

THESIS

ON THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM: FREEDOM'S RELATION TO ETHICS AND AN  
APPLICATION OF A COLLINGWOODIAN FRAMEWORK

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

### ON THE CONCEPT OF FREE-WILL:

### FREEDOMS RELATION TO ETHICS AND AN APPLICATION OF A COLLINGWOODIAN FRAMEWORK

In this project, I will begin by exploring the conceptual relations to the concept of free will, namely the relation of ethics. I will argue that any conception of normative ethics is dependent on a conception of free will and free action. Beginning with this section, it is my hope to convince the reader that the free-will debate has genuine stakes, and providing an account of free will is necessary to the preservation of ethics. The second half will be an attempt to preserve the concept of ethics by articulating a theory of free will that uses the metaphysics of R.G. Collingwood. The application of Collingwood's metaphysics begins with the phenomenology of concepts as the foundation for thought, and seeks to develop these concepts through a scale of forms. The purpose for this application is to overcome the antinomy of the free-will debate by reconciling opposing concepts (i.e. "freedom" and "determinism") into one landscape of understanding.

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## PART I:

### 1: Conceptual Entanglements

Normative ethics, in its most basic function, serves to guide actions based on a systematic reflection of which actions are considered right or good. When we look at the normative systems that are most commonly used in philosophy (Kantianism, Utilitarianism, etc.), the principles that underlie these systems have metaphysical assumptions about the actions and ability of the moral agent. These metaphysical assumptions are not typically discussed in the isolated chamber of the free will debate, and due to this unfortunate bracketing, the consequences of debate on its interconnected parts (normative ethics) are rarely discussed. This chapter will seek to motivate a libertarian view of free will by displaying the consequences of its opposite: hard determinism. I will start by arguing that all normative ethical systems, either deontological or consequentialist presume a concept of moral obligation based on its derived axioms. Traditionally, it is thought that moral obligation is strictly bound to deontological theories that emphasize rules or duties. I will argue that this is incorrect, as the concept of an “obligation” in its most basic sense is a prescription of a moral “ought”, and this moral ought is considered to be a rational principle in any system of ethics.

The second half of this chapter will demonstrate how the concept of moral obligation in normative theory is tied to a sense of libertarian free will. I will argue that the concept of obligation entails *reasons* for action, and these reasons are considered to be obligatory if and only if one has the ability to act on these reasons and they are considered to be the best amongst alternatives. The reasons for action in any normative theory are considered to be *normatively objective*, meaning that, if one subscribes to a normative theory, then whatever axiom the theory

provides is a reason for action. By establishing that the concept of moral obligation implies reason for action, I will argue that reasons for action imply the ability of an agent to act on normatively objective reasons. The “ability” to act on reasons implies alternate possibilities, which I will describe in the language of *possible worlds*. I will then transition to the treatment of “rightness” and “wrongness” in normative ethics by arguing that judgments of right and wrong are dependent on a conception of possible worlds where the “right” action and “wrong” action are both accessible by the agent. The possible worlds that are both accessible are what I will describe as the *success factor* which posits that an agent can only do something “wrong” if and only if one could have successfully acted in the “right” way.

The conclusion of this chapter will posit that if determinism is true, the only possible world is the actual world, thus there can only be reasons for us to perform actions that we are going to in fact perform. The fallout of this conclusion two fold. For one, prescribing morally obligatory axioms becomes incoherent because one cannot have reasons for a moral obligation if one is determined to never act in accordance with the reasons for that obligation. Secondly, if one does not have reasons for morally obligatory actions, then ascribing “rightness” and “wrongness” to agents becomes incoherent due to the lack of alternate possibilities. If determinism is the thesis that given the past and the laws of nature there is only one unique future, then normative ethics is truncated from the requirement of alternate possibilities. The result of this is the dismemberment of the very foundation of normative ethics: guiding action based on obligation and making judgments of rightness and wrongness.

## 1.2 Normative Theories and Moral Obligation

When looking at normative theories such as Kantianism, utilitarianism, contractarianism, etc. what are the features that make each theory fall under the category of “normative”? In other words, what do these theories purport to do and how do these theories have some commonality that makes them operate within a single universe of discourse (i.e., “normative ethics”)? Intuitively, we can say that a normative theory purports to 1) state and defend basic principles of morality, and 2) determine which actions are right or wrong based on those basic principles of morality. Although this account rather trite and uncontroversial account, an investigation into the particulars of normative ethics is warranted if we are to accomplish our goal in concluding that the universe of discourse of normative ethics assumes a concept of moral obligation.

The first task of any normative theory is to define the relevant moral factors for a given action. For example, the morally relevant factor is deciding to save a person from drowning is the fact that this could save a life. In most cases, morally relevant factors are plentiful in a given action, and it is the task of a normative theory to set the morally relevant factors that could influence any given situation in which an agent must act in accordance to the “right” or “wrong”.<sup>1</sup> Along with the morally relevant factors for action, a normative theory must provide a foundation for its action guiding claims. This foundation is typically axiomatic, as the following normative theories claim each claim the following principle to be true:

**Deontology:** Act only on that maxim which is categorical and done for the maxim itself.

**Contractarianism:** One ought to act by those rules and factors determined by a group of rational, egoistic bargainers.

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<sup>1</sup> (Kagan 2014)

**Consequentialist:** One ought to act in such a way that brings about the best available consequences.

These axioms provide the foundations for a mechanism to develop that provide a systematic way to for an agent, given the selected axiom, to decide which action in a given situation is correct. From consequentialist foundations, utilitarianism develops which states that the best consequences are those that produce the most overall happiness (hedonistic), deontology develops into the test of universalizability, etc. The basic principles of these normative theories all carry the notion that if one is to accept the axiom as a means of moral action, then to *be a rational agent*, i.e., to be judged as a rational arbiter of a moral principle, one must act in accordance with the accepted axiom. In this way, the accepted axiom carries some notion of obligation, as it is by way of rationality that one is required to act on one's accepted beliefs.

The view that one is obliged to act in accordance with one's accepted axiom, or in other words, one's accepted belief, is a version of rational coherentism. Rational coherentism is generally the view that in order for an agent to be considered rational, one must believe what follows from one's beliefs. In the case of a normative theory of ethics, if one believes in the principle of deontology, then one must form *intentions* for action that follow from this belief in a coherent manner. This principle can be formalized as follows:

**Principle of Rationality:** Rationality requires you not to (believe *p*, believe if *p* then *q*, and not believe *q* as a means of action).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> (Way 2018)

This principle claims by way of *modes ponens*, claims that an agent is rationally required to form intentions based on one's initial beliefs. For example, if moral axiom  $p$  claims that action  $q$  follows from  $p$  ( $p \supset q$ ), it is rationally required by means of coherence for one to that one believe in  $q$  as a means for moral action. "By means of coherence" simply means that if one were to do the opposite, namely believe  $p \supset q$  and not believe  $q$  it would be incoherent on the part of the agent.

It would seem that any normative theory of ethics must adopt this principle if one's system is to be a rational way to guide actions towards some action that is judged to be right. To convince the reader of this, imagine a system of normative ethics such as utilitarianism that does not adopt the principle of rationality. How would this system function? It would have to accept that although one can believe in the initial axiom of a system (for example, maximizing utility), one does not have to have to form an intention for action in based on the axiom. For example, if John is a utilitarian and according to his calculations action X is the action that maximizes utility, John would have no requirement to act on action X, although it is rationally derivative from the principle of the system. The fundamental principle of a normative theory of ethics is to *guide action*, and if one is not rationally required to believe in the "means of action" that flow from a moral principle, then it seems the system has failed do serve the very function that it set out to do.

If it is correct that any normative system adopts something like the principle of rationality (which to me seems to be self-evident), it must follow that what one "ought" to do is what is rationally required. What's rational for a utilitarian is doing whatever action maximizes utility, because maximizes utility is what one ought do. It would be very peculiar if a normative theory claimed that what you "ought" to do is what *doesn't* flow from the normative theory itself

(hence, accept irrational behavior). In this way, the obligation in any normative theory, i.e., what one ought to do is preservation of *rational* coherence, as a moral theory without obligation cannot maintain coherence. If one does not have to meet the “ought” of a moral axiom, the moral axiom is left inefficacious and purely descriptive.

### 1.3 Obligations, Reason and Libertarian Free Will

What do we mean when we claim that one has a belief that follows from an accepted moral axiom? Common sense tells us that a belief, when it corresponds to action, entails reasons for action. Aristotle pointed this out in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, by the claiming the fact that one ought to act in accordance to the right logos (which is most commonly interpreted as “reason”) is commonplace and should be assumed.<sup>3</sup> Although there is an immense amount of literature about how reasons correspond to beliefs, I will be assuming that when one has a belief that stems from a moral axiom, that belief necessarily entails reasons for action. Our example earlier highlighted this point, although it was not clearly stated: when John the utilitarian does his calculations to decide which actions produce the best consequences, the action that produces the best consequences is itself a reason to act. It is a reason by itself because it is rationally produced by the axiom that “bringing the best consequences” is morally “right” or “good”. This reason is *normatively objective* in the sense that it is not entirely dependent on the internal states of the agent. An agent may not, at a give time, have the desire or motivation to act on what an accepted moral principle demands, but the agent’s desire and motivation does not change what he or she “ought” to do. For example, if doing action X according to a normative theory is correct, and an

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<sup>3</sup> (Aristotle 2001, 1103b-30)

agent mistakenly believes that action Y is correct, the mistaken belief of the agent does not alter what the agent in fact has the most normatively objective reason to do.

