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THE FALL FROM EDEN: WHY LIBERTARIANISM ISN'T JUSTIFIED BY EXPERIENCE

Oisín Deery

Libertarians claim that our experience of free choice is indeterministic. They think that, when we choose, our choice feels open in a way that would require indeterminism for the experience to be accurate. This claim then functions as a step in an argument in favour of libertarianism, the view that freedom requires indeterminism and we are free. Since, all else being equal, we should take experience at face value, libertarians argue, we should endorse libertarianism. Compatibilists, who think that freedom is consistent with determinism, respond to this argument in a number of ways, none of which is adequate. This paper defends a stronger compatibilist response. Compatibilists should concede, at least for argument's sake, that our experience of freedom is in a sense libertarian. Yet they should also insist that our experience is in another sense compatibilist. Thus, even if libertarian descriptions of experience are phenomenologically apt, there is still a sense in which the experience might be veridical, assuming determinism. This response undermines a central motivation for libertarianism, since it removes any presumption in favour of libertarianism based on experience.

Keywords: Free will, libertarianism, compatibilism, agential experience, phenomenal content, natural kinds

1. Introduction

This paper responds to a certain argument in favour of libertarianism, the view that freedom requires indeterminism and we are free:¹

Argument L

- (1) The content of our experience of freedom is (presumptively) veridical.²
- (2) Our experience of freedom has libertarian content.
- (3) If our experience of freedom has libertarian content, then our experience is veridical only if libertarianism is true.
- (4) So, libertarianism is (presumptively) true.

The libertarian content is this. For a possible action, A, that one is considering performing, one's experience is as of being free to decide to A, and as of

¹Libertarians are committed to indeterminism in a way in which compatibilists (and most non-libertarian incompatibilists) are not committed to determinism.

²Take 'veridicality' to mean: accurate in a relevant sense, under some specification of how the world might be. Different ways of spelling out what this means will be sketched later.

being free to decide, in an unconditional sense,³ to refrain from A-ing. This style of argument appears in the work of Thomas Reid,⁴ C.A. Campbell,⁵ Timothy O'Connor,⁶ and Richard Swinburne,⁷ among others.

For compatibilists, who maintain that freedom is consistent with determinism, the usual responses to Argument L are to reject (1) or to reject (2). This paper makes a case for rejecting (3).

2. Compatibilist Strategies

Some compatibilists reject premise (1) of Argument L.⁸ These compatibilists grant premise (2), thereby admitting that experiences of freedom have libertarian content, but they insist that such experiences are non-veridical. However, compatibilists who adopt this strategy concede what arguably they should not concede: that experiences of freedom are non-veridical if determinism is true.

Most compatibilists prefer to reject premise (2), the claim that experiences of freedom have libertarian content.⁹ These compatibilists maintain that our experience of freedom is usually veridical, but they insist that it has exhaustively compatibilist content. The experience is simply as of having a conditional freedom: once we experience being free from constraint, coercion, and so forth, our experience is as of being free to decide to A, or to refrain from A-ing, *if* we want (or try) to do so. By rejecting (2), though, compatibilists enter into seemingly intractable disputes with libertarians (and other incompatibilists) about the nature of the presentational content of experiences of freedom—about whether it is of having a compatibilist (conditional) freedom or instead a libertarian (unconditional) freedom. It is exceedingly difficult to know how to adjudicate such disputes, since they turn on competing introspective claims.

With this in mind, a more recent compatibilist strategy is to develop an error theory for libertarian judgments *about* experiences of freedom [Horgan

³On the compatibilist 'conditional analysis' of freedom, S is free to do otherwise iff: If S wanted (or tried, etc.) to do otherwise, then S would do so. Something about S's prior states would have to be different. Libertarians think that S is free given S's *actual* states. That is what is meant by being free 'in an unconditional sense'.

⁴From the consciousness of our own activity, seems to be derived, not only the clearest, but the only conception we can form of . . . the exertion of active power' [Reid 1788: 36]. Here, 'active power' is libertarian, since the 'power to produce any effect implies power not to produce it' [ibid.: 35].

⁵'Are there objections to a freedom of this [libertarian] kind so cogent that we are bound to distrust the evidence of "inner experience"? . . . The arguments which seem to carry most weight with Determinists are, to say the least of it, very far from compulsive' [C.A. Campbell 1957: 168–74].

⁶'It does not seem to me . . . that I am caused to act by the reasons which favor doing so; it seems to be the case, rather, that I produce my decision in view of those reasons, and could have, in an unconditional sense, decided differently . . . Such experiences could . . . be wholly illusory, but do we not properly assume, in the absence of strong countervailing reasons, that things are pretty much the way they appear to us?' [O'Connor 1995: 196–7].

⁷'It is a basic principle of rationality that things are probably the way they seem to be . . . in the absence of counter-evidence . . . When we make a decision, it seems that we choose and are not caused to choose as we do' [Swinburne 2011: 82].

