

## Chapter 21

### Hard Determinism and Libertarianism

#### *1. Free will and the hypothesis of mechanism*

In the previous chapter we looked at two arguments meant to show that no choice or action anyone ever makes is a choice or action made freely. Both arguments depend crucially on the idea that the behaviour of people, even their thoughtfully willed behaviour, is no less the mechanical result of prior events than is the behaviour of anything else in the world. Both arguments, that is, explicitly suppose that anyone's choice or action is just as much the mechanical effect of things that happened earlier as is the behaviour of turtles or robots or weather systems. We can refer to this idea, the idea that the world is a mechanical system in which each state of the system is entirely a causal product of earlier states of the system, as the hypothesis of mechanism. It's an *hypothesis*, at least it is for us, for we have yet to consider any argument that it is true. The hypothesis of mechanism is that any event at all, even the event of making a deliberate choice or performing an intentional action, is entirely the causal product of prior events.

A philosopher who holds that no choice or action anyone ever makes is a choice or action made freely, and who accepts one or the other of the two arguments we examined to that conclusion, is called a hard determinist. The hard determinist thinks that everything in the world, including people in their activities of choosing and acting, simply responds to things that happen to it in the way that it does out of its nature. If a rubber mallet strikes a pillow, the pillow will be compressed around the point of impact; if a rubber mallet strikes an anvil, the anvil will not be compressed. Regularities of these sorts mark animal and human behaviour as well. And, for the hard determinist, it is *because* human behaviour is mechanical behaviour that human behaviour is not free behaviour.

Let us sum up what we have called the position of hard determinism. We can represent hard determinism as an argument. It goes like this: 1) If the hypothesis of mechanism is true, then there is no freedom. 2) The hypothesis of mechanism is true. 3) Therefore, there is no freedom. The world, and every non-atomic system in it, works like a machine, says the hard determinist—and because the world works like a machine, no choice any one ever makes is a choice made freely. If the hard determinist is right, we are not morally responsible for anything we do, no more than is the wind morally responsible for bending the tree or is a puppy morally responsible for chewing the morning newspaper.

#### *2. Indeterminism and free choice*

Let us suppose, against hard determinism, that the hypothesis of mechanism is false, at least to the extent that it doesn't cover absolutely all occasions of choice or intentional action. Let us suppose, that is to say, that, at least on occasion, the relation between the reasons for acting that a person has at the moment of choice and the choice that that person makes is indeterminate. Suppose that those reasons do not determine that the person will choose some specific one of the options rather than the others. Would that then mean that at least sometimes we choose or act freely?

If mechanism isn't true of all occasions of choice, then some occasions of choice are such that the option for action that the agent chooses was not determined, by any feature of the agent at the moment of choice, to be the option the agent would choose. So would such a choice be a choice made freely? The problem with answering yes to this question is that a choice of an option not determined to be the choice of that option by anything at the moment of choice would be the choice of an option not made on the basis of the agent's desires or other reasons. If the hypothesis of mechanism is false in the case of reasons for choosing and choices, then though Frank chose to buy a red car rather than a blue car, we can yet well imagine that instead he chose the blue rather than the red, though we don't imagine that there was anything different about his reasons. But, one might think, for a choice to be a choice made freely, that choice must be an expression of the values or personality of the person who made it. Otherwise, it isn't a choice made by that person, but something that simply happened to him. It looks here as though neither the choice of the red over the blue nor that of the blue over the red is the expression of Frank's values, then, for neither is determined to be the choice he makes by his preferences or reasons at the moment of choice.

For the choice of one option over another option to be a choice made freely, that choice must be an expression of the values or personality of the agent making the choice. This idea seems correct, but, as we will see in the next section, some philosophers deny it. Let us right now, though, take a moment to try to understand that idea better. Suppose Sally, at the moment before ordering her cappuccino, had weighed her options and, on the basis of her wants and tastes, found that she would rather have a café au lait than a cappuccino. That means that Sally's best reason supports the choice to have café au lait rather than cappuccino. Suppose then that she chooses to have a cappuccino and so orders a cappuccino. Her choice of cappuccino cannot be an expression of her personality, given our earlier supposition that she'd rather have a café au lait. Her choice of cappuccino is not an expression of her personality for it is not based on what she most wants.

In fact, it is difficult to think of Sally's going for cappuccino in these circumstances as anything like a choice at all. After all, she wanted to have café au lait rather than cappuccino.

If her going for cappuccino is not based on what she most wants, then it is not really a choice at all. It is, rather, simply something that happened to her. Sally, in the situation we have described, simply found herself ordering cappuccino. If her going for cappuccino wasn't actually a choice at all, it could hardly be a free choice.

