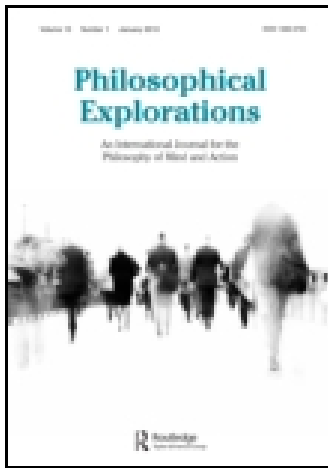


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Is agentic experience compatible with determinism?

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Many philosophers think not only that we are free to act otherwise than we do, but also that we experience being free in this way. Terry Horgan argues that such experience is compatibilist: it is accurate even if determinism is true. According to Horgan, when people judge their experience as incompatibilist, they misinterpret it. While Horgan's position is attractive, it incurs significant theoretical costs. I sketch an alternative way to be a compatibilist about experiences of free agency that avoids these costs. In brief, I assume that experiences of freedom have a sort of phenomenal content that is inaccurate if determinism is true, just as many incompatibilists claim. Still, I argue that these experiences also have another sort of phenomenal content that is normally accurate, even assuming determinism.

Keywords: free will; moral responsibility; determinism; phenomenology; phenomenal content; agentic experience; Horgan; compatibilism; incompatibilism; libertarianism; cognitive penetration; Chalmers

1. Introduction

The waiter offers you ice-cream. 'Chocolate or vanilla?' he asks. Each flavor is delicious, but you know you should only choose one. You hesitate. It feels like you are free to choose vanilla. Yet it also feels like you can refrain from choosing it – say, by choosing chocolate instead. It feels like you are free to do otherwise.

Is this experience accurate, assuming determinism? Many incompatibilists, who think that being free to do otherwise is incompatible with determinism, have thought it is not. They think that we experience having a freedom that is inconsistent with determinism. According to John Searle, for instance, our experience amounts to the feeling that 'we could be doing something else right here and now, that is, all other conditions remaining the same' (1984, 95). Some incompatibilists – the libertarians – even go so far as to maintain that our experience in this regard is evidence that we *possess* an incompatibilist freedom (cf. O'Connor 1995).

Compatibilists think that the freedom to do otherwise is consistent with determinism (Moore 1912; Vihvelin 2004; Fara 2008). If the freedom we experience possessing is compatibilist, then our experience of being free to do otherwise is accurate, assuming determinism. For instance, compatibilists sometimes suggest that we experience freedom conditionally: in the above example, as long as we are free from constraint, coercion, and an addiction to vanilla ice-cream (say), our experience is that we are free to choose chocolate *if* we want (or try) to do so, and similarly regarding vanilla (cf. Mill 1865; Grünbaum

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1952; Nahmias et al. 2004). If that is right, then it undermines a key motivation for libertarianism – the view that being free to do otherwise is inconsistent with determinism, and we have such freedom. After all, if the nature of our experience is compatibilist, then libertarians cannot argue from the incompatibilist nature of experience to our possessing an incompatibilist freedom.

A somewhat different compatibilist strategy is to grant that introspection *seems* to reveal that experience is incompatibilist, yet insist that introspection is not reliable in this domain. Terry Horgan adopts this strategy (2007, 2011, 2012, forthcoming). Horgan agrees that people often *think* that their experience is incompatibilist. However, he argues that even when people judge their experience as incompatibilist, actually it is compatibilist: people *misinterpret* their experience. By spelling out how this happens, Horgan provides an error theory for incompatibilist judgments about experience.

Horgan's compatibilist strategy is attractive and has important theoretical advantages, but it also has disadvantages. After considering Horgan's position, I sketch an alternative way to be a compatibilist about experiences of freedom that avoid these disadvantages. In my view, even if we take people's incompatibilist reports about their experience at face value, and thus grant that such experience has genuinely incompatibilist content, there is still an important respect in which the experience is accurate, assuming determinism.

2. Agentive experience

To forestall any confusion, let me begin by clarifying some terminology. Granting that we actually experience being free to do otherwise, experience-incompatibilists think that this experience is *inaccurate* if determinism is true. Call such experiences libertarian or incompatibilist. Experience-compatibilists think the opposite: the experience might be *accurate*, even assuming determinism. Call such experiences compatibilist. Finally, call the question whether our experience of being free to do otherwise is compatible with determinism (in the way just outlined) the experience-compatibilism question.

I take an experience to be any non-doxastic representational mental state with phenomenal character,¹ where phenomenal character is what-it's-like (or what it feels like) to be in that mental state. An experience's phenomenology is just its phenomenal character. The satisfaction conditions for an experience are its accuracy or veridicality conditions. For any experience, its content yields a veridicality condition: the content specifies how the world must be in order for the experience to be veridical. If a visual experience has the content *squareness*, where this property is attributed to a particular object, then that experience is veridical only if the object in question *is* square. Moreover, I assume a close tie between content and phenomenology, so that an experience's phenomenology shares a veridicality condition with its content. Call this phenomenal content. A visual experience of seeing a red apple will have the phenomenal character *reddishness*, and thus the content that a certain object that one sees – the apple – *is* red. Such content is constitutively determined by the phenomenal character, and it is veridical only if the apple is actually red.

The property of being able to act otherwise is the property of being free in a particular way: it is to possess a specific – not just a general – ability or freedom. General abilities are uncontroversially compatibilist. I might possess a general ability to raise my hand an hour from now, without having the specific ability to exercise it just then, perhaps because I will be asleep. Determinism is compatible with my retaining such unexercised abilities. Only specific abilities are at issue in the question whether freedom is compatible with determinism. Let us characterize this notion as follows. One has the specific ability to do something only if (i) one has a general ability to do it, (ii) one has an opportunity to do it, and (iii)

holding fixed one's motivations at the time (including the exact strengths of one's motivations), one can exercise one's general ability to act in that way at that time. If this is true of more than one option at a time, then one has the specific ability (or freedom) to do otherwise.²

What about agentic experience? For a start, one might wonder whether there *is* such a phenomenon. Even if there is, it is a further question whether properties like *being free to do otherwise* feature in it. One might think that even if people *believe* that they are free to do otherwise, they do not *experience* such freedom. Yet, as we shall see, appeals made by philosophers to experience imply that such properties do feature in experience. I will deal with these two issues in turn.