In *Reason's Debt to Freedom*, Ishtiaque Haji argues that because the moral “ought” (or the morally obligatory action) involves reasons for action, these reasons imply the availability of alternate possibilities for the agent to act on. The availability of alternate possibilities is a classic and fundamental requirement of libertarian free will. Libertarian free will generally claims that what it means for an agent to be “free” is to have 1) control over one’s actions and 2) the availability of alternate possibilities. The argument is based on *Kant’s Law*, which states that if an agent has a moral obligation to complete an action, i.e. morality requires an agent to complete an action; the agent must have the ability to complete that action. I believe that Kant’s Law has a substantial intuitive pull, as it would seem that we not want hold an obligation to an agent to whom it is impossible for them to complete the obligation. Where reasons come into play is when we think more acutely as to what it means when we are obliged to act. If a normative theory of ethics provides reasons for action based on its axiom, then in order for those reasons to be obligatory (the agent ought to complete), those reasons must be the *best* amongst alternatives. Another way to frame this is that any normative theory of ethics that subscribes to their axiom(s) as being intrinsically good must claim by way of that intrinsic goodness, that the action with the best reasons is what which promotes intrinsic goodness.<sup>4</sup>

Up to this point, we have stated that a normative theory provides reasons for action because of the rational coherence principle, and that these reasons for action must be the best amongst alternatives due to the intrinsic goodness of the action itself, or the consequences of the

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<sup>4</sup> I take normative theories to all be promoting some intrinsic good. For example, promoting the best consequences is promoting the best “goodness”, obeying the moral law is for its own sake is “good”, etc.

action. These reasons for action are what Haji calls “reason-wise ought’s”, which I will slightly modify to mean the following:

**Reason-Wise-Obligation (RWO):** One is morally obligated to do something based on reason if and only if rationality demands that the action stems from a normatively objective principle and is the best amongst alternatives (due to the intrinsic value).<sup>5</sup>

Now from this principle, it seems almost tautological to say that if one reason-wise-obligation to do something, then one can do it. This is a reiteration of Kant’s Law, but there is an important function of reason here that “ought” implies “can” does not capture. Think of how reasons typically function in our day to day lives: when we have a reason to do something, it is *prima facie* plausible that whatever that reason corresponds to is in fact possible. Let us think about what this means in the form of a counterexample: imagine that you are relaxing on a beach and somewhere across the world there is a child drowning in the ocean. This child, if saved, will become a benevolent world leader that would that would bring about lasting world peace. Saving this child would produce the best consequences, be a deontological duty, and be agreed upon by a group of rational and egoistic bargainers. In other words, saving this child would be “right” in any normative theory. Yet, can the principle of rationality have a consequent that cannot be done? This would seem to violate the very intuition of an agent *being coherent*, as when we state that the consequent q (as a means of action) follows from p (the moral principle), it seems that the consequent, in order to be coherent, must be something that can actually be done. Using our example above, if the agent cannot conceivably travel across the world in order to save the

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<sup>5</sup> (Haji 2012) Haji adopts a similar account of reason-wise-obligation, but where mine differs is in regards to having normative ethics in the background.

drowning child, then it follows that there can be no means of action to save the child, hence there can be no rational consequent to the antecedent.

What about the second condition? It would seem that to be the best amongst alternatives, it must be that action that can be actualized. By this, I mean, when thinking about if an action is the best amongst alternatives, it must be the case that the agent in question can actually perform that action. In our example, it is clearly the case that the agent cannot reasonably perform the action (barring teleportation), so it cannot be considered the best amongst alternatives because the action itself is not a viable alternative to anything else. To be considered to be an “alternative” candidate, the action in question must be considered *prima facie* plausible. By this, I mean that an alternative action is only considered to be “alternative” if the action conceived of can be thought of as a genuine way that the future might unfold. In contemporary metaphysics this may be translated into talk possible worlds, which is meant to be a thought experiment into thinking of how things could have been different.

Saul Kripke, in *Naming and Necessity* posited a possible world to denote the simply the thinking of how things “could have been different”.<sup>6</sup> The talk of “worlds” here is meant to refer the conditions that make up situations, and the *stipulated* conditions that are conceived of in the different tokens of a situation. For example, if situation X has conditions XYZ in the actual world, a possible world is one where we can imagine the *same* situation but with different conditions, i.e., possible world X with conditions ABC. The test of whether a possible world can be an actuality, i.e., be a situation that could obtain in the actual world, is a matter of rational constraints that the real world imposes upon a situation. Kripke gives the simple example of throwing a pair of dice:

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<sup>6</sup> (Kripke 1980)

Two ordinary dice (call them die A and die B) are thrown displaying two numbers face up. For each die, there are six possible results. Hence there are thirty-six possible states of the pair of dice, as far as the numbers shown face-up are concerned, though only one of these states corresponds to the way the dice actually will come out.<sup>7</sup>

The rational constraints in any situation are number of ways that a situation could turn out given a set of reasonable limitations, which are the objects involved (the dice) and the relevant properties (number combinations on the dice). Using our situation of the agent on the beach, the objects involved are obviously the agent on the beach and the child drowning across the world, and the relevant property in the situation is the distance between them. Can we imagine a possible world given the constraints in the actual situation where the situation could have turned out differently (the agent not saving the child)? It would seem that we could imagine possible worlds where the conditions that make up the actual world are significantly different, i.e., a possible world where teleportation exists, but this is not what we are after when thinking about an agents possibilities. What we are seeking when conceptualizing “the way things could have been” is a *nearby* possible world, which is to say a possible world where the conditions that make up world *p* are very similar to the conditions that make up the actual world. In the actual world of our agent on the beach, there does not seem to be a nearby world where the agent could save the child, as the restrictions in the actual world bar such a possibility from being conceived of.

In our example, the agent cannot have an action that is best amongst alternatives because the agent does not have a means of action that stems from a moral principle. From this, it necessarily follows that the agent cannot have a possible world where the action is completed

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<sup>7</sup> (Kripke 1980)

given the rational constraints of the actual situation. The conclusion of this example is that an agent cannot have a reason-wise-obligation to do something that one cannot in fact do.

There may still be the lingering intuition that although one may not be able to do something, they can still have a reason to do it. Remember, a principle being normatively objective means that it provides reason independent of an *agent's motivations and desires*, but not independent of an agent's *ability*. What would be the consequences of denying the link between being reason-wise obligated and “can” or ability? We surely wouldn't want to say that an agent has a reason-wise-obligation to prevent Hitler from invading Poland, as this is physically impossible for an agent located in the present to do, yet, there would seem to be no logical difference between our agent on the beach who cannot stop the child from drowning and some agent who cannot stop Hitler from Invading Poland. Accordingly, if a normatively objective principle is meant to guide action, it would be self-defeating if that normatively objective principle gave reasons for things that an agent could not accomplish (one in which there is no conceivable possible world). Imagine all of the morally relevant factors that are happening across the world right now: wars are happening, children are being kidnapped, and forests are being burned for frivolous reasons. If one were to deny the link between reason-wise-obligation and ability, an agent would have a reasons-wise-obligation to act on all of these things even though it is impossible for such a thing to happen. This is obviously absurd, and it seems to highlight the link between having a reason to do something and being morally obligated to do that thing.

At this point, it might be good to take stock of what I have argued for so far. I have argued that normative ethics, no matter which normatively objective principle that one chooses, requires moral obligation. The normative principle requires moral obligation because it is rationally required and this rational requirement necessarily provides the best reason for action.

Implicit but necessary in a normative principle is the requirement of libertarian free-will, which states that if one has the best reasons for action, then one has 1) the ability to complete that action and 2) the availability of possible worlds in which one does complete the action. If one accepts my argument thus far, then in order for an agent to be reason-wise-obligated to do an action, the agent must have enough control to complete that action, and the availability of alternative possibilities.

#### 1.4 Rightness, Wrongness and Libertarian Free Will

Another important feature of normative ethics, which assumes libertarian free will that we have not discussed, is the judgment of an action being “right” or “wrong”. These judgments of rightness or wrongness in normative theory are what I will call a *success factor*. An agent is successful in a normative context if, in combination with my investigation above, the agent completes an action entailed by a reasons-wise-obligation *and* that agent had the possibility to fail. I think this conforms well to our common sense ways of thinking about a successful moral agent, as what makes the agent an object of praiseworthiness (excluding mere consequentialist reasons) is that he or she could have done something that they ought not to have done.<sup>8</sup> To use an example that is personally dear to my nature, when we look at a morally laudable character in a fictional setting, let's use Batman in this case, the reason as to why Batman's moral actions bestride above in a moral sense is not because what he does as Batman is difficult (fighting

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<sup>8</sup> What I mean by consequentialist reasons is the common way for one to disregard the ability to do otherwise and uphold praiseworthiness and blameworthiness, specifically in a deterministic universe. One can be praised (and blamed) for an action based on it having positive consequences rather than being a reflection of the agent's character or ability. For example, in a deterministic universe where no one has the ability to otherwise, I can still praise an agent for donating to charity based solely on the grounds that the action produces good consequences.

crime), but because it would presumably be an easy and effortless transition for Batman to *not* do what he does. Using philosophical terminology, Batman has a *nearby possible world*, which is accessible to him where he does not risk his life fighting crime.

This common-sense way of thinking implies some concept of possible worlds, as our intuition to say that an agent did something morally wrong implies the accessibility of a nearby possible world. For example, imagine an agent who sees a burglary and is provided a reason-wise-obligation to stop the burglary from happening. Unfortunately for this agent, there is an undetectable sheet of ice that is slipped on, rendering her unconscious.<sup>9</sup> In thinking of how things could have been different in the above situation, there does not seem to be a nearby possible world in which the factual conditions in the real world could have resulted in a different outcome. In other words, there are no conceivable possible worlds in which an agent is rendered unconscious due to an undetectable sheet of ice and *succeeds* in acting on a reason-wise-obligation. Failure to stop the burglary from happening is the only conceivable outcome given the factual restraints, and because of this fact, our intuition tells us that the agent themselves cannot be morally wrong. The intuition can be formalized in the following principle, which I will call the *success factor*:

**Success Factor:** It is morally wrong for S to perform A if and only if S can successfully perform  $\neg A$ .

This principle claims that there must be an accessible world in which one can perform the “right” action (or reason-wise-obligatory action), in order for one to be considered wrong. Hence, there

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<sup>9</sup> I will reference this example later and call it the “burglary case”.

must be at least two possible worlds where the agent succeeds and fails in completing a moral action at the time prior to the moral action itself. To use our previous example, an agent who sees a burglary and has a reason-wise-obligation must have two possible worlds prior to the action itself  $p$  or  $\neg p$  (attempting or not attempting to stop the burglary) where it is conceivable that the agent could have completed  $p$  or  $\neg p$ . This seems consistent with our normative principles, as the underlying purpose of “acting in accordance with  $x$ ” is to steer the agent away from whatever actions that are  $\neg x$ . The normative principle is meant to prescribe behavior that is thought to be the best amongst alternatives, and it is only because of those alternatives that an action can be “right” or “wrong”. For Kant, one ought not to lie because the alternative action makes the concept of lying incoherent; for the hedonistic utilitarian, one ought not to lie in a given situation because the alternative action decreases happiness, etc. Each principle must be balanced with an alternate possibility, or possible world in which the normative theory prescribes the “right” action; *yet* it is only considered “right” because of its possible-world counterpart in which the action is “wrong”. Normative ethics is not simply describing that an action is right in a given circumstance, but rather, it is prescribing “rightness” based on the counterpart of “wrongness”.