Furthermore, if Sally's choice between the two styles of coffee was not a causal product of the prior state of her personality, of her likes and dislikes and preferences at the time of her choice, then her choice would be inexplicable, both to us as observers and, more importantly, to her herself as an agent in the world. To the question, "why did she choose cappuccino?" there would be no answer. There would be no answer to this question, because her choice was undetermined by her prior state, and thus was based on nothing. That Sally's choice, if it is not based on her personality, is inexplicable might be difficult for us to comprehend. After all, we might ordinarily suppose that for any choice an agent makes, there is some reason the agent has for going the way she does. But even more puzzling is how her choice must look to Sally herself. Sally cannot see herself in her choice, for her choice is not based on her wants or preferences. Her choice must appear to her to be without point or

meaning, as something totally surd. Sally must appear in her own eyes to be a stranger to herself whenever she acts freely.

Let us recall where we are in our discussion of free will. In the previous chapter we examined two arguments that no choice is ever a choice freely made, two arguments each of which depends crucially on the claim that the hypothesis of mechanism is true of people's choices and actions. Well, it might occur to us, perhaps that means that if the hypothesis of mechanism is *false*, then we do after all have freedom of choice. It is that thought we are now investigating. The question with which we began this section was the following: Would the falsity of the hypothesis of mechanism with regard to choices imply that some (at least) of our choices are choices we do or can make freely? So far we have uncovered strong reasons for concluding, despite our initial thought, that the falsity of the hypothesis of mechanism would *not* imply that some of our choices are choices made freely. Indeed, we have gathered reasons for thinking that if our choices are not determined to be the choices they are by our personalities at the moment of choice, then they could not be freely made choices or really even choices at all. We are in danger of having to conclude that there is no free will, whether the world is a mechanical system or not.

In a world in which one's personality does not determine one's choices, one's choices cannot be choices made freely. That seems to be the upshot of our considerations in this section. It will be helpful here for us to list these reasons for thinking that the falsity of the hypothesis of mechanism would imply, perhaps surprisingly, that we do not choose freely. We can dramatize what appears to follow from the idea that the hypothesis of mechanism is false by imagining that within our minds is a randomizing device. This randomizing device is interposed between our reasons for choosing one option rather than another and our actual choice of an option. This randomizing device severs the causal link between our reasons and our choice, such that our choice is not determined by our reasons. Sally, for instance, notes that she wants to have café au lait rather than cappuccino, but then the randomizing device kicks in, making it a matter of chance whether she then chooses to have café au lait. Under such conditions, these results would obtain: 1) One's choice is not an expression of one's values or personality at the moment of choice. To be an expression of one's values or personality, one's choice must not only be in line with one's values or personality, but be *caused* to be the choice that it is by one's values or personality. If a requirement of being a choice freely made is that one's choice be an expression of one's values or personality, then one's choice is not a choice freely made. 2) One's choice is not really even a choice at all. It is not something that one oneself has made, but is rather something that has happened to one.

One simply finds oneself going for the one option. Since it is certainly a requirement of a free choice that it be a choice, the assumption that we are here discussing a choice must be rejected. A person with a randomizing device in his mind would not be a person capable of making a choice. 3) The choice, or whatever it is, would be inexplicable to observers. Even one's most intimate friends would have no way of knowing which option one will go for. They could know one as well as possible, know one's wants and preferences at the moment of choice completely, and still be unable to say how one will choose, and be unable to explain why one chose as one did. 4) The choice, or whatever it is, would be meaningless and surd to one oneself. One would not see oneself in one's choice. If a requirement of being a free choice is that the choice make sense to the person who makes it, that the person who makes it

understands why he makes it, then in a world in which preferences or reasons do not determine choices, no choices are made freely.

We will come back to these points when we examine the view known as libertarianism, the view that we do indeed have free will, and we have free will only because not all of our choices are determined to be the choices they are by our personalities. For libertarianism to be plausible, it needs to address each of the four points listed above.

### *3. Incompatibilism*

Hard determinism, remember, is a position according to which no choices are ever made freely and no actions are ever performed freely. The hard determinist says, first, that if the choices and actions of conscious beings like people are just as much the mechanical products of prior events as are the behaviours of turtles, robots, or weather systems, then no choices made or actions performed by conscious beings are choices made or actions performed freely. The hard determinist says, second, that in fact the choices and actions of conscious beings *are* just as much the mechanical products of prior events as are the behaviours of turtles, robots, or weather systems. It is because the hard determinist says these two things that she concludes that free will does not exist.

Libertarianism is a position according to which some choices are made freely and some actions are performed freely. Obviously, the libertarian rejects the conclusion drawn by the hard determinist. The libertarian says the exact opposite of that conclusion. Crucially, though, and this is essential to libertarianism, the libertarian agrees with the first thing that the hard determinist says. No less than the hard determinist, the libertarian insists that *if* the choices and actions of conscious beings like people are just as much the mechanical products of prior events as are the behaviours of turtles, robots, or weather systems, *then* no choices made or actions performed by conscious beings are choices made or actions performed freely. Of course, what the libertarian insists on here is conditional, an if-then sentence, so it does not by itself say either that the choices and actions of conscious beings like people are just as much the mechanical products of prior events as are the behaviours of turtles, robots, or weather systems, or that no choices made or actions performed by conscious beings are choices made or actions performed freely. It just says that *if* the first of these two theses is true, *then* so too must the second of the two theses be true.