First, certain disorders of agency speak against the suggestion that agentic experiences in general are reducible to beliefs about agency (cf. Bayne 2008, 185–187, 2011, 360). A patient with anarchic hand syndrome may discover her hand 'doing' things – perhaps against her wishes. She may even describe her hand as 'having a will of its own'. Such a patient's disavowal of her hand's 'actions' is due to the fact that she does not experience its movements as issuing from her own agency. She might come to *believe* that the movements are, in a sense, her own actions (who else's could they be?). Yet this judgment will hardly affect her experience. If that is right, then agentic experiences are not beliefs about agency.³

Even granting that there are agentic experiences, it is a further question whether properties like *being free to do otherwise* feature in them. On one view, the contents of agentic experiences are *sparse* (cf. Bayne 2008, 189–190). On this view, agentic experiences merely represent one as acting, controlling one's action, and acting with effort (cf. Horgan, forthcoming; Bayne 2008, 190–192). An opposing view takes the contents of agentic experiences to be relatively *rich*. For example, they also represent one as being the source of one's actions and one's actions as being free – including in the sense that one is free to do otherwise.⁴

At any rate, the way in which many people describe their agentic experience indicates that they experience being free to do otherwise, and such beliefs drive a good deal of philosophical theorizing about free will. Indeed, many philosophers take it as a basic insight that being free to do otherwise is central to the notion of human freedom, and our possessing such freedom is confirmed by our phenomenology of deliberation and choice. This goes for both compatibilists and incompatibilists, as noted earlier.⁵

Finally, there is recent experimental evidence indicating that it is not just philosophers who report experiences of being free to do otherwise, ordinary people report such experiences as well. In a series of experiments conducted by Deery, Bedke, and Nichols (2013), participants were asked to decide between two options (for instance, two charities) and were asked whether, as they faced their decision, they experienced being free to choose either option. In these experiments, every effort was made to ensure that participants attended to their relevant experience (if any). Over 91% of participants reported an experience of being free to choose either way, where it was left open for them to interpret such freedom however they wished. This result supports the claim that these participants had an experience of being free to do otherwise.

Furthermore, participants in these studies went on to judge their experience as incompatibilist when the notion of determinism was explained to them. Following a series of comprehension checks, participants were asked whether the experience they had earlier reported having was consistent with determinism. Across a range of conditions, participants said it was not. Whether participants merely imagined making a choice or actually made a choice, whether the choice was morally salient or not, or whether the choice was present-focused or

retrospective, participants reported an experience of being free to choose otherwise that is inconsistent with determinism. Apparently, people not only experience being free to do otherwise, but they also report that this experience is inaccurate if determinism is true. This offers at least *prima facie* evidence in favor of experience-incompatibilism, evidence that must be addressed by compatibilists.⁶

For compatibilists, these results are problematic for at least two reasons. First, if a compatibilist theory of freedom fails to capture the experience of being free to do otherwise, then it is not clear whether the theory is explaining the right phenomenon. It seems plausible that the freedom the theory explains should be the one that people report experiencing. Second, if all experiences of being free to do otherwise are illusory, assuming determinism, this leaves us with no way of distinguishing – *just in terms of the accuracy conditions of our phenomenology* – illusory experiences of freedom from experiences we normally judge as accurate. Imagine that you wake at night and consider switching on the light. As you lie there, you experience being free to switch on the light, or to refrain from doing so – for instance, by intentionally remaining motionless. Surely, we want to distinguish this case from one in which, unbeknownst to you, you have been paralyzed by a drug, yet still you experience being free to switch on the light or to refrain from doing so. If all your experiences of being free to do otherwise are illusory *because* determinism is true, then there is no compatibilist way to make sense of the idea that your experience in the first case is accurate in exactly the way it is not in the second. Granting that we experience being incompatibilistically free, we are left with the verdict that the content of our phenomenology in each case makes such experiences illusory, assuming determinism. One might avoid this verdict if the experience had compatibilist content – for instance, if it were best described in terms of conditional freedom. Yet, as we have seen, this goes against the evidence. Moreover, for the reasons given a moment ago, compatibilists cannot insist that the experience is theoretically unimportant. Compatibilists need an alternative strategy.

Terry Horgan proposes just such a strategy. Horgan agrees that the relevant experience is theoretically important, and he agrees that many people have a strong tendency to report that their experience is incompatibilist. However, he argues that even when people judge their experience of freedom as incompatibilist, actually it is compatibilist: people misinterpret the experience. By spelling out how this happens, Horgan provides an error theory for incompatibilist judgments about experience. If Horgan is right, then participants' reports in the study mentioned a moment ago may well be in error.

A contrary possibility – which Horgan rejects, yet which I maintain is a live option for compatibilists to endorse – is that experiences of freedom are genuinely incompatibilist, and perhaps result from the cognitive penetration of agentive experience. Roughly, cognitive penetration occurs when one's phenomenology is altered in certain ways by one's cognitive states. If experiences of freedom are cognitively penetrated, then even if their phenomenal content is initially compatibilist (as Horgan claims it is), that does not mean that it *remains* compatibilist. Incompatibilist beliefs might shape the compatibilist phenomenology, making it incompatibilist. Although I claim that this should not be worrisome to compatibilists, there are two *prima facie* reasons for thinking that it is not worrisome that I reject.

First, if – so to speak – the cognitive tail is wagging the experiential dog in these cases, then this might be thought less worrisome to compatibilists than if the relevant experience were *inherently* incompatibilist. Compatibilists can simply grant that certain (mistaken) beliefs result in inaccurate experience, yet insist that the experience can be altered to be accurate once these beliefs are corrected. However, it is not clear that such correction will always (or even ever) be possible. Let me explain.