⁸Lehrer concedes that, regarding experiences of freedom, the libertarian 'accurately describes what I find by introspecting, and I cannot believe that others do not find the same' [1960: 150]. Lehrer thus concedes premise (2). Yet he thinks his experience is not veridical, so he disables Argument L at premise (1). Similarly, Hume thinks that 'There is a false . . . experience . . . of the liberty of indifference' [1739: Bk. II, Part III, sec. II], by which he means that we experience freedom as indeterministic yet the experience is non-veridical.

⁹See, for instance, Mill [1865: 285], Grünbaum [1952: 672], and Nahmias et al. [2004]; cf. Horgan [2011, 2012].

2011, 2012].¹⁰ According to this strategy, even if people judge their experience as incompatibilist, actually it is compatibilist: people misinterpret their experience. Dialectically, this is more helpful than simply banging one's fist on the table and insisting that the experience is compatibilist. Even so, it commits compatibilists to arguing that the experience is *exhaustively* compatibilist, and it is not clear whether compatibilists need to shoulder this burden, especially since there is evidence that ordinary people (as well as philosophers) tend to judge their experiences of freedom as inconsistent with determinism [Deery et al. 2013].¹¹ It would be helpful if compatibilists could avoid having to deny the introspective claims of those reporting libertarian phenomenology.

This paper presents a case for rejecting premise (3), the claim that if our experience of freedom has libertarian content, then it is veridical only if libertarianism is true. The trick for compatibilists is to argue that such experience has two sorts of phenomenal content, and thus two associated veridicality conditions. The experience might be veridical if the satisfaction conditions of just one of these types of content are met. Even *if* one type of phenomenal content is libertarian, yet an experience of freedom has another type of phenomenal content that is compatibilist, the experience might be veridical if only the latter type of content is satisfied. Libertarianism need not be true. Thus, Argument L would be blocked at premise (3).

However, since libertarianism plausibly implies the view that libertarian phenomenal content is veridical, (1) and (2) jointly entail (3). Thus, (3) cannot be denied without denying (1) or (2). This paper makes the case that (3) is false *because* (1) presupposes a unique phenomenal content to experiences of freedom, and that presupposition is mistaken.¹²

Of course, if the assumption that experiences of freedom have libertarian content is false, then compatibilists do not need to posit dual types of content. However, the only way in which compatibilists could dispense with the need for dual content is if they were to show that experiences of freedom have exhaustively compatibilist content. It is precisely the requirement of establishing *that* contentious claim that the view presented in this paper is designed to avoid.¹³

3. An Analogy with Colour

An experience with libertarian phenomenal content might be veridical even if determinism is true. This is because the experience might have more than one distinct type of phenomenal content. The experience might be veridical if the satisfaction conditions of just one of these types are met. Here,

¹⁰See Deery [2014] for criticism of Horgan's strategy.

¹¹Participants in these studies distinguished the feeling of epistemic openness from the feeling of the future's being open in whatever way might be required for freedom. So the relevant experience is not of mere *epistemic* openness.

¹²This is different from the strategy (already mentioned) of accepting that experiences of freedom have a unique phenomenal content that is libertarian, yet conceding that it is non-veridical.

¹³This paper remains noncommittal about whether experiences of freedom *have* libertarian content, for a similar reason.

‘phenomenal content’ is content that is tied in a particular way to an experience’s phenomenology: it is constitutively determined by the experience’s phenomenal character.¹⁴ To see how this might work, let us examine how David Chalmers [2006] makes a similar move in connection with the phenomenal content of colour experiences. The proposal developed in this paper adapts Chalmers’s framework, and applies it to agentive experiences of freedom.¹⁵

Chalmers thinks that the view about phenomenal content that is most adequate to our phenomenology in visual colour experience is *primitivism*. According to this view, we experience colours as simple intrinsic properties of objects, spread out over their surfaces. As Chalmers puts it [2006: 66],

When I have a phenomenally red experience of an object, the object seems to be simply, primitively, *red*. The apparent redness does not seem to be a micro-physical property, or a mental property, or a disposition, or an unspecified property that plays an appropriate causal role. Rather, it seems to be a simple qualitative property, with a distinctive sensuous nature.

If this is right, then experiences of colour have contents that attribute primitive properties.¹⁶ This is *perfect* content. Chalmers thinks it natural to judge this content as phenomenal content, given that the properties presented in the experience are constitutively determined by the phenomenology.

However, Chalmers concedes that, ‘For all its virtues with respect to phenomenological adequacy, the . . . primitivist view has a familiar problem. There is good reason to believe that the relevant primitive properties are not instantiated in our world’ [2006: 66]. According to primitivism, none of our ordinary experiences of colour is veridical. As a result, primitivism fails to provide us with any way of distinguishing—just in terms of the veridicality conditions of phenomenology—illusory or hallucinatory colour experiences from experiences we normally judge as accurate.

