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10 Free Will: Some Bad News

Saul Smilansky

1 Preliminaries

I believe that if we reflect more on the free will debate, and on ourselves as participants in it, we shall do better in tackling the free will problem. More specifically, I will argue here that the free will debate is characterized by an effort to see the bright side of things. This feature is striking, and it is shared by almost all participants, irrespective of their disagreements. We are not critical enough about this (natural) tendency. And I do include myself here. There is some good news, even if we lack libertarian free will (LFW). But all in all, and in different ways, the free will issue is very bad news. I will first sketch the way I see the free will debate, and thereby explain why, if I am correct, this means that we need to work on ourselves in order to tackle it more successfully. Second, I will illustrate why the free will problem is “bad news,” and briefly discuss what this implies. This is a metaphilosophical overview of the free will problem and debate, from a particular angle, which does not aim to capture all that is valuable in contemporary work on our topic. I have also refrained from referencing many of works that I will touch upon (except for the few publications that I refer to by name). The bibliographical materials of the people I refer to are easy to discover and I wish to avoid cumbersome details. Throughout, I have sought to maintain the conversational tone of my talk.

In my work on the free will problem I have made two radical claims. The first is that we must aim to systematically integrate the partial but crucial insights both of compatibilism and of hard determinism, and become that unfamiliar beast, a compatibilist hard determinist. My diagnosis of the debate has been that both sides on the compatibility question seem to take for granted what I call the “Assumption of Monism,” whereby (if there is no LFW) we must be either compatibilists or hard determinists. Once we are free of this assumption, we can address the

business of exploring when, how, and how much of each side we can integrate with the other. I point this out not only in order to signal where in the debate I am coming from, but because the issue of "either-or" on the compatibility question also has a strong psychological basis, for people are naturally inclined one way or the other. Now that some of the debate is beginning to be more open to the sort of "compatibility dualism" or "pluralism" that I have been advocating, we can reflect more easily on why this harmful dichotomy has existed for so many years.

The second radical idea is that illusion plays a central role in the free will problem, and that, moreover, this role is mostly positive. My diagnosis of the debate on this level has been that we are mostly blind to the centrality of illusion. I will not repeat too much of this previous work in this essay, but I will both end and begin with illusion—end, for it is an implication of my claim that the free will problem is "bad news"; and begin, because I think that to deal with the free will problem adequately we must be sensitive to the temptations of deluding ourselves, temptations that exist regarding this problem more than any other. Put differently, our difficulties with this problem are not only cognitive, for we are smart enough to tame it; our difficulties are in large measure psychological.

2 Apologia

Before I jump into these murky waters, I would like to spend a brief while saying something self-reflective here, which is, after all, what I have just said that we should all do more of. In this essay I shall be critical of a central tendency within the free will debate, and not only of specific positions within it. This stance is unpleasant for me. I think that here we might do well to follow Sidgwick's advice in *The Methods of Ethics*: "I have thought that the predominance in the minds of moralists of a desire to edify has impeded the real progress of ethical science: and that this would be benefited by an application to it of the same disinterested curiosity to which we chiefly owe the great discoveries of physics" (Sidgwick 1963, viii). Though we are still interested in edifying, I think that if Sidgwick were here today he would see the major problem as a desire to comfort ourselves. This is a natural extension of the dominant general human bias toward views (primarily of ourselves) that make us feel good. Sidgwick's example is important because he is widely recognized as having been a very pleasant and decent person. Despite being pleasant and decent—or perhaps because

of this—when he took a dispassionate attitude, he was able to contemplate fairly unpleasant proposals (such as a deceitful "Government-house utilitarianism," in Bernard Williams's phrase).

We must be on guard lest we find ourselves talking about the debate in ways, or indeed recommending certain ways of dealing with the free will problem, that are psychologically motivated by our needs to comfort ourselves, rather than "going with the issues." However, we also need to remind ourselves that dispassion itself may be dubiously psychologically motivated; and similarly for urges for simplification, or for seeming radical. In any case, in order to "purify" our thoughts we must become more aware of the various ways in which our fears and hopes are entangled with them. We must make room for looking at the free will problem, at the debate, and at ourselves, in a cold-blooded fashion.