One's visual experience of two lines appearing to be of different lengths in a Müller–Lyer illusion is not altered by one's (correct) belief that they are in fact of the same length. Similarly (as we saw earlier), the fact that a patient with anarchic hand syndrome forms the explicit belief that her hand's movements are (in some sense) her own actions will hardly affect her alienated experience of their *not* being hers (cf. Bayne 2008, 185–187, 2011, 360). Of course, such examples merely show that phenomenology is not *as* responsive, or responsive *in the same way*, to beliefs as other beliefs are (cf. Macpherson 2012, 30). Still, even if we grant that experiences of freedom have a phenomenal content, P, that is in fact incompatibilist and results from cognitive penetration, such content does not have to be caused by an explicit belief. It might instead be caused by an implicit background belief, and in such a way that the experience is generated automatically. For instance, there is evidence that susceptibility to the Müller–Lyer illusion depends on whether one has grown up in a 'carpentered' environment – in other words, an environment that contains numerous right angles (McCauley and Henrich 2006). The idea is that people who grow up in such environments form implicit background beliefs about the typical relationships of angles where three straight lines converge, and these implicit beliefs affect their visual experience. Similarly, experiences of freedom may be affected by implicit background beliefs, and in such a way that these experiences will be difficult, if not impossible, to alter.

Finally, compatibilists may think that even if experiences of freedom are cognitively penetrated, and thus many people end up with (perhaps unalterably) incompatibilist experience, people's experience *beforehand* was compatibilist. This may be so.⁷ Yet agents for whom this is the case will nevertheless have genuinely non-veridical experience (under the assumption that determinism is true). To grant that much, for the experience-compatibilist, seems to give the game away.

In Section 3, I sketch Horgan's view, then in Sections 4 and 5, I outline its theoretical disadvantages. After considering Horgan's position, I sketch an alternative way to be a compatibilist about experiences of freedom that avoids these theoretical costs. I argue that even if we take people's incompatibilist reports about their experience at face value, and thereby grant both that *introspection reliably latches onto the phenomenal content of such experience* and that *such content is rich enough to be incompatibilist*, there is still an important respect in which the experience is compatibilist: it is veridical even if determinism is true.

3. Horgan's view

According to Horgan, people's incompatibilist reports about their experiences of freedom are in error. Of course, incompatibilist experience might be mistaken in the sense of being non-veridical. Yet Horgan suggests a way in which people might be mistaken *about* their experiences – that is, they might misinterpret them. Horgan concedes that people often judge their experiences of freedom as incompatibilist. For instance, he says,

When one attends introspectively to one's agentic phenomenology, with its ... [representational] ... aspects of freedom ... and when one simultaneously asks reflectively whether the veridicality of this phenomenology is compatible with causal determinism ... , one feels some tendency to judge that the answer to such compatibility questions is No. (Horgan, [forthcoming](#))

Horgan thinks that while introspection is reliable in some domains, introspective judgments about whether one's agentic experience is compatible with determinism are unreliable

(2011, 2012, forthcoming). He begins by distinguishing between two sorts of introspection: (1) *attentive introspection*, which involves ‘paying attention to certain aspects of one’s current experience’, and (2) *judgmental introspection*, which involves ‘forming a judgment about the nature of one’s current experience’ (Horgan, forthcoming). The kind of content on which we attentively introspect is ‘presentational content’, which is

... the kind that accrues to phenomenology directly – apart from whether or not one has the capacity to articulate this content linguistically and understand what one is thus articulating, and apart from whether or not one has the kind of sophisticated conceptual repertoire that would be required to understand such an articulation. (Horgan, forthcoming)

This is the sort of content about which we make judgments when we judgmentally introspect.

In judgmental introspection, we attend to certain aspects of our experience, and then form a judgment about them. Thus, ‘Judgmental introspection . . . deploys attentive introspection, while also generating a judgment about what is being attended to’ (2011, 84). There is no appearance/reality gap when we attentively introspect. However, in judgmentally introspecting on our experience it turns out that we can go wrong: we may be subject to a ‘labeling fallacy’ (2012, 408–409). For instance, we might make a performance error in applying the ordinary judgmental concept ‘red’ to our experience of redness: we might mistakenly apply the ordinary concept ‘green’. In Horgan’s parlance, we might ‘mislabel’ the phenomenology. Presumably, this hardly (if) ever happens. Thus, while attentive introspection is infallible, judgmental introspection about color experience is not quite infallible, although it nearly is.⁸

Horgan thinks that our judgments about agentive experience are not like this. It is not merely that our judgments are fallible; *they are not reliable at all* – at least when it comes to our experience of freedom and whether it is compatible with determinism. For a start, answering this question goes beyond what attentive introspection is capable of. The question can *only* be answered by means of judgmental introspection, and this process is ill-qualified for the task. Horgan thinks that when we try to answer the compatibility question by judgmentally introspecting, we find that we are unable to arrive at a reliable answer, even though the question is about the character of our introspectively available experiences of freedom.⁹ It is not simply that we are subject to the occasional labeling fallacy. Rather, we cannot reliably tell what the answer to the compatibility question *is* simply by judgmentally introspecting.

According to Horgan, there are good reasons for this, which I outline in a moment. Nevertheless, he admits that there are ‘sophisticated philosophers’ who think that there is what he calls a ‘read-offable’ incompatibilist answer to the compatibility question about the experience of being able to do otherwise, ‘since they have said so to me in philosophical discussion. And I confess to experiencing some temptation to think so myself, as I suspect you the reader do too – a temptation that needs explaining’ (2012, 416). To this end, Horgan offers a two-part debunking explanation for incompatibilist judgments about experience. First, Horgan suggests a way in which we might introspectively confabulate. Second, he tells a contextualist story about the application conditions of the notion of freedom, which also applies to judgments about *experiences* of freedom. I will take these in turn.

First, Horgan suggests that if we think we can tell by introspection that our experience is incompatible with determinism, this may reflect a form of ‘introspective confabulation’. It is one thing to know (A) by introspection:

(A) My experience does *not* present my behavior *as* determined by my prior states.

Yet it is another thing to know (B) by introspecting on phenomenology:

(B) My experience presents my behavior *as not* determined by my prior states.