In expanding on this point of “rightness” needing “wrongness”, a brief exposition into the Hegelian dialectic may be in order. Although one may read the last sentence as an oxymoron (“brief” and “Hegel”), I believe we can discuss the core tenets of the dialectical method without getting lost in the abyss. The Dialectic, in its most simple interpretation, is the determination of what something “is” by the unity of two contradictory concepts: one being the first “notion” or thought about a concept, and the other being the opposite of the first “notion”. Important to note here, Hegel’s dialectic cannot be conceptualized without understanding that thought is always a

matter of movement.<sup>10</sup> For example, let us assume that one starts with the thought  $p$ . In order for this thought to be affirmed, one must “move to” its negation  $-p$ , and because of the movement to what  $p$  isn’t (namely  $-p$ ), the original thought  $p$  affirms itself. Once the thought  $p$  affirms itself, it sublates, or “eats up” its negation into a whole that cannot be separated. This is traditionally thought to be the thesis (first thought), moving to the antithesis (negation of the first thought), and the synthesis (the whole of the concept including its negation).<sup>11</sup> Hegel states in the Science of Logic:

It is the dialectical immanent nature of ‘being’ and ‘nothing’ themselves to manifest there unity, that is ‘becoming’, as their truth...they sink from their initially imagined independence to the status of *moments*, moments which are still distinct but at the same time are sublated.<sup>12</sup>

Hegel is stating here that the identification of something, or the determination of a concept must be in relation to “being”-what something is, and “nothing”-what something is not. To use a simple example, imagine the determination of a banana. One knows that a banana is yellow, but one also knows in a more implicit way that the concept of “yellow” is not the same as the concept of a “banana”. In a way, the concept of “yellow” is different from the concept of a “banana”, yet it is because of this unity of two different concepts that one is able to identify the object itself. Hegel calls this the “negation of the negation”, which is a convoluted way of saying that the determination of an object, say, a banana, consists in uniting two different concepts “yellow” and “banana” into one thing. To use another example, take the concept of “causality”. For Hegel, the concept of “causality” only exists because it consists of two opposing or

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<sup>10</sup> (Griet 2007)

<sup>11</sup> (Boer 2010)

<sup>12</sup> (Hegel 2010)

contradictory subjects, i.e., *cause* and *effect*. The opposite of a cause is its effect and vice versa, and because of this “unity of opposites” one can intelligibly identify the concept of “causality”.<sup>13</sup>

Now we can think of Hegel’s Dialectic in terms of our discussion of normative rightness, wrongness and alternate possibilities. Using Hegelian language, we can say that the concept of “rightness” finds its negation in the concept of “wrongness” and moves into a process, which is identified as “ethics”. The concept of “ethics” encapsulates both “rightness” and “wrongness” in such a way that ethics cannot be done without proper reference to both contradictory concepts. Hegel states this quite explicitly in a discussion of Aristotelian ethics:

In defining the concept of virtue from a practical standpoint, Aristotle distinguishes the soul’s rational side from its irrational side. To the rational side belong judiciousness, prudence, knowledge, and wisdom in general. The other of irrational side encompasses sensation, inclination, and passion. And virtue consists in the unity of the rational side with the irrational. When the inclinations, passions, and the like are so disposed toward reason or as to do what it commands, then we have virtue.<sup>14</sup>

Hegel is stating that the concept of “virtue” is not solely what belongs to the rational side, but rather, the concept of “virtue” is the unity of the irrational and rational side. The rational side is what is considered “good” and the irrational “bad”, and in order to one to be virtuous reason must unite the rational and irrational into a whole, which encapsulates the concept of “virtue”. Virtue, in order to be complete, must have two contradictory parts, which work together to produce virtuous action.

Going back to what we discussed earlier, I stated that an action could only be considered wrong if an agent had the ability to do the right action (success factor). The Hegelian dialectic

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<sup>13</sup> (Boer 2010)

<sup>14</sup> (Hegel 1996)

would seem to agree, as one cannot make an *ethical* (the whole) judgment without reference to the contradictory parts that make up the whole (“rightness” and “wrongness”). Transitioning this to our discussion of possible worlds and the ability to act on possible worlds, one cannot be wrong in performing an action if the only accessible world to the agent is the world in which the “wrong” thing is done. To say that someone has done wrong, using our Hegelian backdrop, is to make a judgment based on a whole concept which must involve two counterparts, i.e. *two possible worlds*. Therefore, if we are to make a moral judgment, there must be two possible worlds of “rightness” and “wrongness” that were in fact accessible to the agent at the time of an action. Philosophical analysis aside, this seems to conform well to our common sense judgment of what makes something “right”. What makes something “right” is always in reference to its counterpart, i.e. something “wrong”. Telling the truth is right in virtue of lying being wrong, not harming others is right in virtue of not harming others being wrong, etc. To put it into a normative theory context we can use our examples that were stated earlier: what makes the action right for the consequentialist is the fact that the opposing action doesn’t produce the best consequences...what makes an action right for a Kantian is the fact that doing the opposite would lead to a logical contradiction.

The conclusion of this discussion can be summarized in the following way: in order for an action to be considered morally right or wrong, the agent at the time of action must have *at least* two possible worlds which the right action or wrong action is done, and the agent must have the ability, at the time of the action, to act on either possible world. This is based on the concept of normative ethics *needing* its contradictory counterparts in order to judge the moral worth of an action, which we elucidated using the Hegelian dialectic. If one accepts my argument to this

point, then in order for an agent to ever be morally right or wrong, one must (to use traditional free will language) have the *ability to do otherwise*.

### 1.5 In a Deterministic Universe: Obligation and Reason

Now that we have an understanding of the conceptual requirements of normative ethics we can now ask the following question: what features of normative ethics would or wouldn't be undermined in a deterministic universe? To be clear about what we mean by "a deterministic universe" let us adopt the following definition:

(D): Facts about the remote past in conjunction with the laws of nature entail that there is only one unique future.<sup>15</sup>

This definition captures the thought that given past and laws of nature, there is only one future *possible*.<sup>16</sup> It is postulated at times by philosophers that given this definition of determinism, the only possible world is the actual world, thus the idea of having access to possible worlds is a fanciful falsehood.<sup>17</sup> This position is called *actualism*, which claims that the events that do happen are the only events that could have possibly happened. If determinism is in fact true, I see no way to disregard actualism. In a deterministic universe, it does not make sense to say the following: "action X at time T could have been different" as the only way that an action *could* have been different is if the *laws of nature and the past were different*. In the actual world, the laws of nature and the past are presumably fixed, so to say that an action could have been

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<sup>15</sup> (Mckenna and Pereboom 2016)

<sup>16</sup> (Mckenna and Pereboom 2016)

<sup>17</sup> (Ayers 1968)

different given the actual laws of nature in conjunction the past is incoherent. When we intuitively think that we “could have done otherwise”, it is absolutely not the case that we are saying “if the laws of nature were different along with the past I could of done otherwise”, but rather, we are saying something along the lines of “in that same situation (the same past and laws of nature), there could have been a different outcome”.

How does this affect our discussion of moral obligation? If one accepts my discussion of reason-wise-obligation, then in order for an agent to be obligation, they must be able to complete the action that rationality demands (based on a moral axiom) and that action must be the best amongst alternatives. In a deterministic universe, it would seem that the first condition of being reason-wise-obligated could be met by selected agents given that the past and the laws of nature determined them to be able to act in accordance with a means of action prescribed by a moral axiom. For example, in a deterministic universe, John the utilitarian “could” do an action that produces the best consequences so long as he was determined to do so. It would be as if John the utilitarian, being determined to act in accordance to his moral beliefs, was endowed with a bit of moral luck. Others though, might not be so lucky. If an agent is determined to act in opposition to one’s own moral beliefs (which is perfectly plausible, say, in a case where an agent is overcome with desires) then according to our definition of being reason-wise-obligated, an agent cannot be obligated to a consequent that cannot be done. Thinking back to our example of the agent who cannot stop the child from drowning, we said that this agent cannot meet the principle of rational coherence because prescribing a consequent (the  $q$  in  $p \supset q$ ) in order to be *coherent* must be something that can in fact be done. Using the case of an agent who is determined to not act in accordance to one’s moral beliefs, it would also seem that this agent cannot meet the principle of

rational coherence because acting in accordance with their moral beliefs is something that cannot be done.

What about our second condition of being reason-wise-obligated? Can an action be considered to be the “best” amongst alternatives in a deterministic universe? Seeing how we defined an alternative as a possible world, which would be actualized given the facts constraining the actual world, determinism would seem to rule this condition out given that the fixity of the past and laws of nature only leading to one possible outcome. How then, can we make sense of talk about possibility in a deterministic universe? Of course, we could reduce talk of possibility to a weak *epistemic* notion that would entail a proposition of the like: “for all we know, X, Y, Z outcomes could be the way that the future turns out”. I’m not sure that this captures the essence of possibility talk, as when we are making claims about future possibilities, it seems we are making a stronger claim, i.e. we *know* that this certain situation is a genuinely open way in which the future could develop. We genuinely think that there is a possible world in which has a link to the actual world in such a way that the agent in question could unite the possible into the actual.