There might seem to be a particular danger to this "psychological turn": that, as the saying goes, "everyone falls in love with his own compromises." It is enough, we might think, that people find it difficult to enter into other people's philosophical perspectives, without adding an attempt to connect those positions to psychology. I think that there are clear dangers here; nevertheless, we should spend some of our time on such navel gazing. I certainly spend more of my time reflecting on my own motivations than I do on those of others. And I have enormous respect for the labors and achievements of many philosophers working on the free will problem. But as I mentioned already, I think that the long shadow cast by the free will problem affects the way in which we approach it, and makes this problem particularly demanding emotionally, and particularly requiring of self-awareness and self-reflection, as correctives. The proof of what I am proposing is in the pudding, and I would like now to proceed to say something about how I perceive the free will debate, and then to argue that matters are far grimmer than that debate brings out. Or, in active mode—far grimmer than we have allowed ourselves to realize, internalize, and declare.

3 A Reinterpretation of the Free Will Debate

A common perception of the free will debate goes something like this. It is a combination of a number of distinct questions, on each of which many philosophers hold contrary positions. The classical questions are the "libertarianism question," whether there is universal determinism or, irrespective of determinism, the possibility of the sort of transcendent freedom

we know as libertarian free will. Then comes the second question, the "compatibility question," which asks if we can have moral responsibility even if determinism (or an absence of LFW) is the case. Compatibilists say "yes"; hard determinists say "no." This was largely the way the debate looked for some two thousand years, until quite recently. Today, of course, we know that the issues are more subtle: do we really need the "ability to do otherwise" in order to be free, or responsible? Would it be bad if we did not have moral responsibility? Do we at all need to worry about the continuation of common attitudes and practices, or are they self-perpetuating? There is (rightly) a sense of satisfaction within the debate about the great philosophical progress that has been made in the last two generations. And the common perception is that the variety has only brought more things to disagree about. I think that most readers will find this picture familiar.

Now I will briefly sketch out a different interpretation of the free will debate. It is necessarily rough, as I do not have the space to go into details, but I believe that you will find it also, perhaps reluctantly, familiar. Here there is a progression from idea to idea, with every pessimistic reply generating a new possibility—sometimes a new question, sometimes a new answer. Occasionally, indeed, old skeletons pay a return visit. The common denominator is that *every time a door closes, a new one opens*. We never really confront the feeling that a door has been shut in our face, and we are at a loss. Determinism threatens, so perhaps quantum mechanics will help us. Quantum mechanics is unable to give us control, so perhaps, as Robert Kane suggests, we do not need the sort of control we thought we did. For those libertarians for whom this sort of compatibilism-with-randomness hardly seems worthwhile, maybe there is a new form of causality, "agent-causality," available especially for us. And if nothing seems to be plausible, maybe (as Peter van Inwagen claims) LFW still evidentially exists, but as a mystery. Let's now go beyond LFW, and I will be assuming in the rest of the discussion that we do not have it (for any of a number of reasons, namely, because determinism dominates human life, or because indeterminism cannot give us much, or because in any case the very notion of LFW does not make sense).

At this stage we used to get the compatibilist reply that what matters is simply doing what you want—which we typically surely can do, even in a deterministic world. Or, a bit differently, 'can', it was explained, simply is 'would, if she wanted to'. It was countered that all this will hardly do, for surely we are often rightly worried about the *sources* of our desires. Moreover, perhaps we are not free just because we cannot want to X, even

if we would X if (counterfactually) we could have wanted to. In response, compatibilists moved on, with scarcely a heartbeat, to other explications. My point is not that these compatibilist, or Fischerian semicompatibilist, explications are not valuable—they are, and as a partial compatibilist I share some of them. I also think that they are shallow, in that they do not address the chief worry, that even under ideal compatibilist conditions all our blameworthy or praiseworthy actions are ultimately beyond our control, merely the unfolding of who we happen to be; the unfolding of the given. But the present point is that no major conscious sense of crisis appeared, but only rather quick solutions. I do not think, for instance, that we can really understand the full attractiveness of "Frankfurt-type examples" and the bypassing of the "ability to do otherwise" if we cannot see, and feel, how similar they are in *function* to quantum mechanics—namely, a way to "change the subject" and overcome the increasing sense that traditional compatibilist accounts of the "ability to do otherwise" are beginning to seem less and less convincing. I will not be able to enter into a detailed discussion of the subtleties of state-of-the-art compatibilism and its varieties, and in any case there is no reason to think that my own view carries particular weight here; the present point is to see the pattern of the debate.