Horgan admits that we can ascertain whether (A) is true by introspecting. However, (B) is distinct from (A), and we cannot ascertain whether (B) is true by introspection. Even if (B) were true, we could not know this by judgmentally introspecting on experience. When we judge our experience as incompatibilist, and thereby assert (B), either we are mistakenly inferring (B) from (A), or simply conflating (A) and (B).

Although Horgan maintains that we cannot decide whether our experience is compatible with determinism by introspection, he claims that our experience has compatibilist satisfaction conditions. For one thing, he thinks that many non-human animals have free-agency phenomenology, and thus it is appropriate to consider what the evolutionary purpose of such phenomenology might be. Its purpose, he conjectures, is to enable many agentive creatures (both human and non-human) to track – in experientially salient ways – the kinds of options that exist for them as alternatives for action at a time, and in such a way that these are picked out against a backdrop of phenomena that they experience themselves as powerless to affect. In this way, agents not only (i) experience voluntary actions differently from externally caused bodily motions, but also (ii) experientially identify features of the environment that are amenable to influence by their bodily motions – that is, motions ‘that can be internally generated by the creature’s inner motion-control mechanisms’ (forthcoming). As Horgan puts it, ‘For such potential bodily motions, the anticipatory-freedom phenomenology of “I can” (vis-à-vis those potential bodily motions) will be beneficial’ to agentive creatures like us (forthcoming). For Horgan, these experiences are compatibilist, since incompatibilist veridicality conditions that go beyond those needed to track such differences would serve no useful purpose. As a result, ‘it is very likely that actual agentive phenomenology simply does not have incompatibilist satisfaction conditions’ (forthcoming).¹⁰

In addition, Horgan maintains that the *notion* of being free to do otherwise has compatibilist satisfaction conditions, and therefore the compatibilist veridicality conditions of experiences of freedom ‘coincide’ with those of the ordinary notion. This is important since it bears on the second part of Horgan’s two-part debunking explanation of incompatibilist judgments about experiences of freedom, as I now explain.

Part of why Horgan thinks the ordinary notion of freedom is compatibilist is that people appear to be competent in applying this notion in ordinary contexts – for instance, when they distinguish free from unfree actions (e.g. where agents are coerced at gunpoint, or are subject to irresistible addictions, and so on). Here, people apply the relevant notion of freedom without considering the thesis of determinism. Compatibilism accommodates such judgments easily, by enabling them to come out true even assuming determinism. By contrast, incompatibilism requires that a more stringent condition be met, namely, that indeterminism (at a minimum) be true. Horgan thinks that we should prefer compatibilism to incompatibilism since other things being equal ‘one hypothesis is better than another if it accommodates the attributional practices of competent users of the relevant concept better than the other’ (forthcoming).

This is important because it sets up the second part of Horgan’s two-part explanation of incompatibilist judgments about experience. Here, Horgan has a contextualist story to tell

about the application conditions of the notion of freedom, which also applies to judgments about our *experience* of freedom:

I maintain that many concepts that figure importantly in philosophical problems are governed by implicit, contextually variable, semantic parameters – and that some forms of philosophical puzzlement arise largely because (i) posing a philosophical problem can tend to shift the implicit parameters toward settings under which the claims made using a given concept are more ‘demanding’ in their truth conditions than the claims that would normally be made using that concept, and (ii) one tends not to notice this shift of the ‘score in the language game’ when one is contemplating the philosophical problem. . . . I maintain that the very posing of the question whether human freedom is compatible with . . . determinism tends to alter the contextually operative settings on certain implicit semantic parameters that govern the concept *freedom* – and tends to drive those parameter settings so high that, in the newly created context, no item of behavior that is . . . determined counts as *free*. (Horgan 2007, 21–22)

Horgan grants that such contextual parameters do not apply to agentic phenomenology. After all, he thinks that non-human animals share with us an ‘anticipatory-freedom phenomenology’ (forthcoming), despite the fact that their mental content is not governed by contextual semantic parameters. Even so, when we introspect on our experience of freedom while asking ourselves whether it is compatible with determinism, Horgan thinks that our judgment get ‘infected’ by the same scorekeeping confusion that occurs when we ask the compatibility question about determinism and the ordinary notion of being free to do otherwise.

4. Problems with Horgan’s view

Even if we grant Horgan’s hypothesis about introspective confabulation, more needs to be said about how this mistake occurs. For example, Shaun Nichols notes that generally people do not make this sort of mistake when it comes to headaches: ‘the phenomenology of headaches doesn’t present us with a set of deterministic headache-causes, but we don’t leap to indeterminist conclusions there’ (2012, 296). In other words, we do not mistakenly infer from the claim that our experience does *not* present our headache *as* determined the further claim that we experience our headache *as not* determined. Thus, Horgan needs to say how the phenomenology of deliberation is relevantly different from that of headaches. This requirement is a theoretical cost of Horgan’s view, which the alternative position that I sketch in Section 6 does not incur, since my view does not claim that incompatibilist judgments about experience are mistaken. Of course, I need to say something about the *source* of incompatibilist experiences, whereas Horgan does not. Yet my position has resources in this regard, as I outline later in this section.

Note too that Horgan’s proposal is backward-looking, since it focuses on our introspective access to the causes of our decisions. By contrast, deliberation and action-planning are importantly forward-looking. When we face decisions, our focus is not the causal antecedents of our decision, but rather the alternatives with which we are presented and our sense of being free to decide between them. These are some of the aspects of experience that libertarians most often cite as incompatibilist, and they are also of concern to compatibilists. When we focus on the future, the content of our experience is presumably not that our behavior is not determined by our prior states and the laws of nature, since for one thing our experience does not concern the laws of nature. More plausibly, our experience has a content, P, that is in fact incompatibilist, where P is something like *openness to the*