In a deterministic universe, the “best” action that the agent can do must necessarily be the action that the agent will do. If there are no alternative possibilities, which are genuinely open to us, then we are *always doing the best we can*. Peter Van Inwagen articulates this thought in the following way: “To deny that men have free will is to assert that what a man *does* do and what he *can* do coincide”.<sup>18</sup> In other words, if “can” and “does” necessarily coincide, then our condition of the “best” action among possible worlds collapses into the action that the agent does in fact do. This would mean that if we were to uphold a reason-wise-obligation in a deterministic

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<sup>18</sup> (Inwagen 1975)

universe, we would be saying something like “you ought to do what you have the best reason to do, which is the thing that will do”. This would leave the concept of moral obligation in normative ethics in a state of contradiction. To elaborate, if a normative theory states that its moral axioms provide the best reasons for action and if we agree that an agent can only have a reason for something that they can in fact do, then in a case where an agent is determined to act *against* whatever action that a moral theory provides, it must be agreed that he or she *didn't have a reason to act morally*. Just like in our case of the agent who cannot have a reason to save the child drowning across the world, a determined agent cannot have a reason to do something that they are not determined to do. We can formalize this argument in the following way:

P1: One can only have the best reason for something if it can be done.

P2: In a deterministic universe, there are no alternatives, so the best reason is the only reason that one can have.

P3: One can be determined to act in discordance to a moral principle (acting “immorally”, loosely speaking).

C: In a deterministic universe, one can have the best reason for acting immorally.

If one accepts the premises above, namely that in order to have the “best” reason to do something then you must be able to do it, then in a deterministic universe, the only thing you can do is the thing that you are determined to do, which implies that the “best” reason is always the reason for an action that will be done. The consequence of this is that an agent may be determined to act in discordance with a moral principle and we would have to submit that they had the *best reasons for acting*.

In submitting to this conclusion, I would like to evoke the imagery of a game of Jenga. If we imagine that the Jenga tower in this case is the theoretical structure of normative ethics, and we submit that one can have the best reasons for non-moral actions, then I suspect that we have pulled a crucial block out of our tower. The tower has not fallen, but it is in a precarious position, needing support to remain erect. We may be able to provide support by claiming that although one can have the best reasons for doing the non-moral action, we can still claim that the action is morally wrong. In other words, we may concede that an agent had the best reason for what it is that they did, but we can still say that this agent was morally wrong for doing so. This may be the patch that keeps our normative structure erect in a deterministic universe, but if not, the collapse is all but certain.

#### 1.6: In a Deterministic Universe: Rightness and Wrongness

In remembering our discussion of the Hegelian dialectic, we stated that the “right” action could only make sense with reference to the “wrong” action. This was due to the concept of “ethics” needed reference to both of its counterparts, i.e. rightness and wrongness. How can we configure *agential* rightness and wrongness in a deterministic universe? By *agential*, I mean prescribing a moral quality to an *agent* based on what moral or immoral action was done (“Agent X was wrong to do such and such”). According to our conclusion above, we stated that in order for an agent to be right or wrong, there must be at least two possible worlds where the agent completes the “right” or “wrong” action.

In a deterministic universe, there can be possible worlds where the past and laws of nature lead to a different outcome, yet one could ask the following: is this really what we are eluding to when saying that there must be two possible worlds where the “right” and “wrong”

action is done? I hold that in saying that an agent could do either the “right” or “wrong” action, we are saying that the possible worlds, up to the time of the decision, entails the exact past and laws of nature that the actual world does. Let us use our example of the burglary case, where the conditions are modified to where the agent does not have an undetectable sheet of ice in her path. In this case, it is summertime and the agent is witnessing a burglary while out a walk. The agent in this case decides that doing what morality requires, i.e. interfering to stop the action, is not worth her time and hassle and decides to walk the other way. Our intuitions tell us that this is wrong, but why? It would seem the reason as to why we think it wrong is that we are able to easily imagine multiple scenarios in which the agent could have done the “right” thing. The agent could have easily called the police, or if this particular agent was rather brave (or maybe rash), could have intervened directly. In philosophical language, there seemed to have been nearby possible worlds that were accessible to the agent prior to the moment that she made her decision to not intervene.

Is this way of thinking about moral judgment rendered incoherent in a deterministic universe? In comparing our two hypotheticals of the burglary case (one where the agent slips on ice and one where the agent does not), it seems that there is no logical difference in the accessibility to possible worlds in a deterministic universe. If our conception of ethics, and specifically ethical judgments, entails something like the concept of “ethics” needing its opposing counterparts, then in a deterministic universe, this unity cannot happen. At any moment of moral action, an agent only has access to one part of the concept of “ethics” (rightness or wrongness). In other words, an agent can only do “right” or “wrong” if that agent is determined to do so, hence a right action could have never been wrong and vice versa. Therefore, using our Hegelian conception of ethics, ethical judgment in a deterministic universe cannot hold because

it cannot make reference to the whole of “ethics”. For Hegel, a singular thought cannot affirm its quality without its counterpart, and if we extent this to our discussion or moral action, then a singular action cannot affirm its quality, namely its ethical quality, without its *counterpart being possible*.

In keeping with the formal structure of the last section, let us formalize our argument in the following way:

P1: Ethics involves two counterparts: rightness and wrongness.

P2: Making a judgment of ethics must necessarily involve reference to both of its parts (i.e. there was a “right” and “wrong” action that could have been done).

P3: In a deterministic universe, each moral action that is done can only make reference to one of its parts (rightness or wrongness).

C: In a deterministic universe, one cannot make agential ethical judgments.

One may object at this point that we can still make *general* ethical judgments of the following nature, “lying is wrong, killing is wrong, etc.”. I *submit* that this is true, but when we *apply* ethical judgments to agents, we loose our ability to make reference to the whole. Why does this follow? Well, simply because when applying moral judgments to agents, we are talking about *actions*, and in a deterministic universe, and agents actions could not have made reference to the whole concept of “ethics”.

We have now removed another fundamental building block in our Jenga tower of normative ethics. I suspect that the tower has collapsed upon this removal. Normative ethics in a deterministic universe would be left as rubble that resembles nothing of what it once was. Prior

to our investigation, normative ethics was able to hold agents to moral obligations based on its derived axioms because those axioms themselves provided the best reasons for actions. After our transition into a deterministic universe, the best reason for actions ended up being whatever the agent will in fact do (based on our condition of having a reason means being able to act on that reason). The conclusion of this is that the best reasons for action can be the non-moral or immoral actions, which defeats the claim that a moral obligation necessarily entails the best reasons.

In a deterministic universe, the ability to make moral judgments of “rightness” and “wrongness” is also impeded. If our conception of what makes an action right or wrong is necessarily dependent upon its counterparts, then in judging a single action, we are unable to make reference to those opposing concepts (rightness and wrongness). This means that moral judgments in a deterministic universe are left suspended to generalities (“X is wrong), but can never be extended to agents or actions themselves. Trailing back to the first section of this chapter, we said that a basic function of normative ethics is to determine which actions in a given context are right and wrong. If one accepts my argument, then this basic feature, along with moral obligation is undercut, rendering any system of normative ethics unable to perform its designed function.

## PART II

### *Libertarian Free Will: How Can it be Possible?*

♦ “(Philosophy) does not, like exact or empirical science, bring us to know things of which we were simply ignorant, but brings us to know in a different way things which we already knew in some way”-  
*Robin George Collingwood, An Essay on Philosophical Method (EPM) (161) (2005)*

Now that we have an understanding of the conceptual entailments of libertarian free will<sup>19</sup>, we can now ask the pivotal question: how can such a thing be possible? Assuming that we want to preserve normative ethics, providing a coherent account of how such a thing can be is a task worthy of any philosopher. Robert Kane, for example, has introduced a theory of freedom that uses probability-based quantum physics to explain how brain and neural activity can be “free” in some sense.<sup>20</sup> While this account is promising, I want to combine aspects of this theory with a classical metaphysical approach to explain how something like free will can be possible. This account, although philosophically archaic, will start with the reference point of the phenomenology of freedom, and move to explain this phenomenology by way R.G. Collingwood’s metaphysics.

The philosophy of Collingwood is based on a classical metaphysical approach, one in which argues that philosophical concepts must take place on a “scale of forms”. This approach was not founded by Collingwood, as the philosopher of today only needs to shake the dust off of

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<sup>19</sup> The terms ‘free-will’ and ‘freedom’ will denote the concept of “libertarian free will”, i.e., the ability to do otherwise and control over our actions.

<sup>20</sup> (Kane, The Significance of Free Will 1996)

his or hers copy of Plato's *Republic* to find the same conceptual framework.<sup>21</sup> This is the generally idea that philosophical concepts must be known through the development and progression of stages within a scale. This philosophical framework allows for concepts that may be seen as contradictory or binary otherwise, to inhabit the same metaphysical landscape. In the modern free-will debate, the concepts of libertarian free will and determinism are seen as mutually exclusive concepts, and the acceptance of one entails the rejection of the other. This isolated and bracketed framework not only fails to account for the multi-faceted phenomenology of human experience (i.e. it seems that "free-will" finds itself in certain phenomenological experiences, while others seem more "determined"), it also fails to account for the way that nature mirrors this dialectical approach. At the quantum level, systems are undetermined in a way that cannot be found at the macro-level, yet both levels inhabit the same world. The scale of forms can accommodate this antinomy by framing the concepts not as absolutes (the world is strictly determined or strictly indeterminate), but relative concepts that can be more or less instantiated in the world at in given time.<sup>22</sup>

In *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, Collingwood claimed the following, "it is a relatively bad way of knowing a thing if we merely observe that it is so but do not understand why it is so; a better way of knowing it would be by observation and understanding together".<sup>23</sup>

This statement will serve as the structure of this chapter. The first half will be the application of

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<sup>21</sup> At the end of Book 6 of *The Republic*, Plato expresses his scale of knowledge, which starts which "imagination" and moves through different stages eventually end at the "understanding".

<sup>22</sup> It seems to be that our common sense understanding of free will implicitly adopts a scale of forms. For example, we tend to think that children have less free will, in that; they are less capable of making autonomous decisions (the reason as to why we don't hold children to the same level of moral responsibility as an adult). The position that we adopt seems to be something like the following: the more mental maturity and stability, the freer the will. Under this conception, free will is a conceptual scale that progresses with development.