Similarly, consider some more out-of-the-way versions of compatibilism, or views that at least support compatibilist-like conclusions. First, P. F. Strawson's classic "Freedom and Resentment" (Strawson 2003). This is one of the greatest and most salient philosophical papers of the twentieth century.¹ But can we really not see that it *means* something, that we have this unusually influential paper, which basically says, "Don't worry"? Strawson rejects the libertarian metaphysics, which he considers "panicky," and he thinks that LFW is incoherent. He also does not seem to put great store by traditional compatibilist stands. All this, however, does not matter, for except in the drawing rooms of philosophers no one will or, indeed, needs to take the difficulty seriously, he claims. This position has also confronted strong objections: substantively, even if certain reactions are unavoidable, this is still far from saying that they are justified (say, that resentment is deserved). And pragmatically, the threats of a loss of moral confidence by people, if hard determinist views become more prevalent, and of the temptations of handling people through social means that do not respect innocence, and do not track responsibility, show that Strawson was much too complacent. But as with previous views, I have not attempted to do justice to his position here, merely to help us to see how, for all the differences, it is the same *sort* of thing: a strong affirmation of the positive,

at the very instant when all the attempts to give it a basis, until that point, have been given up.

From neo-Humeanism to neo-Kantianism: Christine Korsgaard and Hilary Bok are not convinced by P. F. Strawson's justification for the "don't worry" attitude, but they also think that there is hardly anything to worry about: after all, a competent moral agent surely can think that he can do the right thing when acting, and that is all that we need. One problem with this view is that it avoids the issue of what people may come to think when reflecting on the past. Surely anticipations of such "retrospective excuses" can affect us in the present, when acting. I will say a bit more about this in the second half of my essay, when I give direct examples of "bad news."

It is interesting to note that almost all these positive views have remained more or less within the common, broadly Kantian, paradigm, which puts desert at the center, requiring control for responsibility, and responsibility for desert. (Arguably this is the case even with the Strawsonian view, which is why Jay Wallace was able to fuse Kant and P. F. Strawson.) Here is a quick proof of my claim for the dominance of deontological desert-based views: although Thomas Scanlon is one of the most influential contemporary moral philosophers, and he has also written on the free will problem, almost no one has followed him within the free will debate, in his attempt to offer an alternative contractualist basis for the discussion. Similarly, although utilitarianism has been central in ethics for over a century, it has hardly been allowed into the free will debate. For example, J. J. C. Smart's utilitarian reinterpretation of blame is, if considered at all, typically presented as proof of the crudity of utilitarianism. Similarly for Dennett's work. Now, again, I don't so much disagree with the charge of crudity made, in the free will context, against utilitarianism or Dennett, as seek to map things so that we become *amazed* at the nature of our debate. Like the defenders of some medieval fort, again and again we see our walls come tumbling down and, without a blink, we manage to retreat a bit, and miraculously set up completely new walls. One way of doing so, apparently, is to assure ourselves that little has changed, and that we don't even need to make use of radical or different materials, but rather can rebuild our cozy philosophical castle in familiar deontological form, by using the old ruins.

It is not, of course, the case that everyone is optimistic about everything: typically each one thinks that the solutions offered by others will not work. But he or she still offers his or her own solutions, and those *will* do the trick. It seems that on the metaphilosophical level we are all students of

that great philosopher and football coach Vince Lombardi: for us, failure is not an option.