In addition to perfect content, Chalmers defends another type of phenomenal content that makes colour experiences veridical, at least in the right kinds of cases. This second content enables us to differentiate illusory or hallucinatory experiences from experiences we judge as accurate. This is *imperfect* content, which has its own associated veridicality condition: it is satisfied iff the relevant object has whatever property (or set of properties) normally causes colour experiences. The central idea is that experiences of colour are (usually) veridical, despite the fact that primitive colour properties are not instantiated in our world.¹⁷

Chalmers’s view about imperfect content is complex. At bottom, however, this type of content is a *mode of presentation* of a property; it is not the

¹⁴We can be neutral about whether content or phenomenology has explanatory priority, since even if experience has content in virtue of what is presented in phenomenology, still one might have such phenomenology in virtue of first having content [Chalmers 2006: 51].

¹⁵The only other adaptation of Chalmers’s view is due to Pereboom [2011: 29–40], who adapts the view in developing a physicalist account of phenomenal concepts. No one (Pereboom included) has yet used the strategy for free will.

¹⁶See John Campbell [1997] for a canonical statement of this view.

¹⁷See Johnston [1992] for an important precursor to Chalmers’s strategy.

property itself. When one has an experience as of seeing a red apple, one's experience attributes the property *redness*. In this case, Chalmers thinks, the second content is a mode of presentation of this property. According to his related view for colour expressions [2006: 58],

A natural view of . . . [such] . . . modes of presentation holds that they are *conditions on extension*. The extension . . . of an expression is something like an object or a property. The mode of presentation associated with an expression is a condition that an object or property must satisfy in order to qualify as the expression's extension.

Chalmers argues [2002, 2004] that this condition is an *epistemic intension* [2002: 135]. It is a function from possibilities to extensions, where the relevant possibilities are epistemic—any one of them could, for all we know *a priori*, turn out to be actual. As Chalmers puts it: 'One can naturally think of the intension as supplying criteria for the determination of extension: in combination with the actual world, these criteria will determine an extension' [2002: 150].¹⁸ Similarly, for the second phenomenal content [cf. Chalmers 2004], we require [Chalmers 2006: 59]

a condition that a property must satisfy in order to be the property attributed by the experience. There is a natural candidate for such a condition. Let us assume . . . that the property attributed by a phenomenally red experience is a physical property . . . Then one can naturally hold that the associated condition on this property is the following: it must be the property that normally causes phenomenally red experiences (in normal conditions for the perceiver).

This is imperfect content, and it is phenomenal since it is constitutively determined by the phenomenology. Even so, imperfect content is inadequate to phenomenology, since it does not reflect the phenomenal character of colour experience.¹⁹ As a result, although the second content reflects our judgments about veridicality, it fails the important test of phenomenal adequacy, which primitivist perfect content passes.

Chalmers combines these two views in a way that captures both the truth-conditional virtues of imperfect content and the phenomenological virtues of primitivist perfect content. His proposal is this. For colour experiences to be *perfectly* veridical, objects would have to instantiate primitive colour properties. Yet even if an experience is not veridical in this way, it might nevertheless be *imperfectly* veridical: it might be veridical according to our ordinary standards of accuracy.²⁰ These are the standards according to which

¹⁸Chalmers's semantics for expressions like 'red' (and for colour experiences) is *mixed-internalist*, since extension is mediated via an intension (the internalist part) in conjunction with the world (the externalist part). While the dual-content view for experiences of freedom is mixed-internalist in this sense, the view proposed for the term 'free' is instead *mixed-externalist*. See note 30 and sections 5–8.

¹⁹This is because, as Chalmers puts it, a phenomenally red experience is as of a 'simple qualitative property, with a distinctive sensuous nature', and not as of 'a microphysical property, or a mental property, or a disposition, or an unspecified property that plays an appropriate causal role' [2006: 66].

²⁰As Chalmers [2006: 70] correctly notes, it does not follow that because an experience is imperfectly veridical it is not 'really' veridical, since imperfect veridicality is plausibly what our ordinary term 'veridicality' tracks.

we ordinarily differentiate veridical from non-veridical experiences of colour—as when we judge that we see, rather than hallucinate, a red apple. According to Chalmers, there is no conflict here, as long as we bear in mind that the two notions of veridicality are associated with distinct *conditions* of veridicality. The result is that colour experiences have more than one type of phenomenal content, depending on the associated notion of veridicality, and an experience is veridical as long as one of these is satisfied.

Chalmers argues that the most fundamental type of content is perfect content. This is because what is presented in phenomenology *determines* the imperfect content via a ‘matching’ relation, which works as follows. For a colour experience to be perfectly veridical, we would have to live in ‘Eden’, a world in which primitive colour properties are instantiated (since that is what is presented in phenomenology). The best that we can do in our (presumably non-Edenic) world is to have certain properties ‘match’ the primitive properties attributed by perfect content, by playing the role that these properties *would* play in Eden. Although no property can play this role perfectly, some property (or properties) may play it well enough, by being the normal cause of colour experiences. In this way, imperfect phenomenal content is grounded in perfect content. In Chalmers’s terms, perfect content serves as a ‘regulative ideal’ in determining the imperfect content. The perfect content sets an ideal standard for the veridicality of phenomenal content, and the imperfect content is a condition that relates us to whatever properties come closest (in our world) to meeting that standard.

