphysical implications. If that were true, then certainly one would not have made much progress by showing that a purely psychological notion of choice could be reconciled with strong psycho-physical explanation. So something needs to be said about metaphysical notions of choice.

3 Choice as objectively determining

The basic argument to the effect that we have and need a meta-physical notion of choice goes, I take it, like this. When we (really)

choose, we for the first time bring it about that a certain event will occur; we determine, by or through our choice, that the course of events will have one character rather than another. We can do this only if there are objective possibilities in a strong sense. What is involved in this can be conveniently represented in a temporal model with forward-looking branches. An event that is possible at t is to be found in at least one branch later than t . Any event that has already been determined at t to happen is to be found in every branch later than t —that is to say, is necessary at t . To choose (really) at t that E will happen is to determine that E will happen, and requires that up to the moment of choice it was possible that E should happen and also possible that it should not happen. It trivially follows that E, if it is really chosen at t , cannot, at t , have been already determined.

I shall try to show that this picture of things is hopeless, and that it cannot give its defenders what they want. Let E be the event that consists in A's doing a certain action, say G-ing. Then what exactly is it, on this account, that determines for the first time that E will happen? The point of the argument seems to be that A's choice should do this. But if *determining* means the closing of objective possibilities, then it will follow that if A chooses at t to G at some later time, then it is impossible from t on that A should not G; and that is absurd. No-one can need or want a notion of choice that leads to this result.

There are then two options, either to bring the thing determined up to the choice, thus identifying it as something other than the action; or else to move the determination down to the action. The latter course would mean that this was no longer a doctrine about choice at all; or at least, that it was a doctrine only about such choosing as coincides with acting, prior choices not counting as (real) choices. But this does less than minimum justice to prior choosing, leaving it beached, so to speak, and out of any intelligible relation to the real choosing that supposedly occurs only when one acts. Prior choice becomes a mere harbinger of later action, and this cannot be what is wanted by those who have this picture, particularly since it is the experience of prior choosing that helps to encourage the picture in the first place.

So we must take the first option. We will say that a prior choice does for the first time determine something, and that what it determines is that there exists a state of affairs which will, other things being equal, issue in the agent's G-ing at the appropriate later time. The state of affairs presumably consists in a state of the agent. But if the picture is going to yield an account of free action, only some such states will count. The ones that count—the ones that we call states of intention—will have

to be distinguished from such things as somnambulistic or drugged conditions into which, equally, A might put himself (if not quite so directly), and which, equally, might be expected to issue in his G-ing. (We all need to make such a distinction, and those who are drawn to this picture will be particularly keen to do so.) But in order to make that distinction, it looks as though we need to bring in two further conditions. One is that when A's state is the required one, intention, he could still change his mind. Another is that *issuing in* is not simply equivalent to *causing*.

These further conditions, however, make it unclear again what, on the picture, choosing is supposed to effect. The first condition means that even after A has chosen there is still an objective possibility that E will not happen, and, moreover, whether that possibility is realized is still up to A. So how can his choice have done anything to shut any possibilities off? As for the second condition, it may be that *issuing in* is understood as at any rate a special case of *causing*. If it is understood in this way, then it will have been admitted that one can consistently say both that A is in a state which will cause his G-ing, and that he has the power even then not to G. Once that much has been admitted, the picture itself surely begins to seem less compelling (the fact that, according to the picture, A put himself into that state, though it supplies a consideration, does not supply it at the right point to weaken the force of the admission.) If, on the other hand, *issuing in* does not even imply *causing*, we are still in the dark about the difference that A's getting into this state is supposed to make. It looks as though A still has to do everything that he has to do in order to G, and we are back with the option rejected earlier, by which prior choice is at best only a harbinger of action.

The picture of choice objectively determining outcomes is not unwelcome merely to someone who has a prejudice in favour of determinism or parsimony. Rather, in its own terms it makes no sense of the relations between prior choice, intention and action. It could not deliver what is wanted by those who are attached to it.

4 Blame

I come now to the relations between the second and third items that I picked out earlier, the psychological and the ethical. The item from the third area most favored in these discussions is, of course, "moral responsibility", and that is usually explained in terms of *blame*. This is conceived as the rough analogy in the moral realm to legal penalties and

denunciations. It is supposed to demand, more stringently than in the legal case, that the agent could have acted otherwise.