The last position we need to consider is hard determinism. Here, surely, pessimism will triumph at last: if the ghost of LFW is long given up, and *any* of the numerous palliatives concocted by scores of capable compatibilists are also scorned, then we can finally confront disappointing reality and, surely, descend into the called-for depression. But *no!* Like Spinoza and B. F. Skinner in the past, our contemporaries Waller and Pereboom (and some new younger philosophers such as Sommers and Werking) are full of optimism and joy at giving up the old order, and at the new dawn awaiting us when, please notice—in terms of the traditional debate—all is lost.

Have you ever heard of a hardier bunch of men and women than us free will philosophers? Pollyanna herself should be sent to us for classes on positive thinking. I am reminded of that cheerful knight in the sketch in Monty Python's *Holy Grail* movie, who has one limb cut off, then another, and so on, but still calls on his enemies to continue fighting, taunting them, while they are carving off more of him with every blow, with cries of "Chicken, eh, chicken!"

Finally, a striking illustration of the nature of the contemporary debate is the book *Four Views on Free Will* that has recently come out (Fischer et al. 2007). The four philosophers are very diverse: Robert Kane is a libertarian, John Martin Fischer and Manuel Vargas are compatibilists of different sorts, and Derk Pereboom is a hard determinist. Yet the book could nevertheless be accurately subtitled "Four Optimists." This, I hasten to add, is not criticism: these are excellent philosophers and good choices for such a book that aims to survey the debate. But that is exactly my point: the book is representative, yet all four are clearly optimists on the free will problem, if each for very different reasons (and each rejecting the optimism of the others).

4 Why the Free Will Problem Is Bad News: A Few Illustrations

It is time for me to get down to some more conventional philosophical work. I will not be able to say much within the present scope, and those of you who are into negativity, pessimism, and depression can pursue them in my book, *Free Will and Illusion* (Smilansky 2000), or in the more recent papers such as "Free Will and Respect for Persons" (Smilansky 2005). I am assuming that we do not have LFW. In that case, I think we should sleep much less well at night.

Injustice

No sustainable systematic way has been found, so far, of constraining criminal behavior except through a system of punishment and incarceration. Even the humane and daringly experimental Dutch, who have been willing to permit doctors to intentionally bump off the ill and the old, and have legalized drug use in coffee shops, have not found a way to avoid punishments and prisons. I suspect that we would prefer serving time in a Dutch prison to the pleasures of doing so in most other countries, but still, serving a twenty-year sentence in any prison is a *terrible* experience. Now, on the assumption that we shall continue to put people in prison, consider what an awful thing this is, and what it means about injustice in life. Again, this does not mean that we should not, by and large, follow compatibilist guidelines: we should establish and maintain what I have called the Community of Responsibility, in which punishment will track responsibility based on intentional action, and the common excuses will prevail. Even in a determinist world, not all thieves are kleptomaniacs, just as we are not all alcoholics, and this matters. Taking these distinctions (however shallow they are) seriously is, as I have argued, a condition for respect for persons and for any civilized form of human interaction. That is why the compatibilist has a case. But even if we grant the compatibilist everything that she wants, people will still spend twenty years in prison, when (as nonbelievers in LFW) we must say that in fact there is no *other* way in which their lives could have unfolded and which was within their control. No way, that is, in which they would not have committed the crimes for which they are being (compatibilistically justly) punished. The criminals have willingly done awful things, but their being such people, who want to do awful things to others (or are at least indifferent about the harm they do when they do what they want to do), was not ultimately up to them. When they are punished they are, in an important sense, victims of the circumstances that have constituted them, making them what they are, with their particular set of motivations and sensibilities. Compatibilism of the sort that follows the responsibility paradigm (which I have called "control compatibilism") is, morally, the "best game in town," but the results it affirms are nevertheless horrible. Their being horrible does not mean that some mistake has been made, and that we can do better, but it is what it is. Similarly for countless other spheres where injustice prevails, even under ideal compatibilist conditions.