A similar story can be told for experiences of freedom. Even *if* what we are phenomenologically presented with in experiences of freedom is libertarian, and so is non-veridical if determinism is true, there is a second type of phenomenal content that might be veridical, assuming determinism.

4. Perfect (Libertarian) Content

Assume, first, that there is something *it is like* to be an agent—there are agentive experiences. Further assume that such experiences have liberal contents. In perceptual experience, liberal contents attribute not just low-level properties like redness or squareness, but also high-level properties like being an apple. Likewise, liberal contents for agentive experiences attribute high-level properties like being free to do otherwise, as well as low-level properties like being an action.

One might doubt whether there *are* experiences of freedom. Moreover, even if one grants such experiences, one might doubt whether they could have presentational content that is liberal enough to be non-veridical if determinism is true. After all, the more liberal the content is, the more demanding the veridicality condition will be. However, let us grant—at least for argument’s sake—that this idea makes sense. In other words, assume premise (2) of Argument L: there are experiences of freedom with libertarian presentational (that is, perfect) content.

This libertarian perfect content must have at least two parts. For some action A, the relevant content must be that (i) one is free to decide to A, and

that (ii) whether one decides to A is indeterministic. Here, (i) is merely agentic, and is insufficient by itself for the content to be libertarian. For that, we need (ii) as well.

Yet how could anyone's experience have as content that her deciding to A is undetermined by her prior states together with the laws of nature?²¹ Presumably, experience does not concern such laws. Furthermore, even if someone's experience is *not* that her deciding to A is determined by her prior states (together with the laws), it would clearly be a mistake to conclude from this that her experience is that her deciding to A is *not* determined. (That would be a scope fallacy.) For present purposes, let us assume that content (ii)—that whether one decides to A is indeterministic—is as of one's feeling a certain 'unconditional openness' to the future. The future *feels* open in a way that appears to require indeterminism for the experience to be accurate. It feels *as if* one is free to decide to A or, in an unconditional sense, to refrain from A-ing.

We are assuming that experiences of freedom have libertarian perfect content. That is what premise (2) of Argument L says. By analogy with primitivism about colour experiences, it may seem reasonable to think that an experience with such content is veridical only if libertarianism is true. That is what premise (3) says. Call a world in which libertarianism is true an 'Agentive Eden'. Now, it is (let us grant) *possible* that our world is an Agentive Eden, although very likely it is not. Leave that question aside. What concerns us here is just whether experiences of freedom with libertarian perfect content might be consistent with determinism, in the sense of being veridical under the assumption of determinism. This question can be answered without reaching any verdict about whether libertarianism is true, or whether instead determinism is true.²²

On the face of it, an experience of freedom with libertarian perfect content seems *obviously* non-veridical if we assume determinism. The proposal of section 5 is that this verdict is not obvious. An experience of freedom with libertarian perfect content might well be veridical, assuming determinism, despite the libertarian content itself being *non-veridical*.

5. Imperfect (Compatibilist) Content

By analogy with colour, plausibly there is a second, imperfect, phenomenal content to experiences of freedom. This content is a condition that a property must satisfy in order to *be* the property that is attributed by the experience. The attributed property is the freedom to do otherwise. What condition might work as the imperfect content for such an experience?

²¹The standard characterization of determinism is that whether one decides to A *is* entailed by a description of one's prior states (as part of a complete description of the world) at a time together with a statement of the laws.

²²One cannot determine whether a content is veridical without specifying an evaluation context, which is either deterministic or not. Yet one does not have to be committed regarding (a) whether any experience actually has that content, or (b) whether the specified evaluation context is the actual context. One simply assumes both the content and the evaluation context in order to assess whether the content *could* be veridical in that context.

For colour, the second content is ‘whatever property (or set of properties) ordinarily causes phenomenal colour experiences’. In the agentive case, the imperfect content is plausibly the following condition: ‘that there is instantiated whatever relevant property (or set of properties) is ordinarily instantiated when one experiences being free to do otherwise’.²³ This content, which is compatibilist,²⁴ is veridical iff this condition is met.²⁵ In other words, the imperfect content is a mode of presentation of whatever relevant properties we possess—if any—that make us free. Moreover, the content is phenomenal since it is constitutively determined by the phenomenology.