Faced with the problem of accommodating these notions to determinism, or at any rate to strong psycho-physical explanations, the standard reconciling strategy does two things. It tries to find, or at least postulates, a sense of *could have acted otherwise* that will be compatible with those explanations. But, in addition, it tries to find a function or point for blame, and that is characteristically found in some forward-looking reason for it, such as the modification of the agent's motives⁶. It is interesting that the need should be felt for some such justification. The underlying idea seems to be that if blame *were* related to a non-naturalistic *could have*, it would not need any other explanation or justification, but since it is not, it does. But why should that be so? If it is said that it needs justification because it is to some extent unpleasant, that would be just as true if there were a non-naturalistic *could have* as if there is not. I think that the search for an appropriate account of blame is motivated by a rather shifty thought that if the non-naturalistic story were true, blame would be really or straightforwardly justified, but since that story is false, it is not, and we shall have to find something else to justify it.

The standard reconciling account, in terms of blame's effects, is too generous to blame, and at the same time sells it short. It sells it short by trying to base the justification of blame just on its efficacy. No such account can be adequate, because it collides with one of the most obvious facts about blame, that in many cases it is effective only if the recipient thinks that it is justified. Blame that is perceived as unjust often fails to have the desired results, and merely generates resentment. This shows that the idea of blame's justification is not the same as the idea of its efficacy. When a recipient thinks that blame is unjustified, the content of that thought cannot be that the blame will be ineffective. This does not show that the purpose of blame may not in fact lie in the modification of behavior; it means only that if this is true, it cannot be obvious to those who are effectively blamed. Like many such Utilitarian proposals, it is not so much self-destructive as inconsistent with ideals of social transparency, and most naturally fits a situation in which those who understand the justification, and those whose behavior is being modified, are not the same people⁷. These complexities do mean, however, that if you are trying to say what blame is, you cannot simply cite its aims of modifying behavior. If blame is an instrument of social control, it is a peculiar one, and its peculiarities must be allowed for in the account of what it is.

The need to find something useful for blame to do illustrates the way in which the standard reconciling strategy has been, also, too generous to blame. Just like most of the libertarians who reject the reconciling project, it takes blame to be enormously important, the real thing. Indeed, there is a special form of ethical life, important in our culture, to which blame is central: we may call this special form of the ethical "morality"⁸. Much discussion of freewill, on all sides, has shared the assumptions of morality, particularly about the central significance of blame. To correct those assumptions, there are several points to be borne in mind about blame itself.

Judgements that express blame are only one kind of ethical judgement among others. Inasmuch as blame is an ethical force, it is only one kind of ethical force, and it could not have its effects if it did not rely on other kinds. We have to learn what it is to be blamed, and (in line with a pattern familiar in ethical learning) we learn this by being blamed: by being, relative to the standards of later on, *unjustly* blamed. As soon as we look at blame not as a uniquely appropriate expression of truly moral judgement, and not, on the other hand, simply as an instrument of social control, but see it as part of a concrete ethical life, we shall be helped to understand the other psychological forces (such as love, perhaps) that are needed to make blame possible as a manifestation of the ethical dispositions.

Blame rests, in part, on a fiction, the idea that ethical reasons, in particular the special kind of ethical reasons that are obligations, must, really, be available to the blamed agent. (This is not the same as the fiction of a non-naturalistic *could have* but it is connected to it.) *He ought to have*, as moral blame uses that phrase, implies *there was a reason for him to do it*, and this certainly intends more than the thought that we had a reason to want him to do it. It hopes to say, rather, that he had a reason to do it. But this may well be untrue: it was not in fact a reason for him, or at least not enough of a reason. Under this fiction, a continuous attempt is made to recruit people into a deliberative community that shares ethical reasons, and the truth misperceived by the reconcilers' causal story is this, that by means of this fiction people may indeed be recruited into that community or kept within it. But the device can do this only because it is understood not as a device, but as connected with justification and with reasons that the agent might have had; and it can be understood in this way only because, much of the time, it is indeed connected with those things. Blame, like some other ethical institutions, operates in a space between coercion and full deliberative co-operation.

Blame is expressed in the most *tightly focussed* of ethical judgements. It tries to relate itself, typically, to this very act, in these very circumstances (though the acts themselves may, of course, belong to various orders, such as adopting a policy). It is a good question, why our culture should have evolved an institution that has just this character. It is also a very large question, and I shall not try to discuss it here. But the fact that blame tries to work in this way is doubtless connected with the fiction of the agent's having reason to act in the required way, and with the fact that the stance of the scrupulous blamer is that of a transferred or identifying deliberator, a fellow member of the community of reason. These features lead blame, too, towards an ideal of the absolutely voluntary act; but, as I have already said, that consequence is not the first source of its difficulties.