<sup>23</sup> (Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method* 2005)

Collingwood's framework, which will establish the "that it is so" aspect of free-will, while the second half will articulate the "how it is so". The "that it is so" question will be answered by an exploration into Collingwood's scale of forms, and how the concepts that make up the scale are known through the fundamental structure of the ontological argument. This "fundamental structure" will be removed from any religious connotation, and will argue along the following principle: certain concepts have the notion of "existence" built into the very fabric of the concepts, so one cannot ascertain the concept without assuming that it exists. After arguing for this principle, we will further develop our scale of forms by articulating the "how it is so" question by giving an analogy to certain concepts in quantum mechanics. To recapitulate: the purpose of this chapter is to apply a scale of forms to the free-will debate, but first we must explore how concepts on the scale are established (i.e., the "that it is so"), after doing this, we will buttress our scale by articulating an analogy to quantum mechanics to help elucidate "how it is so".

### 2.1 The Core Structure: The Overlap of Classes

♦ *"Take a knife and cut it in two in the middle, into a top half and a bottom half. You have now separated opposites. But the instant the separation is complete; the top half has its own bottom and the bottom half its own top...your opposites have now coincided."*- Robin George Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis* (200)

Collingwood understood philosophical discourse to take place on what he called a "scale of forms". Although the concept sounds abstract and unrealized, it is actually quite akin to our common sense understanding of different intellectual disciplines. For Collingwood, each

discipline starts with fundamental concepts that unite a number of different things into a class.<sup>24</sup> For example, the concept of “animals” (the genus) unites certain members under a common characteristic, i.e., being an animal. For the medical sciences, the concept of a “disease” unites members of a class by sharing the characteristic of being a disease. From this general concept, more specific subsections flow from a genus: for example, an “animal” can be either vertebrate or invertebrate and then into more specific species like a “bird” or “reptile”. From this the divisions follow and the genus of “animal” or “disease” is eventually exhausted.

The fundamental concepts of science and philosophy differ in significant ways. For science, its general concepts are divided in such a way where the members are exclusive to each other and therefore do not overlap. A vertebrate is distinct from an invertebrate in such a way that if a member of a class is a vertebrate (i.e., has a spine), it is impossible for it to overlap with its opposite without actually becoming that opposite. In other words, a class whose members are distinct cannot share the quality of its opposite without negating its original designated quality. The scale of forms for science starts with abstracted first concepts such as “animal” and by way of that concept makes distinctions between members that share some characteristic of the first concept.

Collingwood believed that philosophical concepts differ in the respect that the members of philosophical concepts do not share distinctness, but actually overlap and embody opposing degrees of two opposite experiences of a concept at any point on a scale.<sup>25</sup> Let us unpack that last sentence. The scale of forms in philosophical thinking involves two concepts that are distinct in experience, for example, in ethics the experience of “goodness” and the experience of “badness”. Both of these concepts are distinct and make up the opposing ends of a scale. The structure of a

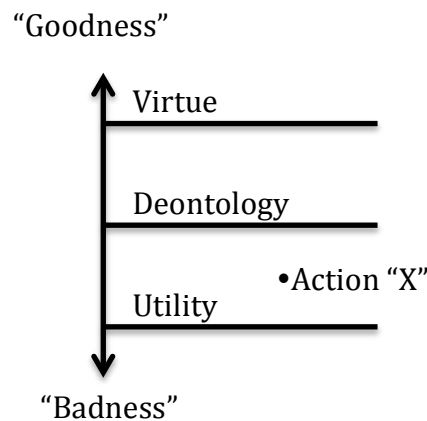
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<sup>24</sup> (Collingwood 2005)

<sup>25</sup> (Collingwood 2005)

scale is by its very nature, a dialectical process. It is a way to reconcile seemingly contradictory concepts into an intelligible whole. The scale of forms for ethics has members, which can be considered as actions that embody both experiences but with varying degrees of each concept. If an action is closer to “badness”, it may be considered not as absolutely bad, but as having more “badness” than “goodness”. Within the scale, each philosophical criterion for moral action is incorporated, which makes a progression of “levels” possible. For example, virtue ethics, deontology, and utility would all be incorporated into the scale, and it is the job of the philosopher to configure how these criteria are arranged and which actions fit into each level.

The higher or lower the level on the scale, the more the action incorporates the general essence of the concept. For example, take the following scale of forms:



*Figure 1.1*

Let action “X” stand for the act of lying to a friend in order to produce the best consequences. Due to the overlap of philosophical scales, action “X” would not be an act done *solely* out of utility, but rather, it would be an amalgamation of all three kinds of “ethics”, with utility being the major factor. To think of it simply, action “X” could be thought of mathematically, e.g., 75% utility based, 20% duty based, and 5% based on virtue. This seems to align well with our common sense notions of an ethical action, as the utilitarian in maximizing utility believes not

only that what is good is what maximizes utility, but that the maximizing of utility is something that everyone should do (hence be something like a duty), and that the maximizing of utility is something that a good person does (hence something like virtue). At each stage in the scale, the development towards each generic essence does not discard the stage prior to it, but rather, it envelopes it to a more or lesser degree. An action can be done more out of duty and less out of utility, more out of character and less out of duty, etc.

The overlap of classes in any particular instance of a philosophical concept is what makes it incompatible with empirical sciences. For Collingwood, the empirical sciences can, by using sense data and testing, say that something X is not something Y: a vertebrate cannot be both a vertebrate and an invertebrate, a prokaryotic cell cannot be both a prokaryotic and eukaryotic cell. Philosophical concepts cannot be separated from their opposites in the same way, as any instantiation of a philosophical concept is going to be on a scale where the overlap of classes is by necessity. Therefore, there is no way to isolate a philosophical concept in the world, i.e., *this* action is virtuous or *this* action increases utility, in the same way that science can isolate its concepts. Collingwood argues that because of this overlap, philosophical concepts cannot be known in the same way that empirical concepts are (by scientific methods).<sup>26</sup>

How then, does philosophy come to know its concepts? If we take the concept of “knowledge” as a philosophical concept (which seems like an uncontroversial thing to say), then the act of “knowing” must itself fit into a scale of forms. If knowing itself is a scale of forms, then by way of our discussion earlier, it must have two distinct essences, which form the scale. Presumably, the top end of the scale would be “knowledge” itself and the bottom something like

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<sup>26</sup> (Collingwood 2005)

“ignorance”.<sup>27</sup> Yet, philosophical concepts must overlap, and there can be no absolute instantiation of either essence in the world. If there is no absolute instantiation of philosophical concepts, in this case “knowledge” and “ignorance”, then there can be no progression from absolute to absolute. In other words, if knowledge always overlaps with ignorance, then one cannot start from ground zero (ignorance), and acquire knowledge.

It would seem that we have backed ourselves into a hole of circularity. We are claiming that philosophical concepts rest on each other, i.e., “goodness” rests on “badness”, and “knowledge” rests on “ignorance”. Collingwood claims that the solution to this dilemma is already embedded in most of philosophical thought:

The solution of the dilemma lies in a feature of philosophical thought to which I have already referred more than once: the Socratic principle that philosophical reasoning leads to no conclusions which we did not in some sense know already.<sup>28</sup>

The reason as to why we do not start from ground zero on a philosophical scale is because we already possess some minimal form of the knowledge that we are seeking to formulate. The knowledge of philosophical concepts is a process of development, where the conclusion of that development is the same as the starting point of the development. The starting point is the experience of the concept, like the experience of “goodness” or “badness” and the conclusion is formulation of what those experiences are. The only difference in the conclusion of philosophical thought is that the reformulation of the original concept is more concrete rather than abstract. We

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<sup>27</sup> Plato himself developed a scale for knowledge which incorporated reality: the highest level of reality was “being” which coincided with “knowledge”, the middle level, “becoming” which coincided with “opinion”, and the lowest level “nothingness” which coincided with “ignorance”.

<sup>28</sup> (Collingwood 2005)

can think of “more concrete” as denoting something like “more known” and abstract as something like “less known”. When one engages in philosophical thought, the conclusion of their analysis never moves from “unknown” to “known”, but rather, it moves to “less known” to “more known”. In this way, philosophical thought, unlike scientific thought, never begins from mere hypothetical starting points because that which is hypothetical assumes that there is something yet to be known.

This minimal form of knowledge that is possessed prior to development is what Collingwood believed to be the “essence” of philosophical thought. The “essence” of philosophical thought can be thought of as the bare minimal phenomenology, or experience of a concept.<sup>29</sup> To help elucidate this, I would like the reader to imagine themselves as children again. As a child, one may not (and most likely does not) have any conception or theory of “ethics”, or “knowledge”, or “free will”. Yet, regardless of a concrete understanding of these concepts, a child certainly still experiences these concepts. For example, imagine a child witnessing the harming of an innocent animal. Seeing such an event will most likely cause an emotional reaction, one in which the child thinks something like “I do not want this to happen”. Is this experience not the foundation of the concept of “wrongness” in ethics? The child has no concrete understanding of why this is wrong, yet due to the experience; the child has some minimal foundation of wrongness.

For Collingwood, the experience of something like wrongness in the child is part of the essence of the philosophical category “ethics”. To use another example, imagine a child that has been told that something they believe was wrong or incorrect. If the child has a deeply rooted conviction, they will most likely challenge whatever is being told to them (most likely in the

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<sup>29</sup> For the rest of this paper, I will be using “experience” and “essence” to denote the phenomenology of the concept.

form of the child like “nu-uh”). Is this not because the child is experiencing something like “having knowledge”? The concept of “knowledge” isn’t developed within the child’s mind, yet the experience of one’s beliefs being correct, or in other words, corresponding to something *actual* in the world, is something like the foundation of what we call “knowledge”.

From this bare minimal experience, one develops an “object of thought”. While this sounds rather obscure, I employ the reader to think of “object of thought” as a concept found within thought. From the experience of “rightness” or “wrongness”, one develops a concept (an object of thought), called “ethics”; from the experience of something like “conviction” or “true belief” one develops a concept of “knowledge”, and so on. For Collingwood, the experience of these concepts is the *reference point* for the truth of philosophical thought, because without the experience, the concept cannot exist. If we did not experience the essence of ethics, free will or knowledge, there would be no *thought* to be had about such a topic. For example, think of the construction of a building; in order for the building to be *built upon*, it must have a sturdy foundation. For Collingwood, the foundation of philosophy is the *experience* of its concepts, which enables the “building” of thought to occur.