There is good reason to think that this condition picks out a genuine second content for experiences of freedom. Consider, by analogy, the view that ‘free’ is a natural-kind term that refers to whatever relevant properties agents possess when (under normal conditions) they make paradigmatically free choices [Heller 1996; cf. Daw and Alter 2001]. On this view, it is irrelevant to freedom whether determinism is true. We are free, unless the capacities underpinning choices we call ‘free’ do not constitute a kind (or at least a *relevant* kind—see section 7). Consequently, we might be free even if determinism is true.^{26,27}

This sort of view is widely held about terms like ‘water’ [Putnam 1975; Kripke 1980]. Despite our being able to point to paradigm instances of watery stuff, it remained for a long time unclear what water consisted in, or whether it consisted in any unified kind at all. As it turns out, water *does* comprise a unified kind: water is H₂O. Nonetheless, ‘water’ might have been like ‘phlogiston’, which does not refer to anything, or ‘jade’, which refers to two kinds: jadeite and nephrite.²⁸ It took empirical investigation of the world to settle the matter. The natural-kind view about freedom says something similar. As long as ‘free’ ends up working like ‘water’, by referring to a relevant unified kind, and not like ‘phlogiston’ or ‘jade’, then we are free.²⁹

The natural-kind view is not unproblematic. One difficulty is that ‘free’ seems to behave differently from standard natural-kind terms like ‘water’ [Balaguer 2010: 22 n.5]. ‘Water’ refers to the aqueous stuff that flows in our rivers and falls from our sky as rain, whatever that stuff happens to be. If we were to discover that our aqueous stuff is actually XYZ rather than H₂O, then ‘water’ would refer to XYZ. Presumably, if we were to make such a discovery, we would not say that water does not exist. The problem for the natural-kind view about freedom is that ‘free’ seems to work differently from ‘water’ in this regard. If we were to discover that what is going on in choices

²³This condition leaves it open that what is relevant is that such properties cause the experience.

²⁴Almost any experience is compatible with determinism, since we might be determined to have that very experience [Mele 1995: 133–7, 246–9]. The claim here is that the experience is compatibilist in the sense that it might be veridical even if determinism is true.

²⁵By leaving it open what properties underpin such experiences, it remains open whether or not they are deterministic.

²⁶This view is related to the paradigm-case view, according to which we fix the meaning of ‘free’ by pointing to paradigm instances of free choices [Flew 1955: 151]. The paradigm-case view is (on one reading) stronger than the natural-kind view, since it *guarantees* that there are free choices, whereas the natural-kind view does not [Heller 1996: 336 n.7]. See Turner [2013] for discussion.

²⁷One might object that, since the disagreement between compatibilists and incompatibilists is conceptual, it cannot be decided by empirical findings, as is suggested here. The argument that this objection is mistaken awaits section 7.

²⁸See LaPorte [2004] for an overview of these issues. See also Sterelny [1983].

²⁹Of course, ‘free’ might be a natural-kind term even if free choices are not a natural kind.

we call 'free' is that we are remotely controlled by Martians, we would not conclude from this that 'free' refers to our being controlled by Martians [van Inwagen 1983: 106–13]. If we made such a discovery, it would seem to show that we *lack* freedom. So the natural-kind view about freedom seems mistaken. The underlying problem is that there might exist something for 'free' to refer to, and it might make up a unified class, but that the members of the class might be unified in part because they share a property that violates overwhelmingly plausible criteria for freedom.

This problem might be remedied by considering certain views about terms like 'witch'. According to these views, a natural-kind term does not pick out *merely* (i) the property that a collection of objects directly related to the term has uniquely in common, but also (ii) the property that supports the kind's causal or explanatory roles in our empirical generalizations.³⁰ Thus, 'witch' cannot refer to antisocial individuals with red hair (for instance), even if that is what individuals called 'witch' actually have in common. This is because these properties do not support causal explanations citing 'witch' in the *explanans* [cf. Boyd 1999; Brigandt 2011; Kumar 2014].

Similarly, 'free' cannot refer to choices that are remotely controlled by Martians. Calling a choice 'free' serves the purpose of indicating that an agent's psychology (say) is the causal source of her choice (which in turn helps us to assign blame and responsibility). We want to locate the causal source because we want to predict and explain the agent's behaviour, so that we can interact effectively with her. If the agent is the source, then an ideally situated onlooker would interact with *the agent* in order to influence the choice. If Martian-control obtained, the agent would *not* be the causal source of the choice, and thus the onlooker would interact not with her but rather with the Martian controllers. So, the property of being controlled by Martians fails to support the explanatory role of 'free' choices in the relevant empirical generalizations.³¹

Whatever intuitive plausibility a compatibilist natural-kind view about freedom might have, the analogous view for *experiences* of freedom is much more plausible. That is because, by conceding that perfect content is libertarian, the claim that there is a second, imperfect, content that is compatibilist *already accommodates* an incompatibilist perspective. The dual-content view for experiences of freedom already concedes that one type of phenomenal content is libertarian, even though it is non-veridical under the assumption of determinism. Nevertheless, these experiences have a second type of phenomenal content, which might be veridical under normal conditions, assuming determinism.