The libertarian agrees with the hard determinist that if the hypothesis of mechanism is true, then there is no free will. But the libertarian says that there *is* free will, thereby contradicting the conclusion the hard determinist draws. The hard determinist's argument, we said, is deductively valid. That is to say, if one accepts the premises of that argument, one cannot on pain of irrationality deny the conclusion. How, then, can the libertarian agree with the hard determinist's first premise but then reject the hard determinist's conclusion? Is the libertarian simply refusing to reason logically?

No, the libertarian is not reasoning badly. The difference between the libertarian and the hard determinist concerns the second premise in the hard determinist's argument. The hard determinist affirms the first part of the conditional that he accepts along with the libertarian. The hard determinist, that is, affirms in his second premise that the choices and actions of conscious beings are just as much the mechanical products of prior events as is the behaviour of turtles, robots, or weather systems. It is because he holds not only the

conditional claim that *if* the hypothesis of mechanism is true of choices and actions *then* there is no free will, but also the direct claim that the hypothesis of mechanism *is* true of choices and actions, that he can conclude validly that there is no free will. The libertarian, for her part, does not assert that the hypothesis of mechanism is true of choices and actions. That she does not assert that it is true of choices and actions enables her to say against the hard determinist that free will does exist, even as she agrees that were it true of them there would be no free will. The libertarian says that if the world were entirely mechanical, then there would be no free will; but, since free will does exist, it must be the case that the world is not entirely mechanical.

Hard determinism and libertarianism share the view that if the world is mechanical then there is no free will. Because they share this view they are both forms of what is called incompatibilism. They both propose that the existence of free will is incompatible with the truth of the hypothesis of mechanism. They both say that there cannot be both mechanism and free will, that the two cannot exist together. One of them, hard determinism, goes on to assert that the hypothesis of mechanism is true. The other of them, libertarianism, does not assert that the hypothesis of mechanism is true. Instead, it asserts that free will exists. (*Compatibilism*, then, would be the thesis that free will could exist in a mechanical world. Compatibilists say that there *can* be both mechanism and free will, that the two *can* exist together. We will examine arguments for and against compatibilism in Chapter Three.)

#### *4. Libertarianism explained*

The libertarian says that if the behaviour of people, even their conscious and thoughtful behaviour, is no less the mechanical result of prior events than is the behaviour of turtles, robots, or weather systems, then no choice a person makes and no action a person performs is a choice made or an action performed freely. The libertarian also says that at least some of the choices made or actions performed by people are choices made or actions performed freely. The libertarian must conclude, then, that at least some of the behaviour of people is not the mechanical result of prior events. People's behaviour is (sometimes, at least) unlike the behaviour of turtles, robots or weather systems.

We will want to investigate three issues connected with libertarianism. First, we will want to know just what, for a libertarian, freedom of choice or action is. We will want to know, in other words, in virtue of what is a choice made freely a *free* choice, and likewise for an action performed freely. (To investigate what makes a free choice free is also, of course, to investigate what makes an unfree choice unfree.) Our question here is: Just what is the libertarian conception of freedom? Second, we will want to know what reasons there are for thinking that free will, as the libertarian conceives it, exists. Our question here is: What evidence is there that we ever choose freely in the way libertarians say we do? Third, we will want to know how the libertarian responds to the argument we developed two sections ago that indeterminism would make our choices capricious and, thereby, unfree. We will take up this issue in the next section. Our question then will be: Can the libertarian respond adequately to the charge that choices not determined to be the choices they are by prior events are just random happenings?

*First question:* Just what is the libertarian conception of free will?

Libertarians tend to concentrate on freedom of the will with regard to choice rather than freedom of the will with regard to action. A freely performed action is simply an action that follows on a freely made choice (an action not freely performed is simply an action that doesn't follow on a freely made choice). Freedom of the will, then, for libertarians, is exercised in the context of choice among options.

Libertarians hold that central to the concept of freedom of choice is the idea that at the moment of choice one can choose otherwise than one does. If at the moment of choice one cannot but choose as one does, then one's choice is not a free choice. Sally chose to leave the clutter on her table as it is; let us suppose that she chose to do this freely. According to the libertarian, since she made her choice freely, at the moment at which she made that choice she could have chosen otherwise—that is, at the moment she made that choice she could have chosen instead to clear away the clutter. What the libertarian means is that at the moment of choice, it was entirely open which option Sally would choose. Nothing at the moment of choice—nothing in the coffee shop and nothing in Sally's personality—determined that she would choose to leave the clutter as it was rather than to clear away the clutter.

It is no part of the libertarian conception of freedom that every choice a person makes or every action he performs is a choice made freely or an action performed freely. A libertarian can easily say that many or even that most of the choices we make we do not make freely. Situations in which we exercise our free will have special features not found in most situations of choice or action. What makes a situation of choice one in which we exercise free will—and, indeed, one in which we cannot but exercise free will—is that the situation is one of conflicting values.