5 Freedom and practical necessity

The deepest exploration in philosophy of the requirements of morality is Kant's (which of course does not mean that those who disagree with Kant, such as Utilitarians, may not be deeply entangled with morality). Kant believed not only that there was an unconditional possibility for action, or at least for trying to act, but also that there was an unconditional necessity, to be found in a certain kind of deliberative conclusion. This is a conclusion naturally expressed in the form "I must"; it may be called a conclusion of practical necessity⁹.

Kant understood practical necessity in terms of a reason for action that was not conditional on any desire at all, and he thought that there could be such a thing because he thought that the reasons of morality were based on reason alone. That is why he identified practical necessity as uniquely moral necessity, and why, for him, unconditioned possibility and unconditioned necessity ultimately coincide, so that he could be led to say that the only truly free acts were those done for the sake of duty.

I do not think that many of us believe this. There are certainly such things as conclusions of practical necessity, but it is not that they are determined by no desires or projects of the agent at all. Rather, they are determined by projects that are essential to the agent; roughly, if I abandon such a project, then I have no reason to go on (which is not to say that I will not go on). In well socialised agents, many of these projects will be compatible with, indeed expressive of, ethical considerations, and we can understand why that should be so. But not all or everyone's are, and it may not be at all clear which are, and which are not, and how. One form of moral luck lies in never having to find out.

Dennett¹⁰ has invoked necessity, as one among other kinds of example, to show that we care less than theorists suppose whether the agent could have acted otherwise. Such conclusions are surely paradigm examples of accepting responsibility, and yet, as with any other kind of necessity, "I must" implies "I cannot not", and "I had to" implies "I could do nothing else". So it looks as though responsibility does not entail "I could have acted otherwise", and the search for some reconciling explication of that formula loses some of its urgency.

It would be a mistake to reject this argument on the supposition that practical necessity is a purely "normative" modality that has nothing to do with how things will be. It is plausible (though, as we shall see, it is not quite correct) to say that if a person rightly concludes that he must do a certain thing (has no alternative, cannot not etc.), then it is impossible, not that he should fail to do it, but that he should intentionally fail to do it. His conclusion does, then, have implications about the way the world will be, but the modality that occurs in them is still essentially deliberative, in the sense that the statement expresses the agent's intentions, and does not merely report an antecedent fact about the agent. If it did report an antecedent fact, then the agent's acceptance of it, if it did not express an unintelligible form of fatalism, would have to represent his recognition of a limitation on his powers; but in that case he could not do the thing in question even unintentionally¹¹.

What this modality represents is a recognition that one cannot intentionally do this thing when one has taken everything available to one into account, *including this very deliberation*. This helps to explain why the impossibility applies only to the intentional action. *A fortiori* it explains something else, that my conclusion of practical necessity does not imply that there is no possible world in which I figure as doing this thing intentionally. For, granted that there are other possible worlds in which I figure, I figure in some of them without my actual projects, and without my actual projects this practical necessity will not arise. This shows something further again, that practical necessity does not after all imply without qualification that the actual world will not contain my intentionally failing to do this very thing, where "this very thing" refers to the most specific description available to me of what I have decided I must do. If the demon scientist or a bolt from the blue changes radically my character and projects between now and the time of action, it may be that I shall intentionally fail to do this very thing, but it will (*pace* certain theories of personal identity) still be me¹².

We can see, I think, how these various points hang together, if we take seriously the point that statements of practical necessity express intentions. Those statements bear much the same relations to a class of possible worlds, as ordinary statements of intention do to predictions about the actual world. When I say "I will..." or "I am going to...", I make no assumption which is presupposed in arriving at any deliberative conclusion, that I can reasonably count on certain future happenings being brought about by this very conclusion, and by the projects and desires that have issues in this conclusion. When I say "I must" I imply that no possible world contains my not acting in this way, if it contains me with these projects, and permits the general conditions for my projects to be expressed in action.

So is the *could not* of practical necessity the negation of the *could* in "he could have acted otherwise", as Dennett's use of it in his argument implies? I doubt it. I think that the latter, the *could* that belongs with the institution of blame, must be meant to represent a possibility available to the agent in deliberating, that is to say, one that he could in principle recognize antecedently. But this is a difficult question, one that is made more difficult, perhaps insoluble, by the fact that because the institution of blame involves the fictional features I have mentioned, it is indeterminate what it does demand in the way of *could* (which may help to explain why so much difficulty has been found in analysing it).