Normal conditions are those in which the relevant experience is not *obviously* illusory. Consider an illustrative example. Someone is under the sway of a hypnotist, who primes his subject to pour a glass of water over her own

³⁰This view employs a *mixed-externalist* semantics for natural-kind terms, which denies that reference is fixed by definitions possessed by all competent speakers, as paradigm-case or Putnamian-kind theorists hold. Rather, they are causal-explanatory generalizations possessed only by experts.

³¹The relevant generalizations express invariance relationships, which are stated as structural equations, that obtain between the pertinent variables in a causal model of the choice: see Nahmias and Deery [in *preparation*]. For natural-kind theorists, the only alternative is to take a harder line, by accepting that even Martian-controlled choices might be free [cf. Heller 1996].

head when she hears the hypnotist cough. The hypnotist gives his subject a glass of water. He tells her that if she drinks it in less than five seconds, she will win a prize. He also reminds her that she is not obliged to drink it. The subject accepts the glass, the hypnotist coughs, and the subject—to her own astonishment!—pours the water over her head. When the subject accepts the water, presumably she experiences being free to do various things: to drink it, to refrain from drinking it (e.g. by refusing it, or by pouring it over her own head, or . . . etc.). Yet the hypnotist is skilled: whenever he hypnotizes a subject, the subject never fails to pour the water over her own head. In this case, too, the subject is not free to do otherwise. Thus, her experience is non-veridical, and obviously so.³² Experiences of freedom that are not illusory in anything like this way are those that occur under normal conditions.³³

In normal situations, one's experience of freedom is imperfectly veridical iff a certain condition is met. This condition is that one instantiate whatever relevant property (or set of properties) is ordinarily instantiated when one experiences being free. That is imperfect content, which is compatibilist.³⁴

6. The Two-Stage View

How are the two types of phenomenal content related? Among them, the most fundamental type is perfect content. This is because we are assuming—at least *arguendo*—that perfect content is the content that most accurately reflects what is presented in phenomenology when we experience choosing freely.³⁵ Analogously with Chalmers's view about colour experiences, the libertarian perfect content determines the second, imperfect, content via a matching relation. For an experience of freedom to be perfectly veridical—that is, veridical according to the standards associated with its perfect content—we would have to live in an Agentive Eden. The best that we can do under the assumption of determinism is to have certain properties match the libertarian properties that are attributed by the perfect content, namely by playing the role that these properties *would* play in an Agentive Eden. No property can play this role perfectly. Yet some property (or set of properties) may be able to play it well enough, by being the property (or set of properties) that is ordinarily instantiated when one experiences choosing freely. This content is compatibilist, since it might be veridical even if determinism is true. Nonetheless, it is grounded in libertarian perfect content, since (to use Chalmers's phrase) the perfect content acts as a 'regulative ideal' in determining the imperfect content. In other words, perfect content sets an ideal standard for veridicality, and the imperfect content is a condition that

³²Whatever relevant property is ordinarily instantiated when the subject experiences being free is *not* instantiated here. That is because the property that would *make* her free is not instantiated.

³³This experience is illusory, according to the veridicality conditions associated with *either* imperfect content *or* libertarian perfect content. The point is that, unless we introduce imperfect content, if determinism is true we have no way of distinguishing (just in terms of the veridicality conditions of the experience) non-veridical experiences like this one from those we normally judge as accurate.

³⁴Recall that imperfect content is not *descriptively* compatibilist, since the relevant properties might end up being indeterministic.

³⁵If premise (2) of Argument L were false, and experiences of freedom actually had exhaustively compatibilist content, then our *presentational* content would be compatibilist. That is not what we are assuming here.

relates us to whatever properties come closest (assuming determinism) to meeting that ideal standard.³⁶ Once the second content is satisfied, the experience is imperfectly veridical, even if determinism is true—and this despite granting premise (2), which says that the relevant presentational content is libertarian.³⁷

In this way, Argument L is disabled at its third premise. The experience can be veridical, it can have libertarian content, yet libertarianism can be false. However, since libertarianism plausibly implies the view that libertarian phenomenal content is veridical, premises (1) and (2) of Argument L jointly entail (3). Consequently, we cannot deny (3) without denying (1) or (2). This paper has argued that (3) is false because premise (1) presupposes a unique phenomenal content to experiences of freedom, namely libertarian perfect content. Yet experiences of freedom plausibly also have an imperfect phenomenal content that is compatibilist. If determinism is true then, even granting (*arguendo*) that experiences of freedom have libertarian perfect content, there is still a sense in which *these very experiences* might be veridical—despite their veridicality not being in virtue of the libertarian content.

7. A Libertarian Complaint

Even if we assume that perfect content is libertarian for everyone, whether we judge an experience as one of being ‘free’ seems to depend on the meaning of our concept of freedom. If our concept is libertarian, then presumably we will not judge the experience as ‘free’ in virtue merely of its imperfect content. This sort of content cuts no libertarian ice, according to the libertarian concept of freedom. Instead, the *perfect* content would have to be veridical.³⁸

As an objection to the dual-content view developed in sections 4–6, this complaint is misguided for two reasons. First, it incorrectly assumes that the imperfect content is *descriptive*, perhaps in a way that would prevent libertarians from endorsing it. Second, it assumes a false semantics for the term ‘free’, or the concept of freedom. Let us deal with these two issues in turn.