Let us investigate this idea by first examining a situation of choice in which, according to libertarianism, there is no opportunity to exercise free will. Suppose you find yourself having to choose between receiving seven dollars and receiving eight dollars. A salient feature of this choice is that each of the two options can be evaluated along the same axis, specifically, monetary value. Eight dollars is more money than seven dollars. Thus, you can compare each option against one single desire you have, the desire to have more money. You choose to receive eight dollars. This choice, a libertarian can say, was not a free choice.

It was not a free choice because you, given who you are, could not have chosen differently than you did. At the moment of choice, you appealed to one single desire you had, the desire for more money, and, since eight dollars is more money than seven dollars, that desire determined that you choose to receive eight dollars rather than to receive seven dollars. Likewise, if you are thirsty and you are given a choice between milk and water, you will choose to have water rather than milk (given that you believe that water quenches thirst better than milk). Again, there is one condition in you at play, your desire to quench your thirst, and that condition determines that you choose the option you think will best serve your one desire.

A choice is made unfreely, according to the libertarian, when that choice is made on the basis of a single desire or value. Your choice between options is made unfreely, says the libertarian, when, at the moment of choice, you evaluate the two options against the same standard, and, against that standard, one emerges as more attractive to you than the other. That one is more attractive to you than the other determines that you choose that one. In such cases you cannot choose otherwise than you do. Since you cannot choose otherwise than you do, you do not choose freely.

In not all situations of choice, though, do you find yourself evaluating options against a single desire or value. Sometimes, each option you envision is attractive to you in some way, but none is attractive to you in the same way as any other. The values or desires against which you evaluate the options you believe open to you are in conflict. To choose any one option is to satisfy some desire you have, but it is also to let go begging other desires you have. It is in these sorts of situation, says the libertarian, that we can and must exercise free choice.

Perhaps the clearest cases of conflicts in values at the moment of choice are to be found in ethically charged situations. You believe of one course of action open to you that taking it would be the ethically right thing to do, while you believe of another course of action that pursuing it would likely gain you something you want, like money or love. The first option is attractive to you in that it is the ethically sound option to choose; but it is unattractive to you in that by taking it you will alienate a person for whom you care deeply. The second option is attractive to you in that by taking it you will impress someone for whom you care deeply; but it is unattractive to you in that by taking it you will do something wrong. If there is no higher value you hold against which you can evaluate both options so as to decide between them, then, it appears, your choice is not determined by your personality at the moment of choice. There is, by hypothesis, nothing in your personality that could determine how you will choose.

You cannot ask yourself which option you like more, for there is no way to bring them together on the same scale. You like each of them in its own way, and those ways cannot be ranked. It is here, say the libertarians, that you exercise free will. (It is here that you *must* exercise free will; if you must choose between them, then you are not free not to exercise free will.)

Each of us has within him or herself the strength required to refuse temptation and to do instead what he or she believes to be right. The choice we have, the free choice, is whether to exercise that strength or not. We can choose to exercise the strength required to do what is right in the face of other desires we have, or we can choose not to exercise that strength and instead give in to our other desire. That is the choice we have, and it is a free choice, for there is nothing in our personality that can determine which option we will choose.

Recall from Chapter One Sally's situation of choice in the coffee shop. Both options for action that Sally envisioned appealed to her. She wanted to clear the clutter from her table because she thought it would be selfish to deny others the use of the table and she didn't want to be selfish. She wanted to leave the clutter as it was because she wanted to remain by herself and thought that leaving the clutter as it was would deter other patrons from sitting with her. If Sally's choice to leave the clutter as it is was a free choice, then, according to the libertarian, Sally had no further desire or value against which to evaluate the two options and so there was nothing in Sally's personality at the moment of choice to determine that she will choose to leave the clutter as it is. Both of the options Sally envisioned were entirely open to her. Sally could have done otherwise than she did do. In freely choosing to leave the table cluttered, Sally simply chose not to exercise the strength of will or character required to overcome her desire to be alone and to serve instead her desire to be kind and generous to others.

*Second question:* What evidence is there that we ever choose freely in the way libertarians say we do?

Libertarians say we choose freely whenever we choose between options attractive to us in different ways, such that we cannot evaluate them against a common standard. In such situations, each option is genuinely open to us in that there is nothing in our personality that determines which option we will take. At the moment of choice, each option is open to us and we can choose any one of them. Our choice of one option over the others was such that at the moment of choice we could have instead chosen one of the options we didn't choose. But what evidence is there that really any choices are such that each option we envision is genuinely open to us? What evidence is there that at the moment of choice we in fact are not determined by our personalities to choose as we do?

The hard determinist, we have seen, says that we choose the option that, at the moment of choice, most appeals to us among the options we envision. We envision two or more options for action, one of them appeals to us more than the others do, we choose that option. That the option we choose is the one that at the moment of choice most appeals to us means that our personalities are determining which option we choose. If we are hard determinists, we explain why Sally chose to leave the table cluttered rather than to clear the clutter by saying that, at the moment of choice, Sally wanted to be alone more than she wanted to be unselfish. At that moment, her desire to be alone was stronger than her desire to be unselfish. Because her desire to be alone was stronger than her desire to be unselfish, the option to clear the clutter wasn't in fact genuinely open to her. This is how the hard determinist sees things. Why should we not agree with the hard determinist against the libertarian, and say that no options in a situation of choice are ever genuinely open?