future. Notably, even some compatibilists grant that our experience of such openness is non-veridical if determinism is true. For instance, Keith Lehrer claims that when it comes to his own sense of openness to the future, the incompatibilist ‘accurately describes what I find by introspecting, and I cannot believe that others do not find the same’ (1960, 150). And such a paradigmatic compatibilist as Hume (1739) agrees with this sentiment when he writes, ‘There is a false . . . experience . . . of the liberty of indifference’ (Bk. II, Part III, §II). This feeling of openness has been characterized by the (semi-)compatibilist John Fischer as like a ‘Garden of Forking Paths’, with each branching path ahead of one seemingly a realizable extension of the actual present into the future (Fischer 1994, 190). Fischer thinks that being free to do otherwise is *incompatible* with determinism, since determinism entails that there is only one relevantly possible extension of the present into the future. For Horgan, however, determinism does not have this consequence. Although Horgan thinks that experiences of freedom are aptly described by metaphors like ‘Garden of Forking Paths’, and he agrees that libertarian descriptions of agentive experience are phenomenologically apt, he nonetheless thinks that it remains open whether the satisfaction conditions of such experience are compatibilist. However, his position does not speak adequately to this view of what the content of such experience amounts to, and this is a further theoretical cost of his view since there is at least *prima facie* reason to think that what it amounts to entails indeterminism. By contrast, my position avoids incurring this cost by granting (at least *arguendo*) that experiences of freedom have libertarian content, yet still might be veridical if determinism is true.

If that is right, then I need to explain how experiences of freedom get to have incompatibilist content, and – since I am defending compatibilism – I must do so in a way that prevents the libertarian from appealing to such content in order to justify belief in libertarianism. As it turns out, there is a way to do this.

Recall the possibility mentioned in Section 2, namely that experiences of freedom may have libertarian content as a result of cognitive penetration, where such penetration occurs when the phenomenal character of one’s experience is altered in certain ways by one’s cognitive states – for instance, by one’s implicit background beliefs. Although controversial, there is considerable evidence that cognitive penetration occurs in cases of visual perception (Delk and Fillenbaum 1965; Levin and Banaji 2006).¹¹ Something similar may also happen in agentive experience. For instance, implicit background beliefs might influence the character of experiences of freedom. Indeed, Horgan seems to recognize this possibility, and he notes that the distinction between phenomenal and judgmental content is not always sharp: ‘it may well be that the two kinds of content can interpenetrate to a substantial extent, at least in creatures as sophisticated as humans’ (*forthcoming*). As a result, even if one’s phenomenal content is initially compatibilist, that does not mean that it remains so. Incompatibilist background beliefs might shape the ‘presentational’ content.

Although there is no definitive evidence of cognitive penetration occurring in agentive experience, certain considerations suggest it is likely. First, if penetration occurs in visual experience, then it is at least a plausible hypothesis that it also occurs in agentive experience. Second, there is recent evidence that background beliefs about determinism and free will have measurable effects on people’s behavior in experimental settings. Thus, if penetration does occur in agentive experience, these background beliefs are likely to influence *experiences* too. Recent studies show, for instance, that priming participants to believe determinism results in their cheating more (Vohs and Schooler 2008), while priming them to believe that neural mechanism is true results in their punishing others less than when they believe that people possess whatever sort of freedom is (for the participants) undermined by neural mechanism – presumably libertarian free will (Shariff, Greene, and Schooler

in preparation). This suggests that background beliefs about determinism or libertarian freedom might well influence people's *experiences* of freedom.

At any rate, it would be theoretically advantageous for a compatibilist view about the experience of freedom to be consistent with the possibility that such experience is penetrated by incompatibilist background beliefs. Horgan's position is not consistent, whereas the alternative position that I sketch in Section 6 *is* consistent. Indeed, the possibility that experiences of freedom are penetrated by incompatibilist beliefs *helps* my view, by positing an explanation for these experiences' assumed incompatibilist content. Further, if the right etiological story to tell about the source of such content is a cognitive-penetration story, then that would prevent the libertarian from legitimately appealing to experiences (as) of freedom in order to justify her belief in libertarian agency. Believing does not make it so, even if it causes one to *experience* it as being so. Therefore, libertarians must justify their beliefs somehow else.¹²

5. Problems with Horgan's contextualism

There is also a problem with Horgan's contextualist proposal, which is that global worries about whether we are free – even in the sense of being free to do otherwise – can arise even when contextual parameters are normal. If that is right, then Horgan's claim that such worries only arise when we raise the parameters beyond their normal settings and explicitly ask the compatibility question is false. Rather, it seems that our competence in applying the relevant notion of freedom is such that it might enable us to *answer* the compatibility question, and do so reliably. That, in turn, would undermine Horgan's claim that incompatibilist judgments about experiences of freedom result from a scorekeeping confusion.

On the sort of contextualism that Horgan adopts, 'can' (or 'is able to') may be used with varying degrees of stringency. According to David Lewis:

To say that something can happen means that its happening is compossible with certain facts. Which facts? That is determined, but sometimes not determined well enough, by context. An ape can't speak a human language – say, Finnish – but I can. Facts about the anatomy and operation of the ape's larynx and nervous system are not compossible with his speaking Finnish. But don't take me along to Helsinki as your interpreter: I can't speak Finnish. My speaking Finnish is compossible with the facts considered so far, but not with further facts about my lack of training. What I can do, relevant to one set of facts, I cannot do, relative to another, more inclusive set. Whenever the context leaves it open which facts are to count as relevant, it is possible to equivocate about whether I can speak Finnish. (1986, 77)

Lewis's view is contextualist since the meaning of 'can' does not, by itself, determine which facts are relevant; the additionally relevant facts are determined by context. While all uses of 'can' share a common semantic element – they express compatibility with certain facts – the precise meaning of a particular use depends on something else, which Lewis calls 'context', and which we can take to be *whatever additional facts determine the precise meaning of a particular use of 'can'*. Therefore, 'S can A' means that S's A-ing is compatible with certain facts, where the relevant facts depend on the stringency with which 'can' is used. The sense in which determinism makes it impossible for someone to do anything other than what she does is this: given the actual history and laws, it is not physically possible for her to do anything else. A similar contextualist line can be run for claims about being free to do otherwise.

Horgan maintains that we go beyond the limits of our competence when it comes to applying notions like *being free to do otherwise*, at least while assuming determinism.

Yet, worries about whether we are free can arise even when contextual parameters are *not* limit-case, as they are when we ask the compatibility question.