The Risks of Change

There seem to be two very different approaches to change. Consider the issue from a hard determinist perspective. Assume that we have lost belief

in free will and moral responsibility. According to the moderate approach, this will only help us to get rid of some of the extremes of our common views—help us not to feel excessive guilt, or not to be unduly judgmental—but all that is good will remain. I find this incredible. How will change "know" that it is supposed to limit itself in such ways? Why would having a strong sense of self-worth, based on one's freely chosen achievements, not be at risk as well? Or, similarly, many of the forms of social motivation connected to the idea of praiseworthiness? The second, extreme approach embraces change, but sees the brave new world as welcome. Again, this seems to me to be incredible—why think that we could do just as well if major supporters for our best moral and personal beliefs and practices were being given up?

This is not to say that I myself have any certain way of knowing what will happen with a given scope of change. First, I might have got certain descriptive matters wrong, about what many people believe, and about how they base those beliefs. The work that experimentally minded philosophers have done on the free will problem in recent years should make everyone pause before they pontificate. But for my present point I do not need to have much of a positive view about where we are, let alone where we will end up if we undergo this or that change: all I require is a measure of skepticism about, one, our capacity of controlling any significant changes, and two, the belief that all will turn out wonderfully well. And those two forms of skepticism seem to me to be very compelling.

Or consider the more compatibilistically inclined. Let us take some quick snapshots of some things that seem to matter a great deal. Constraints on how people are dealt with are one example. There is surely a constant temptation to get things done, to use people, to achieve good social results at the expense of individuals, in short, to bypass "respect for persons," particularly if interpreted in an individualistic and liberal manner. History is full of examples. Whether in the form of bigotry that cares nothing for choice and responsibility, or in the form of the dominance of the need to manage things and the call for efficiency, which bypasses them, the temptation is always present. But constraining such natural social and political tendencies is no mean feat. And traditional free will-related beliefs have played a major role here. For example, the idea of the *sanctity of innocence*: the thought that the innocent must not be harmed, whereas those who freely chose to do bad may be harmed, at least if this would produce good results. This, of course, connects directly to a robust sense of desert—which must exist to enable negative sanctions, and which is the ground for positive reactions and rewards. Now, all these very important matters can have some limited, local justification through broadly

compatibilist forms of thought. But surely, the libertarian story grounds them in a much *stronger* way. This is related to my previous point, about injustice: if we become aware of how deeply unjust even our best practices (under ideal compatibilist conditions) can be, would this not make us *care* less about those standards and constraints, and opt more for pragmatic compromises and considerations? So how can we rest assured, with P. F. Strawson, that no big changes can occur? Or with more conventional compatibilists, that the significantly watered-down senses of compatibilist possibility, or comparative innocence, or desert, will *suffice*? Or, with those who hope to build on contractualist or utilitarian justifications, that those will carry sufficient weight with people to lift the required load, something that was done for two millennia by distinct belief in libertarian free will and in the crucial importance of respecting it?

Quick Thoughts about Heroism

Think about the firefighters who rushed into the collapsing, burning buildings in 9/11. Envisage a situation in which a few of them who survived, after losing most of their mates, and perhaps being physically harmed themselves, are sitting around and talking about things. Assume that a hard determinist philosopher comes in and tells them that fundamentally they are not better than any common thief or rapist, explaining that ultimately everyone is what he is as an inevitable outcome of forces beyond his control. Do you think that they would welcome this philosopher? Or that, if one or two of them were to listen to him, and begin to understand and internalize what he was saying, that those people would not feel that something very unpleasant and deeply threatening was being said? Then another philosopher, a compatibilist, joins the conversation, and offers his opinion that what matters is only that they did what they wanted, guiding their own actions and being responsive to reasons in the right way. But he too will, reluctantly, admit that there isn't really an actually possible world in which they would not have done exactly what they did do, since they were simply built to choose as they have done. Do you think that the compatibilist would be found to be significantly comforting?

Or think about a case in which there was more time to reflect about the dangers and risks, about the majority of people who decide to do nothing, about one's life and what one will think about oneself—depending on what one does—if one survives. Consider, for example, European non-Jews risking their lives to hide Jews who were personally unknown to them during the Nazi occupation. In Eastern Europe, the price of a Jew was frequently a bottle of vodka—this is what you would get from the Germans

if you turned him or her in. So, should a non-Jew risk his own life and that of his family (even if they were innocent: the Nazis were no respecters of innocence), for something whose market price is a bottle of vodka? That is not easy to do. Studies have shown that such exceptional people had a particularly strong sense of their individual autonomy and responsibility. Do we not think that their (at least tacit) beliefs about free will mattered?