The libertarian holds that the only evidence that sometimes, at the moment of choice, two or more options are genuinely open to us, such that at that moment we can choose otherwise than we do, comes from our own experiences of making choices. If we pay careful attention to our own individual experience of making choices, we will note that on occasion it *feels* to us as though the options we envision are genuinely open to us. We will note that it *feels* to us as though we can choose any of them, that it *feels* to us even as we choose one of them that we can choose otherwise than we do. Now the situation of choice must be the right sort of situation of choice for us to have this feeling. It must, that is, be a situation in which the options we envision seem to us to resist being evaluated against any one particular desire we have. But in this sort of situation of choice, says the libertarian, if we are careful to examine our experience of choosing fully and impartially, we will realize that we feel the options to be genuinely open to us, even at the moment we choose one of them and leave the others behind. We do not experience our choice as determined by anything in us, including our desires. By paying attention to ourselves when choosing, we will realize, in other words, that our felt experience is that of choosing freely.

The hard determinist, on the other hand, supposes that first we become aware that we prefer the one option to the other and then we choose that option on the basis of that preference. This account might seem plausible enough in the abstract, admits the libertarian, when we are coolly reflecting on the nature of choice. But it does not capture at all how things feel to us when we are actually choosing, in the face of different standards, among courses of action we believe open to us. In actual instances of such choices, it feels as though we have no preference, for each option has its attractions and its drawbacks. Instead, it feels as though we are freely deciding to go with one genuinely open option rather than any other

genuinely open option. It is only after we have chosen one option rather than any other that we come to think that we preferred that option. Our preference, then, according to the libertarian, is not the cause of our choice, but instead is created by our choice. Or, at any rate, the libertarian insists, that is what our experience of what it feels like to make a choice tells us.

(Though perhaps, after having chosen, we project that preference back in time, and come to think, as hard determinists do, that we chose as we did *because* of our preference. To think this, though, says the libertarian, is to misconstrue our experience.)

The libertarian says that the evidence that in some situations of choice the options we envision are genuinely open to us comes from our experience in those situations; more specifically, that evidence comes from our awareness that we feel ourselves to be confronted by genuinely open options. The libertarian tells us that in his own case he sometimes feels himself to be confronted by genuinely open options when making a choice, and he invites others to consider in their own cases whether they ever also feel themselves to be confronted by genuinely open options. There can be no reason to refuse this invitation. So the next time you find yourself in the appropriate sort of situation of choice, try to be aware of your felt experience of making your choice. Look at your experience to see whether you feel as though the choices before you are genuinely open or whether you feel as though without your desires or preferences being in any way different you can choose otherwise than you do. The best sort of situation of choice in which to accept the libertarian's invitation is an ethically charged situation. Wait for a time in which, for instance, you are playing doubles tennis and it's for you to say on a close shot whether the ball is in or out. You want to win and you want to look good in the eyes of your partner. If you call the ball out, you will win and please your partner. On the other hand, by calling the ball out you will be cheating your opponents and breaking the rules. Now you also want to be fair to your opponents and to play by the rules. If you call the ball in, you will be fair to your opponents and be playing by the rules. On the other hand, by calling the ball in you will lose the game and your partner will be terribly upset with you for your mistake in not playing the ball. No one but you really knows whether the ball was in or out, so all will accept your call as the accurate one, whichever call you make. Pay attention to your experience of choosing which call to make. Does it feel, at the moment of choice, that each of the two options is open to you, that there is nothing within your complex and conflicting desires that is determining which call you will make?

##### *5. Free choices and meaningful choices*

Can the libertarian respond adequately to the charge that choices not determined to be the choices they are by prior events are just random happenings? This question, the third listed in the first paragraph of the previous section, arises out of the discussion in section 2 above. In that section we made the point that it is not enough for a choice to be freely made that it not be determined to be the choice that it is by previous events. Indeed, it seems that a choice undetermined by previous events would not be an expression of the personality of the chooser, and for that reason would be hardly even a choice at all. It would be more like some random occurrence that befell the chooser, something that happened to him rather than something he did. If it is just a random occurrence, then the agent cannot see himself in it and, therefore, it must from the agent's own perspective be just a meaningless bit of behaviour. The libertarian, as we noted in section 4 above, is committed to the view that for a choice to be

made freely, it must be the case that the options envisioned by the chooser are genuinely open to him, and that means that it must be the case that there is nothing about the chooser that determines him to choose the option that he does. That, in turn, means that the choice of one option over another is not determined to be the choice it is by prior events. So how, then, is a free choice, as the libertarian conceives of a free choice, anything other than a random happening that overtakes a chooser and can mean nothing to him?