Consider a case made famous by Harry Frankfurt (1969). Black – a neurosurgeon – wants Jones to choose A, and can intervene to control Jones’s brain processes should Jones be about to choose B. Yet Black prefers not to intervene unnecessarily. Instead, he waits to see how Jones will choose on his own. Jones is unaware of Black’s presence. Frankfurt claims that Jones lacks alternative possibilities in the case, and thus the freedom to do otherwise. However, if Jones chooses A on his own he seems responsible for his choice, even though he has no alternative given that Black is ready to intervene to control his brain processes.

Now assume that Jones’s choosing A is choosing to kill Smith. A natural response is to ask whether it is reasonable to expect that Jones have done something else instead, given that the conditions in which he found himself ruled out any alternative – and this despite the fact that these conditions play no role in why Jones *does* kill Smith (cf. Widerker 2006). If we think it reasonable to expect that Jones not have killed Smith, it seems we have located a conflict in our thinking about how to apply the notion of freedom. On one hand, if we consider the case just by focusing on the intervener, without ever considering determinism, we might want to grant – given that Black did not intervene – that Jones freely killed Smith. After all, he killed Smith on his own. On the other hand, it is unclear whether it is reasonable to expect that Jones have done something else instead. Recall, he was not free to do otherwise. Did Jones freely kill Smith? Perhaps we do not know. Have we illicitly raised the contextual parameters governing application of the relevant notion of freedom? It is not clear that we have. Once we point out that determinism is meant to function in the same way as Black, by blocking the availability of alternatives and thus blocking his freedom to do otherwise, we have generated a global worry according to the ordinary standards governing application of the notion of freedom. The standards are ordinary since they do not invoke determinism, yet if Black functions in the same way as determinism, then all we have to do in order to generate a global worry is to imagine that there is *always* a figure like Black lurking in the background whenever anyone deliberates about doing anything.¹³

If global worries about whether we are free can arise from our competence in applying the relevant notion of freedom, even when parameter settings are normal, then Horgan’s contextualist move proves doubtful. As a result, it is not clear that any scorekeeping confusion *does* occur when we raise the parameters and explicitly ask the compatibility question about experiences of freedom. We may simply be exhibiting our competence in applying the relevant notion in that context as well.

I suggest that people’s incompatibilist judgments about their experience of freedom are at least *prima facie* evidence of the actual nature of the phenomenal content of that experience. Thus, we would need some positive reason, other than the hypotheses canvassed by Horgan, to think that people systematically misinterpret the nature of such experience. Of course, if Horgan were right that judgmental introspection is unable to provide a reliable answer to the experience-compatibilism question, then we would indeed require an error theory to explain why people make these judgments. In that case, Horgan’s contextualist hypothesis would be preferable to the alternative hypothesis, namely, that such judgments are accurate and competent (as they simply could not be). Yet, given the considerations that count against Horgan’s view, his contextualist error theory looks doubtful. That is, it is unclear whether Horgan’s contextualist hypothesis fares better than the alternative hypothesis that agents are competent and in normal contexts when they judge their experience as inaccurate if determinism is true.

6. An alternative compatibilist proposal

In this section, I outline an alternative compatibilist proposal, which takes incompatibilist reports about the experience of freedom at face value. The trick for compatibilists is to argue that agentive experience has two sorts of phenomenal content, and thus two associated veridicality conditions. Even granting (at least *arguendo*) that people's introspective reports about their experience are incompatibilist and reliably latch onto phenomenology, there may still be a respect in which the experience is veridical, assuming determinism.

Recall that for any experience, its phenomenal content yields a veridicality condition: the content specifies how the world must be in order for the experience to be veridical. If the experience has two sorts of phenomenal content, then it has two associated veridicality conditions. Now take agentive experience. Perhaps our experience of being free to do otherwise has two sorts of phenomenal content. According to one of these, we would have to be libertarian agents for our experience to be accurate. Yet perhaps this very experience also has another sort of phenomenal content, which is usually veridical under determinism.

Consider an analogy. On what might be called a pre-Newtonian view of colors, we experience colors as primitive properties of objects, spread out over their surfaces.¹⁴ When we see a red apple, what is presented to us in phenomenology is that a certain object, the apple, has a certain simple property, redness, spread out over its surface. This property seems irreducible: the apple's redness does not seem, at least in phenomenology, to consist in any more fundamental property – for instance, a microphysical or dispositional property, or some unspecified property that plays a causal role in generating our visual experience. The apple just seems primitively *red*. David Chalmers (2006) calls this *perfect* content.¹⁵ Of course, as Newton and Galileo first saw, such a view is false. Physics tells us that apples are not red (or green) in anything like the way we experience them as being. For physicists like Newton and Galileo, as well as for philosophers like John Locke, the result of this discovery was counterintuitive: *there are no colors*. Thus, all our experiences of colors are non-veridical. This not only leaves us with no way of distinguishing red from green, but also with no way of distinguishing – just in terms of the veridicality conditions of phenomenology – illusory (or hallucinatory) color experiences from experiences we normally think are veridical. As I outline in a moment, Chalmers proposes a novel way of escaping this unsatisfactory situation.

Now consider agentive experience. Let us grant that when we experience being free to do otherwise our phenomenology presents us as being indeterministically free. Similarly, let us grant that this property does not seem, at least in phenomenology, to be any more fundamental property. It just seems experientially that we are free to do otherwise, and in such a way that requires the falsity of determinism to be accurate. Call this *libertarian* content. If the phenomenal content of our experience is libertarian, this has the result that all our experiences of being free to do otherwise are illusory, assuming determinism. This leaves compatibilists with no way of distinguishing – just in terms of the veridicality conditions of phenomenology – illusory experiences of freedom from experiences we normally think are accurate. Recall our example from earlier: you wake at night, consider switching on the light, and experience yourself as free to switch it on or to refrain from doing so. What we wanted was a way of appropriately distinguishing this case from one in which you have been paralyzed by a drug, yet still you experience being free. If *all* your experiences of freedom are illusory *because* determinism is true, then compatibilists cannot make sense of the idea that your experience in the first case is veridical in exactly the way that it is

not in the second, since the phenomenology in each case is the same. This, too, is unsatisfactory.