Recall that imperfect content is compatibilist iff it might be veridical, assuming determinism. By these lights, imperfect content is compatibilist, as we have seen, since it might be satisfied even if determinism is true. Yet it could also be satisfied if *indeterminism* is true, since it is an empirical question what relevant properties are instantiated when we experience choosing freely. Thus, there is nothing *descriptively* compatibilist in the account of imperfect content, despite the fact that it might be satisfied under

³⁶If we lived in an Agentive Eden (which presumably we do not), then the second content would match this ideal exactly.

³⁷It might be objected that, if there are two phenomenal contents to experiences of freedom, then premise (2)—which claims that ‘our experience of freedom is veridical’—is ill-defined, since veridicality is judged relative to a content and context, yet this claim only gives the context, not the content. The view outlined in this paper adopts Chalmers’s pluralism about representational contents, according to which there are multiple content relations (relations that associate experiences with contents). If one relation associates an experience with one sort of content, another relation might still associate that very experience with another sort of content. Thus, an experience of freedom might have more than one sort of phenomenal content.

³⁸An anonymous referee suggests this complaint on behalf of the libertarian.

determinism, and therefore is compatibilist in the present sense. No matter whether one's concept is compatibilist or instead libertarian, and even assuming that perfect content is libertarian for everyone, libertarians are *not* prevented from judging an experience as one of being 'free' in virtue of its imperfect content.

Perhaps libertarians will balk at this suggestion, since their concept of freedom is libertarian. In that case, they are simply failing to apply the correct semantics for 'free'. There are two rival views about how the reference of 'free' (or the concept of freedom) might be fixed. According to one view, if 'free' is a natural-kind term, then it refers mediately via a description. This view is called 'descriptivism' or 'internalism', since the satisfaction conditions for 'free' are meant to be discoverable by investigation of an internal concept [cf. Mill 1884].³⁹ The opposing view is 'externalism', according to which our use of kind terms is regulated by the external world, and so reference is fixed by the world, not a description [e.g. Putnam 1975; Kripke 1980].⁴⁰

Why would libertarians reject externalism, and opt instead for internalism? After all, externalism leaves it open that libertarianism is *correct* about the nature of freedom, since it leaves it open that we are free due to indeterminism. Let us simply assume that libertarians (for whatever reason) want to be internalists.

In that case, libertarians adopt a mistaken view, since presumably we can be wrong about the referent of 'free'. Treating 'free' as a natural-kind term, and as amenable to an externalist semantics, enables us to explain how the reference of 'free' is secured even if we are wrong about the referent. Paradigmatically, free choices are those that that an agent controls in a certain way—presumably in a way that licenses our judgments of moral responsibility. Yet the actual nature of free choices is disputed. According to some philosophers, what makes a choice free is that an agent is able to select a given course of action, yet can also refrain from selecting it. Even then, there is disagreement about whether such an ability consists in an unmanifested disposition to have chosen differently (which might be compatibilist) or instead consists in a form of indeterministic causation by the agent (as libertarians might hold). These accounts are inconsistent, so at least one of them must be wrong about the nature of free choices. Yet their proponents are apparently theorizing about the same phenomenon. This amounts to *prima facie* evidence for the claim that 'free' is a natural-kind term, and is amenable to an externalist semantics. Internalists, by contrast, must insist that the disputants are theorizing about *different* phenomena, since descriptively their concepts differ.

An internalist might resist this verdict by claiming that there is a core definition of 'free' that we all know, at least implicitly, and that, whenever we are mistaken in our claims about free choices, our mistake lies in the more

³⁹Today, few are internalists about natural-kind *terms*, although 'mixed' (or hybrid) internalism retains adherents [e.g. Jackson 1998; Chalmers 2002]; see notes 18 and 30. Yet the related view that *concepts* have a descriptive or definitional structure remains popular: for discussion, see Margolis and Laurence [2003a: 191–5].

⁴⁰For 'mixed' (or hybrid) externalism, see Boyd [1999], Brigandt [2011], and Kumar [2014]; see notes 18 and 30.

elaborate definitions comprising our *theories* of freedom rather than in the core definition itself.