One thing we should note at the start of our discussion of the libertarian's answer to this question is just how small the area of indeterminacy is for the libertarian. Everything in the situation of choice but the actual choice itself, the choice of one option over the others, is determined to be how it is by previous events. The person making the choice contemplates two or more options for action, but he contemplates specifically those options, and not fewer options or other options, entirely because of his personality and other factors. The person making the choice evaluates the options for action he envisions against his likes and dislikes, his wants and fears, his values, and finds each attractive and unattractive in some way and to some degree. But each evaluation he makes is entirely the evaluation it is because of his personality and other factors. There is nothing indeterminate behind either the fact that the agent contemplates just those options for action or the fact that he feels about each of them just as he does. Everything right up to the moment of choice itself is determined to be how it is by features of prior events. It is only at the moment of choice itself that indeterminacy enters, and indeterminacy enters only in the choice among options. Everything except the choice of one option over the others is entirely determined by features of prior events to be what it is.

What did Sally do? Sally chose to leave the clutter on her table as it is. Why did she choose to leave the clutter on her table as it is? Sally chose to leave the clutter as it is because she wanted to remain alone at her table and thought that leaving the clutter as it is would deter others from sitting with her. The question why did Sally choose as she did has a perfectly understandable answer, one that enables us and Sally herself to see her choice as purposeful and meaningful. Whatever indeterminism the libertarian finds in free choices, it is not so extensive an indeterminism that it robs choices entirely of their meaning. Sally's choice to leave the clutter as it is was an expression of her desire to remain alone. Because her choice is an expression of that desire she had, Sally can very easily see herself in the option she chose.

And yet, the choice of one option over others in a free choice, says the libertarian, is not determined to be what it is by features of prior events, and so within each free choice there is an element of indeterminacy. So even after having noted that the area within which there is indeterminacy is very small, still we are left with indeterminacy. And that means that the libertarian must explain how the choice the agent makes can seem meaningful to him when that choice is not entirely an expression of his personality.

What did Sally do? One answer to this question, the answer we gave above, is that she chose to leave the clutter on her table as it is. Why did she choose to leave the clutter on her table as it is? We can answer this question perfectly well, as we did above, by noting features of Sally's personality. In our answer we need not suppose anything occurred without being determined to occur by previous events. The description here of what Sally did is a true description, and the answer to the question why she did what we have described her to have done is accurate. But the question what did Sally do has another answer, a different answer, though not one that conflicts with the answer we have discussed. What did Sally do?

Sally chose to leave the clutter on her table as it is *rather than to clear the clutter away*. This answer also truly describes what Sally did. Why did Sally do that? Why did Sally choose to leave the clutter on her table as it is rather than to clear the clutter away? We understand why Sally chose to leave the clutter as it is. She did it because she wanted to remain alone. But why did she choose to leave the clutter as it is rather than to clear the clutter away? After all, she also wanted to clear it away, for she wanted to be kind to patrons of the coffee shop in need of a place to sit. To the question why she chose to leave the clutter as it is rather than to clear it there can be no answer, at least not for the libertarian.

For there to be an answer, there would have had to have been something in Sally's personality that made it true that she wanted to remain alone *more* than she wanted to be kind to others. But if there was something in her that made her want to be alone more than she wanted to be kind to others, then her choice to leave the clutter as it is rather than to clear it would have been determined to be just that choice by pre-existing factors. And if her choice to leave the clutter as it is rather than to clear it had been determined to be just that choice by pre-existing factors, then it would not have been a free choice. Hence, for the libertarian, there can be no answer to the question why Sally chose to leave the clutter as it is rather than to clear it. That she chose the one option rather than the other is inexplicable. Sally's choice to leave the clutter as it is rather than to clear it is not, then, an expression of Sally's personality.

This result, the result that in a choice freely made there is no answer to the question why the person chose the one course of action rather than some other, must make us wonder how a free choice, as the libertarian conceives of free choices, could be meaningful to the person making it.

We have presupposed, in our discussion of the problem of the meaningfulness of free choices, that choices are meaningful only when they are expressions of the personality of the chooser as it exists at the moment of choice. It is this presupposition that the libertarian rejects in explaining how free choices—choices among genuinely open options, choices of one option rather than some other that are not determined to be the choices they are by the personality of the chooser—can be meaningful to the chooser. Certainly being the expression of one's personality is one way in which a choice can appear meaningful in one's eyes. But being the expression of one's personality is not the only way one's choice of one course of action rather than another can appear meaningful. One can also find a choice meaningful by seeing in that choice one's own creation of oneself and one's personality. As one chooses one option rather than another, one makes oneself a person who, in that situation, chooses that one option rather than the other. One's free choice, then, is meaningful to one as a moment in which one becomes who one will then be. It's not required that one see oneself in one's choice for that choice to be meaningful; one will also find a choice meaningful when one experiences it as a moment in which one makes oneself the person that one then becomes.