Before I outline my compatibilist proposal for agentic experience, let me first outline Chalmers's proposal for color experiences. Chalmers argues that in addition to perfect content there is also another sort of phenomenal content that makes color experiences veridical, at least in the right sorts of cases. This content differentiates illusory color experiences from experiences we think are veridical. Chalmers calls this *ordinary* content. Crucially, perfect content functions as a regulative ideal in picking out the ordinary content. That is, for an experience of seeing a color to be perfectly veridical, we would have to live in a world in which colors are primitive properties of objects. The best that we can do in our world, however, is to have the experience be caused by whatever properties actually play the role that such primitive properties *would* play in a pre-Newtonian world. Even though no property can play this role perfectly, some property (or properties) may be able to play it well enough by being the normal cause of our relevant experience. This condition *constitutes* the ordinary phenomenal content of experiences of seeing colors. Of course, ordinary content does not yield, by itself, an adequate account of the phenomenal content of experiences of seeing colors, since it does not capture how things seem to us phenomenologically. As a result, Chalmers suggests that color experiences have two sorts of phenomenal content: ordinary *and* perfect. Perfect content captures our color phenomenology, while also serving to pick out the ordinary content by being its regulative ideal, while ordinary content allows us to make the kinds of distinctions we want to make between illusory experiences and experiences we think are veridical.¹⁶

A similar story can be told for experiences of freedom. Such experiences plausibly have two sorts of phenomenal content, and so two associated veridicality conditions. First, they have libertarian content, which captures how things seem phenomenologically. Second, they have another phenomenal content that enables us to distinguish illusory from veridical experiences. This is *compatibilist* content. Analogously with the color case, libertarian content functions as a regulative ideal in picking out compatibilist content.¹⁷ That is, for an experience of freedom to be perfectly veridical, we would need to possess libertarian freedom. The best that we can do in a deterministic world, however, is to have our experience undergirded by whatever properties actually play the role in such a world that libertarian properties *would* play in a libertarian world. Experiences of freedom are veridical once they are undergirded by the properties that normally undergird them (under normal conditions).¹⁸ This condition *constitutes* the compatibilist phenomenal content of experiences of freedom. Of course, compatibilist content fails to capture how things appear phenomenologically, on the assumption they appear indeterministic. Thus, I suggest that experiences of freedom have two sorts of phenomenal content: compatibilist *and* libertarian. Libertarian content captures the phenomenology, while also serving to pick out the compatibilist content by being its regulative ideal. Compatibilist content makes our normal experiences of freedom veridical.

Do the properties that undergird experiences of freedom play, well enough, the role that libertarian properties would play in a libertarian world? For instance, one might think that resentment is inappropriate unless libertarian content is veridical. In that case, one might wonder whether agents are morally responsible.

Certainly, more needs to be said about how compatibilist properties are supposed to play the role required of them by my view. That is a task for another day. Regarding the specific worry about responsibility, let me say this. The sort of control required for moral responsibility was traditionally thought to be the freedom to do otherwise. Many philosophers have now abandoned this idea. 'Sourcehood' theorists claim instead that an agent

must be the *source* (in some relevant sense) of her actions in order to be responsible for them, where this does not entail the freedom to do otherwise.¹⁹ Call the control condition on responsibility *moral freedom*, and the freedom to do otherwise *modal freedom*.²⁰ Even if moral freedom does not require modal freedom – and some compatibilists continue to maintain that it does (Vihvelin 2004; Fara 2008) – the question whether modal freedom is compatible with determinism presses on us in its own right. By analogy, consider our interest in personal identity. One reason personal identity matters to us is because of its relevance for responsibility. We want to know what the criteria are for an agent's remaining the same person over time since we want to be able to connect the person whom we hold responsible today for a crime committed yesterday to the same person (according to the criteria) who committed that crime yesterday. Yet that is not the only reason we are interested in personal identity. We also want to know whether we are the kind of creature we believe ourselves to be. It may turn out that there are no viable criteria for personal identity. Such an answer would impact what we believe about ourselves, and may undermine a view of ourselves that we value, independently of any further considerations to do with responsibility. Similarly, modal freedom matters to us independently of moral freedom. If we are not free to do otherwise, then that would impact what we believe about ourselves, and may undermine a view of ourselves that we value, perhaps deeply, quite apart from any further considerations to do with responsibility. In this paper, I am concerned with modal freedom considered independently of moral freedom. The compatibilist properties that undergird compatibilist phenomenal content need only support such freedom. I leave it open whether modal freedom is necessary for moral freedom, while noting that concerns about responsibility only arise if it *is* necessary. And there is reason to think it is not (cf. Frankfurt 1969).

Relatedly, if people experience freedom, then ideally we should want to do justice to whatever the presentational content of such experience amounts to. Horgan's view does this, since for him the presentational content is compatibilist. My view does not, since I grant the content is libertarian. In fact, however, Horgan and I are in the same boat here: if presentational content is libertarian, then it is non-veridical under the assumption of determinism *on each of our views*. Moreover, Horgan and I are also in the same boat regarding compatibilist presentational content, since my view can also do justice to such content: if presentational content is compatibilist, then on my view compatibilist *perfect* content will serve as the regulative ideal for compatibilist *ordinary* content, which in this case will match the former content exactly. Even so, I grant that Horgan's view may be preferable to mine on grounds of simplicity, at least if presentational content is compatibilist. Nevertheless, my view will comprise the best fallback position for the experience-compatibilist to adopt in the event that presentational content is libertarian.