However, debates about free will are notoriously intractable, and the resulting ‘dialectical stalemate’ among philosophers about how to define ‘free’ suggests that there is no single definition of the term that is likely to satisfy all of our intuitions about cases. Even so, philosophers *do* appear to be theorizing about the same natural phenomenon. The best explanation of this fact is that ‘free’ behaves as a natural-kind term, and that an externalist semantics for ‘free’ is correct. Otherwise, it is difficult to see how philosophers *disagree* about freedom, since—according to internalism—different definitions imply different concepts, in which case there can be no disagreement.⁴¹

Bracketing this issue, one might wonder whether the debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists, which seems fundamentally conceptual, could be settled by an appeal to externalist semantics. Whether libertarianism or instead hard determinism is true seems an empirical question, but whether free choice is compatible with determinism seems not to hinge on empirical discoveries, in which case externalism cannot settle the matter. Of course, this begs the question in favour of internalism by assuming that empirical findings are irrelevant to settling conceptual questions. Externalists deny this claim. Further, it is at least partly an empirical matter what the correct theory of reference for concepts *is*, since empirical discoveries bear on the evaluation of such theories and can undermine even what appear to be analytic conceptual claims—as the discovery that space is non-Euclidian undermined the link between ‘straight line’ and ‘the shortest distance between two points’ [Putnam 1962]. Additionally, one might think that any plausible theory of reference must be responsive to scientific knowledge about (for instance) misrepresentation, learning, cognitive architecture, and psychological processing [Laurence and Margolis 2003b: 264]. Externalism is better supported than internalism in these regards. So the question of whether free choice and determinism are compatible, even if it is conceptual in nature, might well be settled by externalism.

In sum, there are good reasons for thinking that the ordinary concept of freedom is such that it is legitimate—even for a libertarian—to judge an experience as one of being ‘free’ in virtue simply of its imperfect phenomenal content, even when the libertarian perfect content is non-veridical.

8. A Compatibilist Complaint

Compatibilists might complain, too. To see why, assume that judgments of moral responsibility presuppose that agents who are judged responsible chose freely in exactly the respect that is represented by the perfect *libertarian* content of their experience of freedom.⁴² In that case, the veridicality delivered by imperfect content seems not to support judgments of

⁴¹Likewise, an externalist semantics explains the stability of subject matter in debates about free will, even when these debates occur in different historical or intellectual paradigms.

⁴²This brackets (as in real life) so-called ‘Frankfurt cases’, which purport to show that responsibility does *not* require being free to choose otherwise [Frankfurt 1969].

responsibility, at least under the assumption of determinism, since these judgments now appear to presuppose the truth of libertarianism.⁴³

This worry has teeth. After all, how *could* an agent be morally responsible, assuming determinism, if we presuppose (as libertarianism maintains) that responsibility requires the *falsity* of determinism? There are two things to be said here. First, according to the dual-content view, it remains true that the agent's *experience* of freedom—notwithstanding its libertarian content—might well be veridical under the assumption of determinism. Thus, even if the agent does not choose freely in exactly the respect represented by her libertarian perfect content, nonetheless *that* very experience might be veridical under determinism, and the agent will still have chosen freely in the manner represented by the experience's imperfect veridicality condition. Further, this condition itself is guided by the libertarian respect in which the agent experiences freely choosing, since perfect content determines imperfect content by being its regulative ideal.

This response may ring hollow for compatibilists who are inclined to lodge the complaint, since the complaint is that the dual-content view seemingly permits responsibility judgments to presuppose that agents who are judged responsible chose freely in exactly the manner represented by their libertarian perfect content. It is here that the natural-kind view about 'free' comes to the rescue.

Let us grant that the concept of freedom underpinning judgments of moral responsibility somehow inherits the presuppositions of the libertarian perfect content of the relevant experience. As we have seen, though, on the natural-kind view there can be no advance guarantee that this descriptively libertarian concept will be our best guide to what is actually going on in paradigmatically free choices. So *free* choices might be deterministic, even if our *concept* of a free choice is descriptively libertarian. As a result, agents might be morally responsible for their choices (because they choose freely) even if our concept of freedom is libertarian, and despite assuming determinism (see Vargas [2013] for a related view).

9. Conclusion

That is the case for rejecting premise (3) of Argument L, and Argument L itself.

The unsoundness of Argument L undermines a central motivation for libertarianism, since it removes any presumption in favour of libertarianism based solely on experiences of freedom. Moreover, this strategy for responding to Argument L has advantages over rival compatibilist responses.

First, responses that grant libertarian phenomenal content by granting premise (2), yet which deny the presumed veridicality of experiences of freedom by denying premise (1), concede what they should not concede: that experiences of freedom are non-veridical if determinism is true. The dual-content view makes such experiences veridical, assuming determinism,

⁴³This complaint is raised by an anonymous reviewer.

despite granting that they have libertarian content. Thus, premise (1) goes wrong in presupposing that there is a unique (libertarian) phenomenal content to experiences of freedom.

Second, responses that deny premise (2), and thereby insist that experiences of freedom have exhaustively compatibilist perfect content, are unable to avoid entering into intractable disputes with libertarians about what is presented in experience. By accepting, at least for argument's sake, that what is presented is libertarian in nature, the dual-content view avoids such disputes. *Let* experiences of freedom have libertarian content. That is no threat to compatibilism.⁴⁴

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