Imagine a person on a tennis court free to choose between calling the ball in and calling the ball out. Nothing in his personality at the moment of choice determines which course of action he will choose. Each of the two options is genuinely open to him. He can call the ball in, thereby being honest but losing the game and incurring the wrath of his partner, or he can call the ball out, thereby cheating but prolonging the game and sparing himself his partner's abuse. His free choice to call the ball in is meaningful to him, says the libertarian,

not as an expression of his honesty, but instead as a moment in which he makes himself an honest person. Through his choice he makes himself into a person who values honesty and fairness. It is because he feels it to be an act of self-creation that he does not experience his undetermined choice as a random happening, as a meaningless thing that happened to him. Indeed, adds the libertarian, our freely made choices appear to us to be the most significant and meaningful choices we make.

Is this an adequate response to the criticism that a choice not determined to be the choice that it is by features of prior events would have to appear meaningless and surd to the person making it? Perhaps not. We might well allow that in some of our choices, in addition to expressing who we already are, we make ourselves into who we then become. But we might still doubt that a person could find meaningful any choice that in no way expressed who she is but entirely created her as who she became. Unless at the moment of choice she wanted to become that sort of person more than she wanted to become that other sort of person, she would have no ground for choosing and, hence, the meaning of her choice would escape her. But maybe this is to presuppose all over again that only choices that are already expressions of who one is can appear to one to be meaningful. The question whether that presupposition is true needs to be resolved.

#### *6. Further criticisms and responses*

The criticism of libertarianism we just canvassed, that on the libertarian account of free choice free choices must appear to the people making them surd and meaningless, is only one of many criticisms that are levelled at the idea that free choices are choices not determined to be the choices they are by prior events. In this section we will look quickly at three other objections and at how libertarians might respond to them.

*1) The deliverances of introspection.* The libertarian's argument that there do exist genuinely open options begins with a claim about what introspection reveals to us about our experience of choosing. That claim is that introspection reveals to us that in choosing among options we feel ourselves undetermined by anything in our personalities to choose the option we do choose. On the basis of this claim, the libertarian infers that indeed we are not determined by anything in our personality to choose as we do, and that leads him to the conclusion that there do exist for us in some situations of choice genuinely open options. Critics of libertarianism raise two issues with regard to this chain of reasoning.

First, some question whether introspection in fact does reveal to us what the libertarian says it reveals to us. It is true that we do not always feel ourselves forced or compelled by our wants and desires to choose some one option for action over the others. But it is not so clear, they say, that we do not feel that our wants and desires determine our choices. When making choices, they say, introspection reveals to us that we feel that we choose as we do as a result of the reasons we have for choosing as we do. The libertarian can do little in the face of this objection except to assert that introspection in fact reveals that we feel ourselves not to be determined by our reasons, and then to invite doubters to examine anew their own experiences of choosing.

Second, some critics question whether, even if introspection does reveal to us that we feel ourselves undetermined in our choices by our reasons, we can confidently move from the deliverances of introspection to the conclusion that in fact our choices are not determined by

our reasons. How things feel to us is one thing, how they are is another. That we feel ourselves not to be determined by our reasons in our choices is one claim, that we truly are not determined is another claim, and the connection between them is extremely loose. Here, the libertarian can respond that, short of some specific reason to think that the inference is faulty, we can in good conscience continue to think it fine. After all, that we are in fact undetermined in our choices by our reasons would provide an excellent explanation for why we feel ourselves to be undetermined in our choices by our reasons.

2) *The predictability of people's behaviour.* Each of us manages quite well with our predictions of how people will behave in this or that situation. Our ability to predict correctly how a person will behave increases as we get to know that person better, as we come to understand what he likes and dislikes, what he is concerned about, what his values are. But, say some critics of libertarianism, if our reasons do not determine us to choose as we choose, then our interactions with each other should be chaotic and we should not be very good at predicting people's behaviour or, indeed, our own. Thus, they conclude, libertarianism is false.

The libertarian must accept that there are in principle limitations on how accurately a person can predict the behaviour of another person. Even a person who knows another person as well as possible, who knows that person much better than anyone in fact knows anyone else, would be unable to predict fully what that person will do when that person makes a free choice. But that does not mean that the libertarian's views imply that social life is chaotic, which it obviously is not. The degree and nature of indeterminacy, responds the libertarian, is such as to be compatible with a high level of predictability in interpersonal relations. After all, the libertarian says, our personalities determine what options for action we will envision in our free choices, and, besides, not everything we do follows a choice we make and not every choice we make is a free choice.

3) *Breaking the law.* Human beings are physical objects in the world who, like all physical objects, are collections of atomic and subatomic particles and nothing more. Further, all that happens at the atomic and subatomic levels happens by way of natural law (this is true even if there exists some indeterminacy at those levels; such indeterminacy means only that natural laws will be statistical). Now, if libertarianism is true and indeed at some times when we choose there exist for us genuinely open options, then, at these times the natural laws by which everything happens are violated. But it is absurd to think that the natural laws by which everything happens are violated, and hence libertarianism is false. We just cannot break natural laws.