### 2.2-The Ontological Argument: The Starting Point for a Scale

Collingwood’s emphasis on the ontological argument is understood as the intertwinement of *essence and existence*. For Collingwood, if the experience of philosophical concepts serves as the foundation for thought, that foundation must be assumed to exist if one is to build upon that foundation. Collingwood understood the ontological argument not as a proof for the existence of God, but rather, proving the idea that certain concepts found within our experience have existential import built into them. For a reader not familiar with the ontological argument, let me

articulate what I believe to be the common feature that most of these arguments share. I will call this the essence involves existence principle (EIEP):

**EIEP:** When ascertaining, or thinking of certain concepts, the very notion of the concept entails the existence of that concept.

To help clarify, I ask the reader to think of a simple example. Take the idea of something like a horse, as opposed to the idea of a unicorn. A horse and a unicorn both share many identical features such as having a tail, hoofs, fur, etc. Yet, the concept of a “horse” is not the same as the concept of a “unicorn” for one obvious reason: unicorns don’t exist. Built into the very concept of a “unicorn” is the principle of non-existence, while the very concept of a “horse” entails existential import. The ontological argument similarly claims that the concept of “God”, like the concept of a “horse” entails that God exists. It is not my aim to defend this claim, but only to articulate the idea that the experience of philosophical concepts, especially the experience of free will, entails the existence of those concepts.

To start, take what I believe to be the easiest example to elucidate the EIEP principal within philosophical concepts: ethics. Ethics, most traditionally conceived, is not merely a descriptive matter, but more so prescriptive. The moral philosopher, when tasked with giving an account of how one *ought* to act is formulating an ideal within her mind that serves as something like an end to ethical activity.<sup>30</sup> This ideal cannot be a mere or fantastical thought if it is to directly impact action. It must be *concrete*, in the sense that the ideal has some existential import,

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<sup>30</sup> E.g., The virtue ethicist formulates the ideal virtues, while the utilitarian formulates the ideal of the best consequences, etc. Each ideal is believed to be something like the “end” of ethics.

or in other words, is something that does or could exist. Collingwood articulates this point in the following way:

The moral philosopher in describing virtue, must himself, in his work as a thinker, display some of the virtues that he describes-sincerity, truthfulness, perseverance, courage, and justice-it is clear that the moral ideal, which it is his business to conceive, cannot be conceived as a mere thought wholly divorced from existence.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, in prescribing the moral ideal, the philosopher is prescribing something that has existential import tucked into it. The philosopher starts by experiencing the concept itself, whether that is truthfulness, courage, etc., and goes on to articulate an ideal based on this experience. This ideal, once articulated, must be assumed to be an existent feature of the world, as if it wasn't, it wouldn't carry normative weight. By this, I simply mean that if the ideal were not assumed to be an existential feature of the world, it would not guide people to act towards that ideal. In the study of ethics, the subject matter, i.e., the moral ideal entails something like the EIEP principle, as the very notion of a moral ideal entails that it exists and it is something to act towards or embody.

Shifting to the free will debate, the concept of “free will” strongly inhibits the EIEP principle. The experience of free will, in the most basic sense, is the act of conceiving of multiple possibilities, and having the ability to choose unimpeded among those possibilities. This could be described as the “essence” of free will. What about this particular experience assumes the existence of the concept itself? Well, the act of conceiving of alternate possibilities assumes that those possibilities could very well exist; otherwise, it would be superfluous to conceive of

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<sup>31</sup> (Collingwood 2005)

multiple possibilities. The determinist would argue that the act of deliberation contributes to the casually determined chain, but this misses the reason as to why an agent deliberates. In the act of a decision, the differing paths that occur in one's mind are not simply passive thoughts, but are assumed to be active insights into how the world might turn out. A person who is contemplating a decision is doing so because they are assuming the *content* of their contemplation (should I do option A or option B) could be real, and it is up to them to make it so. This experience, in other words, cannot be divorced from a commitment to the existence of the concept itself.

The idea that the practical experience of free will entails existential import, or rather, a belief in the existence of its concepts has also found its way into the contemporary free will debate. Peter van Inwagen, for example, argues that the experience of deliberation entails that one genuinely believes in the existence of that which is being deliberated about:

In my view, if someone deliberates about whether to do A or to do B, it follows that his behavior manifests a belief that it is possible for him to do A - that he can do A, that he has it within his power to do A - and a belief that it is possible to do B. Someone's trying to decide which of two books to buy manifests a belief with respect to each of those books that it is possible for him to buy.<sup>32</sup>

I believe this modern formulation is a reformulation of the intuitions that Collingwood was attempting to express. If the experience of free will is something like deliberating among multiple possibilities, then that experience itself assumes the existence of one's "ability" to act on those things. I believe that van Inwagen was making a practical point here, in that, in certain cases, our practical experience of the world is inconsistent with the concept of "determinism". While I do take this to be a strong point, I think that there is an additional feature of significance.

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<sup>32</sup> (P. V. Inwagen 1983)

The significance involves the emphasis that Collingwood placed on the EIEP as the condition for the very possibility of thought about a concept.

As we stated earlier, Collingwood believed that the essence or experience of philosophical concepts is the foundation for thought about the subject matter. We can now articulate the most important detail of this section: if the essence (or experience) of philosophical concepts is the foundation for philosophical thought, and the essence of philosophical concepts entails existence, then one cannot formulate a theory about that concept without assuming that it exists. Under this philosophical framework, questions like “does free will exist?” would be fundamentally incoherent. It would be incoherent in the same way that say, a builder who is constructing a building, could ask such a question like “does a building need a foundation?” In asking that question, the builder fundamentally misunderstands the concept of a “building”, as the very possibility of having a “building” entails having a foundation. In the same way, asking “does free will exist?” fundamentally misunderstands what the experience of free will tells us, and if the experience is what constitutes the concept of “free will” (remember we said that the essence or experience of a concept is something like the *cause* of a concept, or “object of thought”), then negating the experience is the same as negating the concept itself. The essence or experience is the foundation of the concept in the same way that a leveled concrete slab is the foundation for a structure, and without assuming the former the later cannot be possible.

We can map out Collingwood’s analysis for philosophical concepts in the following way:

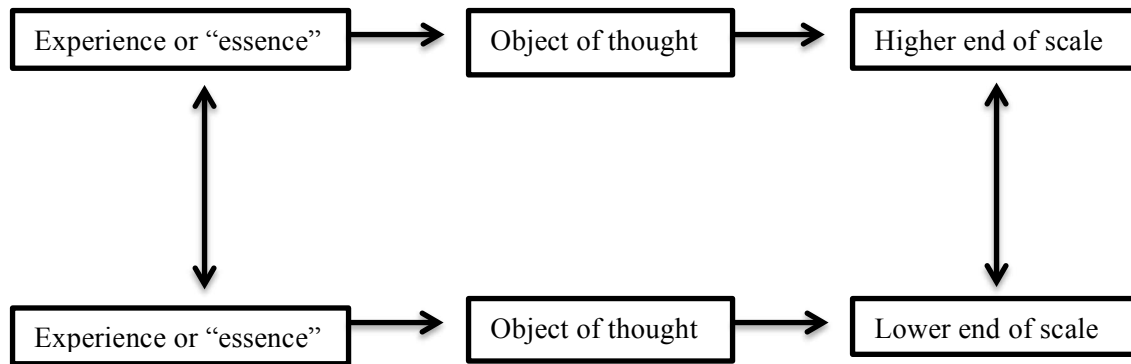


Figure 1.2

The EIEP gives us an entrance point to developing a scale of forms. The scale assumes the existence of its concepts (e.g., in figure 1.1 “goodness” and “badness”), and because if this, one does not have to give a theory of existence, but rather, give a theory of that which exists. In the following sections, we will apply the framework of Collingwood’s scale of forms to the concept of free will. Our scale will be developed in the following way: we will start by articulating how the concepts of “freedom” and “determinism” find their way within our experience, and then posit a scale of development by reference to experience. The experience of these concepts will be the genesis of a more developed scale that will incorporate elements of quantum mechanics.

### 2.3- A (Somewhat) Brief Clarification Before Proceeding:

An obvious objection to this framework is something like the following: our experience may entail something like *prima facie* existence, but we are able to confirm the existence of things like “ethics”, “free will”, etc. through empirical discovery. In addressing this objection, it is important to note that Collingwood bore a radical anti-naturalism streak. Collingwood believed that philosophical concepts were known to exist through experience and because of this, they are empirically unverifiable. This isn’t to say that empirical study cannot contribute to the

understanding of philosophical concepts, but rather, empirical study cannot alone prove or disprove philosophical concepts. The two main reasons he gives for this claim are 1) the scale of forms does not allow for proper scientific distinctions and 2) philosophical concepts are concepts without empirical difference.

As we stated earlier, the scale of forms entails two opposing concepts that develop with varying degrees. The job of the philosopher is to identify actions, or aspects of experience, and find their place on the scale. This means that the concepts of philosophy will always embody their contradiction into a more or lesser degree. Some actions can be overwhelmingly bad, but still incorporate a small amount of good; some actions may be “free”, yet constrained (maybe by past experiences, desires etc.) in a minimal sense. For example, the most germane event that comes to mind is the rule of the Nazi regime, which would embody the philosophical concept of “badness” to an overwhelming degree. Given the three levels on our scale in figure 1.1, we can rule out placing the Nazi regime anywhere near virtue, as given a basic Aristotelian conception of virtue as the mean between excess and deficiency, we could argue that the Nazis as a regime, embodied excesses and deficiencies of such as the excess of rashness, and the deficiency of insensibility, etc.<sup>33</sup>

Using a Kantian framework, we can also preclude the Nazi regime from incorporating anything like a deontological theory.<sup>34</sup> The Nazis embodiment of the principles of murder, racism, etc. would not be universalizable if adopted by all rational agents, thus it could not be a categorical duty. From the lowest stage on our scale, that of utility, one could make an argument that some gains in utility came from the rule of the Nazi party. The Nazis were innovative when

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<sup>33</sup> (Kagan 1998)

<sup>34</sup> (Kagan 1998)

it came to industry, technology, and even in some cases, the medical sciences.<sup>35</sup> This would entail that the Nazi party was not an absolute instantiation of “badness”, as any absolute instantiation of “badness” could not embody any ethical criteria of “goodness”. In articulating where the Nazi regime falls within our scale, we could say that the regime encapsulated 99.5% of the concept of “badness” and 0.5% of the concept of “goodness” due to the gains in utility.