But the phenomenon of practical necessity does certainly show this at any rate, that my acknowledgement of responsibility can co-exist with, indeed be grounded in, a consciousness that I am not in the position of choosing between courses that I shall continue to see as equally open to me. Once one recognises this, and more generally raises one's eyes from the particular preoccupations of the ethical systems called "morality", one will see that the acknowledgement of responsibility has less to do with the concerns of blame, with regard to *could have* or anything else, than is made out. The phenomena of agent regret and of our capacity and need to acknowledge responsibility for what we have unintentionally done, are other examples of the same thing.

6 *What have we got?*

Can the reconciling project succeed? Between determinism (or as much naturalistic explanation as you like), and relevant psychological concepts, yes. Between both of these, and the ethical conceptual scheme, no, not as it stands: or rather, the question is often indeterminate because it is indeterminate to what extent that scheme is committed to all the aspirations and misunderstandings of morality.

We need to recast our ethical conceptions. But that is not in order to escape or adjust ourselves to determinism or naturalistic explanation. We need to do so in order to be truthful even to what we know already about our psychology and much of our ethical life. It is a basic misrepresentation of the problem to pretend that it is only in the light of what we might discover about ourselves or our actions that we might need to reconsider our ethical ideas. But if we bring our ethical ideas nearer to reality, then assuredly we shall find that they are consistent with naturalistic explanations of our choices and actions.

The will is as free as it needs to be. That does not mean, as libertarians would take it, that it is able to meet all the demands of the morality system as they present themselves to the uncritical consciousness or, perhaps, conscience. Nor does it mean that it is free enough to keep the morality system in adequate business, as reconcilers usually take it to mean. It means that if we are considering merely our freedom as agents, and not the more important question of our political or social freedom, we have quite enough of it to lead a significant ethical life in truthful understanding of what that life involves. A truthful ethical life is, and always has been, one that can include our best understanding of our psychological life, and we know that such an understanding is compatible with naturalistic explanation.

NOTES

1. *Essay on Human Understanding*, II.21.14.
2. See Robert Nozick's subtle discussion, "Coercion", in *Philosophy, Science and Method: Essays in Honor of Ernest Nagel*, edd. S. Morgenbesser, P. Suppes and M. White (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969).
3. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110a4 seq.
4. *Elbow Room* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: M.I.T. Press, 1984), p. 136.
5. Brian O'Shaughnessy, *The Will: a Dual Aspect Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
6. It is notable that Hume, in some ways an archetypal reconciler, refused to ascribe any such restricted role to blame. This is closely connected with his striking resistance to some central tenets of what I call "morality": in particular, his refusal to take seriously what he called the merely "grammatical" distinction between virtues and talents. See *Treatise* III.iii.4, and the admirable discussion in Appendix IV to the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*.
7. I have discussed this ideal and its relation to some versions of Utilitarianism in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (henceforward *ELP*) (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1985), pp. 101, 108-110.
8. See *ELP*, chapter 10.
9. *ELP*, p. 187 seq; and see "Practical Necessity" in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
10. *Elbow Room*, p 133 seq. Dennett is not only, or principally, concerned with deliberative conclusions of practical necessity; he mentions them in discussing, very relevantly, impossibilities grounded in character. My questions concern the relations between the two.

11. I take it that if it is possible that I should G unintentionally, then it is not beyond my powers to G.—A fuller treatment would have to deal with complications such as the point there are some things that cannot be done unintentionally, merely because of the kinds of things they are (murder); it is important that in such cases there is standardly some very similar thing one can do unintentionally (killing). Where it is true that I cannot do a certain thing intentionally, but could do it unintentionally, there can be more than one kind of reason why this should be so. Thus I may be able to perform some feat only when I do not know that I am about to do it, because I would otherwise be too scared. Such cases are not the same as those directly related to character, but they are certainly not irrelevant to ethics.

12. A more realistic question, and a harder one, is what we should say if between the conclusion and the time of action I am subjected to constraint to make me not act in the way I have decided I must act. As the argument of section 1 implies, if I act in some contrary way under constraint, I may act intentionally, and show that I can so act. So I must have been wrong in saying that I could not do that (as cynics are happy to point out). But it is raising the standards for practical necessity too high, to insist that it be resistant to every form of constraint under which I can still act intentionally?

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