Some libertarians respond to this objection by denying that human beings are entirely physical objects. Human beings are collections of atomic and subatomic particles and something else in addition. And it is in that something else that their freedom from natural law resides. This response, though, is unpromising. It creates more problems than it solves, and explains mysteries in terms of greater mysteries. A more promising line of response is simply to accept that humans are entirely part of the natural world and then to deny that all that happens in the natural world happens by way of natural law. Not only are the fundamental laws of physics statistical, but some happenings in the world are entirely anomalous. The claim that everything happens by way of natural law is no better than the evidence we have that everything happens by way of natural law, and that evidence is scanty at best. Moreover,

it is contradicted by the evidence we can obtain through introspection that sometimes the options for action a person contemplates are genuinely open to him.

### *7. Summing up*

We have concerned ourselves in this chapter with two very different views on the question whether we possess free will. One view, called “hard determinism,” is defined by two theses. The first of these is that if the hypothesis of mechanism applies to people’s choices and actions just as much as it applies to other sorts of event or happening, then no one ever chooses or acts freely. The second defining thesis is that the hypothesis of mechanism *does* apply to people’s choices and actions just as much as it does to other sorts of event or happening. From these two theses follows the conclusion that no one ever chooses or acts freely. For the hard determinist, then, free will does not exist. People who think free will does exist are making a mistake or labouring under an illusion.

It’s important to know that not every philosophy that denies the existence of free will is a variety of hard determinism. A philosopher might well hold that free will doesn’t exist while rejecting or remaining uncommitted to either of the two defining theses of hard determinism. What makes a denial of free will a version of hard determinism is that that denial rests on the assertion of both the thesis of incompatibility and the hypothesis of mechanism. In other words, what makes a philosophy a version of hard determinism are the reasons offered as to why free will does not exist.

The other view we examined on the question whether we possess free will is called “libertarianism.” Libertarianism is also defined by two theses. The first is that if the hypothesis of mechanism applies to people’s choices and actions just as much as it applies to other sorts of event or happening, then no one ever chooses or acts freely. The second defining thesis is that at least sometimes when we choose among options, we choose freely. In this thesis the libertarian explicitly states that free will exists. (We discussed an argument in favour of the second defining thesis according to which our experience of choosing in morally charged situations reveals that we choose freely.) These two theses together imply that not everything in the world happens as the product of prior causal factors, and so indeed libertarianism includes the idea that our choices are not always the mechanistic effect of the values we hold or our personalities at the moment of choice.

Just as not every philosophy that denies the existence of free will is a variety of hard determinism, so too not every philosophy that affirms the existence of free will is a variety of libertarianism. As we said, a defining ingredient in libertarianism is the thesis that the existence of free will is incompatible with the hypothesis of mechanism. A philosopher who says that free will could exist even if people’s choices or actions are entirely the products of mechanistic causality would not be a libertarian, though he agrees with the libertarian that free will exists.

Hard determinism and libertarianism contradict each other on the question whether any choice or action is ever made or performed freely. But that they are ultimately opposed to each other on this question does not mean that they disagree on all questions. Indeed, they are entirely in agreement with each other on a seriously important matter. Both hard determinism and libertarianism accept and, indeed, depend on the idea that the claim that we

possess free will is incompatible with the thesis that our choices and actions are no less the mechanistic products of prior events than is anything else in the universe. This idea is a defining thesis of both. They both include the thesis that free will is incompatible with mechanism. An equivalent way of putting the point is that they both subscribe to the thesis that freedom of choice or action requires escape from mechanistic causality. That they agree on this matter speaks to the fact that both views conceive of free will the same way. Central to the conception of free will they share is the idea that for a choice or action to have been made or performed freely, it must have been the case at the moment of choice or action that the person could have chosen or acted differently than he did. (Only thereby can the person who made the choice or performed the action be morally responsible for it.) Hard determinism and libertarianism, as different forms of incompatibilism, agree on what it would be for a choice or an action to be made or performed freely; they then disagree as to whether any choices or actions do or could exemplify the concept of a free choice or a free action.

Now one might well wonder how significant their agreement on the concept of free will is. After all, it might seem, their agreement just indicates that they are both speaking about the same thing, free will, and it shouldn't surprise us that those who disagree about whether something exists have in mind the same something. But matters are not so clear when it comes to discussions of free will, for a question prior to the question whether we have free will is the question what it would be to have free will, and it is possible to disagree with hard determinists and libertarians in answering that prior question. In the next chapter, the prior question just what is free will will come to the fore. There we will investigate a position on the question whether we possess free will that rejects the incompatibilist thesis shared by hard determinism and libertarianism. This position will affirm, with libertarianism, that at least sometimes we choose or act freely, but it will also affirm, with hard determinism, that everything we do is as much a mechanical product of prior causal factors as anything else that happens. As it rejects the incompatibilist thesis shared by hard determinism and libertarianism, it must also reject the conception of free will they hold in common. But with what conception of free will will it replace that conception? What could be wrong with the conception of free will integral to hard determinism and libertarianism?