The idea of overlap is, in a sense, scientifically unacceptable. Collingwood claims that the concepts of science (for the most part) are mutually exclusive and do not admit to degrees. Using our example from earlier, a vertebrae and an invertebrate do not come in degrees, but rather, come as absolute instantiations. If empirical verification can only discover absolute instantiations of concepts rather than degrees, then empirical verification cannot discover philosophical concepts. To use another example, take the empirical concept of a “disease”. A disease may find itself with different degrees of severity, but a disease could never overlap with its opposite. For a disease to overlap with its opposite, namely not a disease, that would entail that at any given moment, a patient could have every disease known to man (even if it was to a very small degree). This is clearly not how the empirical sciences makes distinctions. In the sciences, either something is or is not applicable under a certain classification (like a “disease”), so if it is true that philosophical concepts overlap with their opposites, then empirical classification could not handle philosophical concepts.

Collingwood’s more pressing objection to the empiricist calling for verification of experience is based on the instantiation of philosophical concepts in the world. It’s a rather simple argument, but it seems to be to have substantial pull. Philosophical concepts, Collingwood argues, are concepts that are without empirical distinction. By this, he means that

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<sup>35</sup> (Proctor 2003)

the concepts of philosophy can be found within empirical objects that are empirically distinct from each other. For example, in the contemporary field of Animal Ethics, Bernard Rollin has argued that the concept of “moral virtues” that have been typically applied to human behavior, is not only applicable to the description of animal behavior, but that it is reasonable to think that animals can actually act out of something like “virtue”.<sup>36</sup> The concept of say, a “dog” and the concept of a “human”, although sharing similarities, empirically fall under different genera (for human, the genus “homo”, and for dogs, the genus “canis”), yet the concept of virtue can be applicable across empirical divisions. If the concept of “moral virtue” was an empirical concept, it would have to be exclusive to specific members of a specific genus, yet it seems that it is applicable to members across distinct genera.

This, for Collingwood, is evidence that philosophical concepts are *rational* concepts of the mind rather than concepts of the senses. The concepts of the senses provide us with distinctions prior to us knowing them at all, while philosophical distinctions are brought into nature by rational thought.<sup>37</sup> For example, imagine a human who is mentally and epistemically a blank slate. They know nothing about the world, yet just by virtue of seeing nature, they can intuitively make distinctions between objects. Our blank slate human being may see a bird on a tree, not know what a “bird” or a “tree” is, and yet know that the bird is distinct from the tree in some way. In order to make philosophical distinctions, our blank slate human being would need to develop his or hers thought in such a way that they develop not objects of the senses (like that of a tree or bird), as that is given to them, but “objects of thought” that are able to cut across empirical divisions. Our blank slate human being might develop into an environmental

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<sup>36</sup> (Rollin, n.d.)

<sup>37</sup> (D'oro 2002)

philosopher, for example, and apply the concept of “intrinsic value” to both the bird and the tree, thus uniting distinct empirical members into a genus of rational thought.

All of this is to say that the verification of philosophical concepts must take place through rational thought rather than empirical verification. To put it most simply, if philosophical concepts are concepts of experience that develop into *rational thought*, then the means of verification can only be through *rational thought*, whereas the concepts of empirical nature are derived at by the senses, they can only be verified through the senses. This would mean that the scientist searching for “freedom” in the brain might find empirical evidence that helps to better explain the concept of “freedom”, but the scientist will never refute the existence of “freedom” by looking at the brain, because the existence was already confirmed by the experience (as the concept of “freedom” is a philosophical concept). While Collingwood’s refutation of empirical verification seems rather radical, I believe it has some intuitive pull to it. Take one last example that might help cure the reader of skepticism-most people would agree that there are things that inhibit something like “goodness”, and that “good” things exist. Yet, the things that people would describe as “good” would most likely cut across all empirical lines. One may say that a certain book is “good”; while another might say that a certain type of bourbon whiskey is “good”. These two things are obviously different objects of the senses, yet, if there is a sufficient rational explanation of the experience of the book and of the whiskey that coincide, both could be adequately described as the concept (or “object of thought”) of “good”.

#### 2.4 A Scale of Freedom: Rethinking Determinism and Libertarianism

In the contemporary free will debate, it is assumed that libertarianism and determinism entail something of an antinomy. It is thought that libertarianism entails that falsity of

determinism and vice versa. I must confess to the reader that I have always been confounded by this dichotomy. This confusion was illuminated after an intense study of Collingwood and his explanation of philosophical concepts. Recalling what we discussed earlier, Collingwood believed that philosophical concepts must be checked by our experience of those concepts, and that those concepts make up a scale of forms. I believe this framework can help explain that the antinomy of free will and determinism in the form of a scale, both of which are *assumed to exist by way of our experience*.

Using our framework as a point of reference, we said that philosophical concepts, by way of their experience, have existential import built into them. We also stated that there are no perfect instantiations of philosophical concepts, because any scale of concepts must overlap (or embody both opposing essences). If this framework is accepted, then a scale of “free will” must include two opposing essences, presumably that of “freedom” and that of “determinism”. With the phenomenology of these concepts as a reference point for development, I will articulate a scale of forms for “free will”, one which incorporates different stages of development of each opposing essence or experience.<sup>38</sup> After articulating this scale, I will demonstrate that this system is something that can be reconciled with certain interpretations and quantum mechanics, and in doing this, it is my hope that the empiricist can breathe a sigh of relief.

The starting point for the lower end of our scale must be something like “determinism”, or actions that we lack control over and could not have done otherwise. The higher, or more developed end of the scale must be something like “freedom” or that which is unrestricted and able to do otherwise. Both concepts, if they are to partake in a scale of forms, must be known in

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<sup>38</sup> A reader familiar with the contemporary free-will debate might object that this sounds more like a compatibilist account of free will. I will explain that the highest stage on a scale of freedom is closest to libertarian free will, which denotes open metaphysical possibilities and control.

some way prior to development, and this undeveloped “knowledge” is the bare experience of those concepts themselves. It is, as we said, the experience of the essential nature of the concepts that go on to be formulated in a categorical way. In doing this, we are not asking “does free will exist?” but rather, “what is free will?” The first step we encounter in developing this scale is asking ourselves the following question: do we experience the concepts that we are seeking to formulate? Or, in other words, do we *know* the concept prior to our investigation?

The phenomenological experience of both concepts, I think, is best described by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger distinguishes between modes of phenomenological experience that our consciousness has with the world. The two states we will be focusing on are what Heidegger calls *ready-to-hand* and *unready-to-hand* states.<sup>39</sup> Heidegger describes the *ready-to-hand* state as a state in which the agent experiences the objects as not independent from oneself, but as apart of one’s intention or end. For example, the academic who is engrossed in her study does not acknowledge the tools around herself as separate (a computer, books, etc.) in the same way that one would acknowledge these tools if one were to think about each in isolation. In this way, the academic who is writing a paper loses phenomenological awareness of not only these objects, but also of oneself. The objects of experience, and the subject of those objects (the agent) collapse into an organized whole whose intention is to reach the end of some activity (the academic writing the paper).

This would seem like the closest embodiment of a “determined” experience. If what determinism means is the lack of control and open metaphysical possibilities, then an experience where an agent is not phenomenologically aware of oneself would seem harmonize with not being in control or having open possibilities. Why is this so? Well, when we intuitively think of

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<sup>39</sup> (Heidegger 2008)

“being in control” there is an implicit condition of being *self-aware*. When we inquire into whether an individual is in control of their actions, we ask questions like “did you understand the situation?” or “did you understand the consequences?” and this seems to me to be an inquiry into the individual’s awareness of one’s own ability. This lack of awareness, I believe is best represented by Jean-Paul-Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*:

Let us imagine that moved by jealousy, curiosity, or vice I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through a keyhole. I am alone and on the level of a non-thetic self-consciousness. This means first of all that there is no self to inhabit my consciousness, nothing therefore to which I can refer my acts in order to qualify them. They are in no way known; I am my act and hence they carry in themselves their whole justification.<sup>40</sup>

The person who is looking through the keyhole is so absorbed in the action that is taking place that the self-consciousness of the individual at the moment disappears. In those moments of starting through the keyhole, there is no “self” in which actions can be ascribed to the self. The action of looking through a keyhole is thus more like an “event”, an “event” that the person isn’t really contributing to, more so just *participating in*. Sartre’s example also illustrates the individual who feels overpowered by desire, so much so that the individual feels less in control of their actions.

Whether or not determinism would entail a universal *ready-to-hand* state is a one that I will not take a stance on here. My point is that our phenomenological experience has some *reference point* for the concept of “determinism” and it is this reference point that allows such a concept to take place on a scale of forms. In other words, we have experiences that we can

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<sup>40</sup> (Sartre 1984)

imagine as something like what being a determined-being would be, from this, we are allowed to articulate the bottom end of our scale of forms.

The opposing phenomenological state that Heidegger explains is the *unready-to-hand* state. The *unready-to-hand* state can be thought of as a general disturbance in the flow of the *ready-to-hand* state. For example, if the academic were to experience a computer failure while writing, the computer and all of the objects around this person would become phenomenologically known again. The computer would become a separate entity- an object of a subject (i.e., the agent). This “break” in phenomenal consciousness is what allows the agent to consider the object-itself. To think of this in a simple way, when the agent experiences *un-ready-to-hand*, the agent is in a “problem-solving” mode, one in which the problem must be solved in order to return to a *ready-to-hand* state.