We might also think about the murderers, and those who handed human beings over to them in return for the promise of a bottle of vodka, and what taking the free will problem seriously might mean for what we could then say about them (and what this, in turn, would mean for survivors, or the victims). But things are depressing as they are, and let us return to reflection on positive people.

Think about someone on the eve of a mission that he knows is more likely than not to cost him his life: say, being parachuted into al Qaeda territory in Afghanistan, or being sent to infiltrate the Mafia. Do we not think that such a person is affected by what he thinks others will think and feel about his or her actions? That he will be honored by his colleagues, or respected by the public, or even forever hero-worshipped by his young nephew, in a real, robust way? A robust way assumes that it was, in fact, in a strong sense up to him to do this or not, and that hence he is deserving of our appreciation (not only because to do so makes good utilitarian sense), and has through his choice acquired high moral value.

Heroism, if in less dramatic ways, is much more common than we usually think, for many people regularly risk their lives for us, and many people regularly make decisions that go against their self-interest, in order to take care of sick or elderly relatives for many years, for instance. For such people the free will problem (again, assuming we don't have LFW) is bad news. And since we need such people, awareness of this problem may be bad news for us all in a further way. Moreover, the same sort of beliefs and emotions that I have sketched in the context of heroism make up the stuff of our daily tribulations, expectations, and hopes, even if less dramatically.

What Do I Want in Life?

Think about some aspects of what it means to be a person. I have purposefully phrased this in the first person, for I would not want to speak much for others. There is a danger of saying what "we" want, when speaking about one's own idiosyncratic preferences. There is also a danger of caricaturing what is implied by positions one disagrees with: it might come

out of some presentation, say, that anyone who is unperturbed by hard determinism thinks that human life is only about gluttony and fornication, and that's certainly not the case. So I'll just talk a little bit about my grandfather and his son, my father, and myself; hopefully some of this will resonate with you as well.

My grandparents on my father's side immigrated to Israel from Russia in 1925 because they were Zionists. This turned out to be a very good idea: my grandfather's elder brother decided to stay on a bit, as in the "New Economic Policy" (instigated by the Communists to forestall economic collapse) things seemed to be getting a bit better. The brother ended up being sent to Siberia during Stalin's reign for most of the rest of his life. My mother's family had lived in the Ukraine for generations, and almost all of her many relatives (who did not immigrate to Israel) were murdered by their neighbors even before the Nazis arrived, neighbors who then took their property. My wife's grandfather was sent by the Germans up the chimney at Auschwitz. It was not a good idea to be Jewish and European just then. So, coming over proved in hindsight to be a smart move, but it was done out of idealism. And this idea, that it was important to do things for idealistic reasons, was emphasized even when the striking thing was how smart the move was pragmatically.

At first my grandfather did quite well, in the book-publishing business, but then—as a result of some deceit by his partners, the story was never fully revealed to me—he and the whole family ended up poor for some years. That was a trauma in my father's life. My grandfather then got back on his feet, and, significantly, in time became a very high public servant in the Ministry of Trade, supervising the allocation of scarce goods in those post-World War II days of severe shortages. Significantly—because this completes the story that began with the poverty he had suffered "because he was too honest"—here he was chosen because of his manifest honesty, and triumphed. Being honest was central to my grandfather, and to my own father's image of his father. I have not had a similar trauma, but my father's honesty also matters to me. With my father there were other scenarios that shaped his life, and his perception of himself. For example, he joined an underground cell of the anti-British resistance when he was thirteen and then, when he was less than twenty years old, organized a group of young men and women (including his sister, and my mother), to help out in a beleaguered kibbutz in the north of the country. As my father used to point out, although there is a prevailing tale of idealization about those times, only four out of his high school class of over sixty joined

the underground, and very few went on risky volunteering missions such as he did.