This last consideration points to a reason for *preferring* my view over Horgan's. Presumably, we want our experiences of freedom to be veridical. It would be disturbing if all our judgments about our experiences of freedom were mistaken, simply because determinism is true. Yet that is what Horgan's view entails if such experiences' presentational content is libertarian. By contrast, my view saves our judgments, since it permits us to say that such experiences are importantly veridical, even if determinism is true. Relatedly, it cannot count as a consideration in favor of Horgan's view (over mine) that my notion of a compatibilist satisfaction condition does not require that what is presented in phenomenology *be* implemented *as* presented. After all, when applied to Horgan's view this condition would plausibly require that we experience our decisions *as determined*. Yet that is not how we experience them.²¹

7. Conclusion

The proposal I have sketched needs to be worked out in greater detail. Yet even in rough outline it exhibits some attractive features. On the assumption that people experience being free to do otherwise, even if these experiences have libertarian phenomenal content there is still wiggle-room for compatibilists to argue that they are normally veridical, assuming determinism. This enables compatibilists to appropriately distinguish illusory from veridical experiences of freedom. My proposal also blocks the libertarian move of justifying belief in libertarianism by appeal to the phenomenal content of experiences of freedom, at least if such content results from the cognitive penetration of experience by background incompatibilist beliefs. Experiences of freedom may well have content that is non-veridical under the assumption of determinism, just as libertarians claim. Yet that is no threat to compatibilism.

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Notes

1. I say ‘non-doxastic’ since some people think that doxastic states such as judgments (which are representational states) also have phenomenal character (Bayne and Montague 2011).
2. This characterization is neutral on the compatibility question. (i) and (ii) are obviously neutral. The point of contention is (iii). Incompatibilists think we satisfy (iii) only if determinism is false. Some compatibilists may not accept (iii), since they think that worlds with different pasts and laws than the actual world are relevant to judging whether agents can do otherwise in the actual world, whereas (iii) says that only worlds with the same pasts and laws are relevant. Yet unless we characterize specific ability so as to include (iii), it is difficult to see how compatibilists and incompatibilists are disagreeing.
3. Bayne claims that such cases show that agentive experiences are not influenced by cognitive states (2011, 360). I discuss this issue later in this section.
4. See Bayne (2008) for discussion of this issue.
5. In addition to those mentioned earlier, many others grant that we experience being free to do otherwise; e.g. Hume (1739), C. A. Campbell (1951), Lehrer (1960), Ginet (1997), Nahmias et al. (2004), and Holton (2006).
6. The claim that these participants’ experiences are incompatibilist is controversial, since Horgan’s claim – as we shall see – is precisely that people misinterpret their experience. By contrast, I claim that even if such experiences are incompatibilist in a certain respect, they might be accurate in another respect, assuming determinism. Horgan and I agree that people often report having incompatibilist experiences. We differ in how each of us makes this fact fit with compatibilism.
7. If penetration occurs analogously to the hypothesized penetration of visual experience in Müller–Lyer illusions, it will not be clear *when* the experience was compatibilist; that will depend on how and when the relevant background beliefs were formed.
8. Horgan argues (Horgan 2012; cf. Horgan and Kriegel 2008) that there are cases where we are immune even from labeling fallacies – e.g. when we judge that ‘*this* experience has *this* feature’. Such judgments are infallible. These cases do not concern me here.
9. This is despite the fact that, for Horgan, experiences of freedom have intrinsic, determinate satisfaction conditions that are compatibilist, as I outline shortly. However, such compatibility is a ‘non-manifest’ feature of the experiences (Horgan also allows that such experiences may have wide satisfaction conditions.)
10. Moreover, Horgan thinks that a ‘useful illusion’ hypothesis has no purchase here, given the introspective non-manifestness of answers to compatibility questions about determinism and the experience of freedom.

11. See also Macpherson (2012) for an excellent discussion of this phenomenon.
12. If experiences of freedom *are* cognitively penetrated by background incompatibilist beliefs, then libertarian beliefs cannot (at least straightforwardly) be justified by incompatibilist experiences, since such an explanation would threaten circularity.
13. Does Black function like determinism? Libertarians deny that Black blocks alternatives, though they grant that determinism does. However, Black plausibly blocks the sorts of alternatives that are required for the freedom to do otherwise. Even if indeterminism offers Jones a ‘flicker of freedom’ (cf. Fischer 1994, Ch. 7), such a flicker is not robust enough to underwrite the freedom that might plausibly be required for moral responsibility. The central point is that while alternatives (of some sort – without begging the question on the compatibility issue) may be necessary for the freedom to do otherwise, they are insufficient for it. Conversely, compatibilists may think that determinism allows for the freedom to do otherwise, even if Black does not. Most compatibilists, however, accept that determinism *does* block alternatives, and therefore the freedom to do otherwise. Although I am sympathetic to the idea that it does not, there is wide agreement that compatibilist accounts of such freedom are subject to fatal criticisms (cf. Lehrer 1968; see also Clarke 2009).
14. Or spread throughout a volume (e.g. wine), etc.
15. Chalmers also calls such content *Edenic* – it is the content of experiential representations of the primitive properties instantiated in ‘Eden’ (2006, 66). In the ‘Garden of Eden’, Chalmers writes, ‘We had unmediated contact with the world. We were directly acquainted with objects in the world and with their properties. Objects were simply presented to us without causal mediation, and properties were revealed to us in all their true intrinsic glory’ (2006, 48). My ‘pre-Newtonian world’ is Eden for colors.
16. Not all philosophers writing on color grant that primitivism is descriptively right about color phenomenology, although many do, and some even defend primitivism about the nature of colors (John Campbell 1997). Moreover, Chalmers is not alone in defending a view that relies on the phenomenological claim of primitivism, yet claims that primitivism is false about the nature of colors. Johnston (1992) concedes that primitivism is descriptively right about color phenomenology, but claims our world *is* colored since there are (usually) properties instantiated that make true ‘enough’ of our beliefs about color. Johnston’s view is an important precursor to Chalmers’s.
17. The analogy here need not be airtight, it is only meant to be illustrative.
18. I am not claiming that the experience be *causally* undergirded by such properties. More plausibly, the relevant condition is that there are instantiated whatever relevant properties are ordinarily instantiated when one experiences being free to do otherwise.
19. For an overview of sourcehood views, see e.g. Timpe (2013).
20. I owe these terms to Holton (2010).
21. I owe this point to discussion with Terry Horgan and Martine Nida-Rümelin at a conference on the phenomenology of free will and its epistemological significance, Fribourg, Switzerland, 16–19 June 2013.

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