Now, I am not telling these stories in order to familiarize you with the Zionist narrative, but because I expect that on a deeper human level they will be familiar. Your grandparents also immigrated from somewhere, or were cheated, or triumphed although—or because—they were honest, or volunteered, or went to war, or made sacrifices for the sake of their children, or were poor or handicapped, or had to deal with mentally ill or alcoholic relatives, and so on. To confront such situations and to do such things is central in the lives of human beings. But I have no doubt—whatever the experimentalists might tell us—that my grandfather, and my father in his turn, did believe, when reflecting on their actions, that they *had* real choices. So did others, when thinking about them. And the fact that they chose as they did—to leave home for a distant and risky place, to remain honest even if it meant becoming poor, to enlist in an illegal underground organization, or to sacrifice years of hard work for the sake of their children, *while others chose otherwise*, is what gives their story, nay, their lives, in their own eyes, dignity, and integrity. They felt that they can say "*we did the best we could*," where this is not tautological (as it is under determinism, for, whatever one does, it is the only thing that strictly speaking one could have done). It was not trivial to do one's best, while others did not. Hence they could respect themselves and feel that they are worthy of appreciation. All this is of great importance: to my grandfather and father and, I feel, to the meaning and memory of their lives. If they had been told that all this was not so, they would strongly object, and if they were to begin to see things as determinists want them to (even compatibilists)—they would feel cheated, perhaps even that they were suckers, and in any case deflated and depressed. To use a big word, their sense of meaning in their lives, their sense of achievement of meaning, crucially depends on a free will-related story. Being musical, or tall, or even intelligent, are much less central, and even when they matter, it is in a different way. There are things that it is very useful to have, or even to be, but there are things that one cannot be without and maintain one's self-respect.

So we do not need to think about heroes in order to see why the paradigm of real libertarian choice, as a basis of real responsibility, and real desert, and a real sense of acquiring value, is very significant. I do not want to talk much about myself. But with all of the years I've spent on the free will problem, and although I am convinced that LFW is nonsense, I can

still feel the loss, and want to fool myself. Do I want my daughter to feel that I had real choices? Would it *matter* to me if she saw my efforts on her behalf as, well, just the way I was built, as ultimately beyond my control? Of course!

5 Conclusion

I have discussed here issues telegraphically, and yet I feel that I have merely touched upon few of the topics that need to be taken up. I took up injustice, and the basis for taking moral constraints seriously, the unpredictability of change, heroes, and finally, expectations we have from ourselves, and our expectations from others to respond in the right way to the way we have chosen to fulfill our own and their expectations. Similar things can be said about moral depth, and about the way accountability can be undermined, about responsibility and betrayal, about what happens to excuses when they become universal, and about many of the other ways in which we acquire a sense of value in life.

There is one further question: what now? My reply is not simple, but if I need to put it in simple terms, then I say "Illusion." The most important fact about the free will issue, and one of the most important facts about human beings, in my view, is that we have at least tacit libertarian beliefs. And the more someone is sensitive and morally sophisticated, the more she will see the need for that, for without it morality, and human life, are very crude indeed. Illusion, and the need for illusion, is the human predicament.

We need to make various distinctions and elaborations here. Partly we need illusion for pragmatic reasons, because of the danger of overreaction, the danger that things that do make sense on the compatibilist level will nevertheless not be taken sufficiently seriously without the invisible support of the tacit assumption of LFW. Partly we need it because in the end the story is so grim that we had better continue to fool ourselves on free will. Of course, there are factors that call us to resist making use of illusion: the value of knowledge, and of honesty, and what all this means for the role of philosophy, and the attractions of the possibility for what I have called UMIs (Unillusioned Moral Individuals). I cannot discuss all this here. But my own views about the various questions that make up the free will problem are not the focus of this essay. My hope is that you will be more inclined to see how large the change that would be implied by awareness of the absence of libertarian free will, and that we have strong reasons to fear that sort of change. Such ideas play hardly any role in the

free will debate. This is implausible. As philosophers, I urge you to look the bad news in the face, and explore it and its implications.

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Note

1. McKenna and Russell 2008 is a large collection of articles devoted solely to this paper.

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