The *unready-to-hand* state, I believe, is what resembles our experience of freedom. When we are disrupted from a *ready-to-hand* state, it requires genuine deliberation about the situation at hand. This deliberation usually entails something like the imagining of multiple possibilities, or in other words, different ways in which the situation can be resolved. This type of situation can occur to us with different degrees of *value*. For example, the academic who is unable to continue writing due to a computer failure may experience an *unready-to-hand* state as an inconvenience, one in which is not detrimental to, or determinative of, the individual’s selfhood. The academic is still an academic with the same goals, desires and projects that one had prior to the computer failure. Contrarily, one can face an *unready-to-hand* state that is reflective of one’s selfhood (i.e., identity, goals, projects, etc.). This is what Robert Kane identifies as “self-forming

actions”: actions, which are fundamentally reflective of our character and determine the type of person that we will be.<sup>41</sup>

These actions, one in which there is a “torn” decision about self-forming actions, are the phenomenological epicenter of freedom. It is when we feel as if there are genuinely conceivable ways that our life could turn out, and it is “up to us” on which path to take, that our experience is most aligned with libertarian free will. Libertarian free will, in its most basic form involves three conditions: 1) the ability to do otherwise 2) control over our actions and 3) that at least *some* actions are undetermined. For a self-forming action to meet the requirements of libertarian free will, it must be the case that at the time of deliberation, the alternate possibilities that the agent is deliberating over are genuinely open possibilities that could happen, given that the agent were to choose to do so. It must also be the case that the antecedent conditions prior to that decision are not causally determined. Referencing back to our phenomenology, it would seem like we do experience a “break” in the casual chain when in an *unready-to-hand* state, especially when we are experiencing a self-forming decision where agent is “torn” about what to do.

In the same way that the breaking of a computer makes an agent aware of the computer itself, the disruption that occurs when experiencing a self-forming action makes the agent aware of multiple possibilities. These multiple possibilities usually entail reasons, or rather, sets of reasons that correspond to either possibility. For example, imagine a person who is considering leaving one’s job in order to pursue a lifelong passion. Presumably, there are genuine reasons that correspond to each possibility, such as “maintaining financial security” or “pursuing a sense of fulfillment”, etc. It is because these reasons are particularly balanced in their *weight*, i.e. the

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<sup>41</sup> (Kane 2004)

amount of value that the agent assigns to the reason(s); the agent feels disrupted and experiences the decision as being “up to” oneself.

We can now begin to formulate the early stage of our scale of forms in the example below:

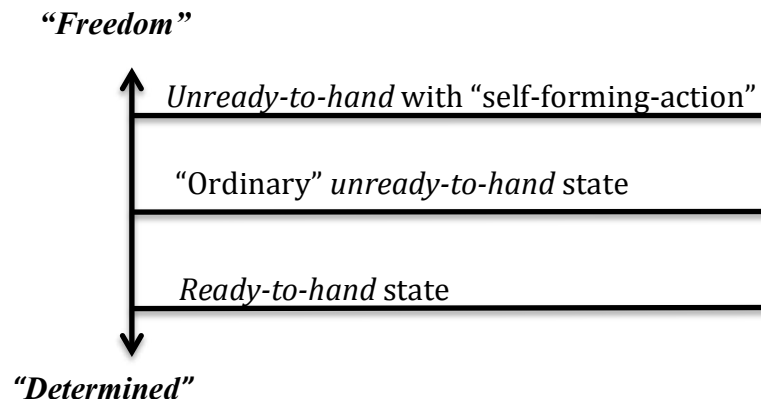


Figure 1.3

I believe that this scale of experience represents, as Collingwood states “the expression of ones own experience and that of others in a reasoned and orderly shape”.<sup>42</sup> Yet, there is still something missing. The empiricist will object that our scale at this point is lacking a critical feature, i.e., some type of empirical foundation. Remembering back to our distinctions between empirical concepts and philosophical concepts, we claimed that philosophical concepts cannot be fully isolated in the world in the same way that empirical concepts can. This is due to the overlap of each essence in any particular action (i.e., there is no action that is wholly “free” or wholly “determined”). Would this mean that our scale is left to our rational sensibilities, unable to provide the deprived empiricist of verification?

### 2.5- Freedom and Overlap: Quantum Mechanics

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<sup>42</sup> (Collingwood 2005)

According to our framework articulated earlier in this chapter, philosophical concepts must adhere to two overarching standards 1) they must take place on a scale, 2) they are known prior to development through our experience. The second condition is, in effect, the standard structure of the ontological argument. We are claiming that by way of experiencing a concepts *essence* (the essence of “freedom” and the essence of “determinism”), that essence is categorical, or in another word, existent.

The empiricist calling for the empirical verification of our scale is not without merit. The concept of “free will” does seem to be conceptually split on whether it is solely a philosophical concept, or a concept belonging to the sciences in a way that our previously explicated concepts are not. For example, “ethics” seems to be a solely philosophical concept because regardless of our advances in science, the scientist will never be able to find the concept of “goodness” in the same way that he or she can find a neuron firing. In this way, ethics seems to be safely tucked in our rational sensibilities. The concept of “free will” is different, as it has a close relationship to the study of physics. If physics in its most basic sense is the study of matter and motion, then the concept of “free will”, which involves the articulation of how agents move throughout the world, is not far removed.

The philosopher of freedom is not without support, as quantum mechanics has made room for certain features of the world being indeterminate. My purpose in this section is not to give a full fledged quantum theory of freedom, but only to show that given certain features of quantum mechanics, our scale of freedom, which is based on experience, can be given the support that it needs. The two concepts that I will focus on, and eventually build into our scale, are *superposition*, which is the concept in quantum theory that particles can take on different states at the same time, and *measurement*, which is simply the act of measuring these particles,

but at the quantum level this denotes a significantly different consequences than measurement in classical physics.<sup>43</sup>

### 2.6 A Preliminary to the Quantum Analogy

Introducing the quantum realm to our discussion of free will may seem to induce a tension between the fundamental thematic elements of this thesis. Our application of Collingwood's framework is inherently based in a rationalist philosophy, one in which claims that philosophical concepts are known through systematic and orderly reasoning rather than empirical study. Introducing the quantum realm to our scale of forms seems to undercut this anti-naturalistic approach. For this reason, I would like to make my intention of this section clear as to avoid any thematic inconsistencies. Our application of the quantum world to our scale of forms is not meant to be a literal interpretation of how things are (i.e., the quantum happenings of the brain), but rather, it is meant to serve as something like a literary device, a metaphor, that is meant to structure our thought on the subject in such a way that our understanding of free will can become more lucid. It is not meant to serve as a theory of existence, as we previously stated that the very experience of free will assumes its own existence. What we are doing in this section is buttressing our scale of forms in order to not argue for "that it so" but rather, "how it is so".

What is the value of a metaphor? The value of metaphorical thinking lies in its ability to reorientate thought towards *possibilities*. This reorientation is desperately needed within the interminable free-will debate. This reorientation that I speak of is a shift away from the classical physical approach, which is based in a mechanistic, and binary understanding of human action, towards a *dialectical* understanding of human action, which understands its concepts not as

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<sup>43</sup> (Albert 1992)

binary opposites, but as opposites that are apart of the same landscape. By “binary” and “mechanistic”, I mean the understanding of human action that claims human beings are “free” or “not free”, and any explanation of action must be under those categories. A quantum metaphor can set free our imagination in such a way that in pursuing the object of our imagination, we may stumble upon something that was unknown. To put it another way, by conceiving of human action in a quantum like way, we may discover something that would have been thought to be impossible under a classical framework.

To convince the reader of the ability of a metaphor to shift thought, let us use a few simple examples. Take a Cartesian inspired metaphor for animal behavior, “an animal is clock, composed of various parts, ticking in one direction”. This metaphor has obvious implications, and the analogy to a clock is something that Descartes explicitly mentions in the *Meditations* as explanation for a body without a mind.<sup>44</sup> This understanding clearly shaped Descartes actions, as his experiments on animals are analogous to the work of a watchmaker. As a watchmaker splits open the face of watch to inspect the parts for proper functioning, Descartes split open animals to inspect their “parts” for functionality.<sup>45</sup> Descartes obviously knew that an animal was not *literally* a machine (one obvious difference is that machines are not self producing like an organic organism: a body builds upon itself while a watch does not) but it is this metaphorical thought that led him to think that animals are analogous to a machine, and subsequently led to him to commit repugnant actions.

Take the opposing metaphor, “a dog is but a child”. This metaphorical stance invokes treatment of care, sensitivity and compassion. More importantly, this stance views animals above *functionality* and views them in terms of “living well”, “being happy”, etc. In other words, this

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<sup>44</sup> (Descartes 1911)

<sup>45</sup> (Grayling 2005)

metaphor implies that the internal *life* of the animal is something to be concerned with, as if the animal is like a child, then we ought to extend the same treatment and care to animals. The shift of thinking of animals as more like humans and less like machines has also led to an avenue of scientific discovery, i.e., animal intelligence, that would not have been available otherwise (one cannot study the behavior and corresponding mental activity of a watch).

The modern free-will debate largely adopts the metaphorical stance that “man is but a machine” which subsequently leads to the imagining of actions as something of a “chain”. This entails two main positions within the debate: hard determinists who claim that none of our actions are free and soft determinists who essentially shift the meaning of freedom to make it consistent with a deterministic universe. Either way, (barring libertarians), a deterministic universe is assumed, and the actions of man are interwoven into the universe in a linear fashion. Instead of seeing the actions of human beings as a chain, which cannot be broken, I propose seeing human actions as a system, which can be “broken” and consequently “settled”. With the introduction of quantum concepts, human action is imagined as a *mended* chain, where the very spot of repair on the chain was the moment in which the agent experienced and acted freely. The metaphor of a mended chain will be the imagery that will support our scale of forms. The bottom of our scale will be the actions that are most “chain-like” or determined. The upper half will be where we experience “brokenness” which will be analogous to the concept of *superposition* and consequently the experience of decision or “settlement” which will be analogous to the concept of *measurement*.

### 2.7- The Double Slit Experiment

The best example of what superposition is can be articulated by the famous *double-slit experiment*. In this experiment, researchers launched tiny particles at a screen and measured the landing pattern of these particles on a background plate behind the screen.<sup>46</sup> The particles were fired at the screen with one slit open, and then with both slits open. The first time the particles were fired (with only one slit in the screen), the landing pattern of the particles was what you would expect, in that the landing pattern matched the slit that the particles went through. Think of firing a shotgun at a wall with a tiny opening: the propellants that hit the wall behind the screen would more or less match the slit that they came out of. The second time around, when the researchers fired the particles at the screen with two slits, the results were not so intuitive.<sup>47</sup> The particles, instead of mirroring the two slits in the screen, created a landing pattern that is what you would expect from measuring waves of light, which is called an interference pattern.<sup>48</sup> Imagine shining a flashlight through a wall with two slits: the light would hit the two slits, creating two different waves one the other side of the screen that would collide with each other, which would result in a pattern that would look something like this (i.e., an interference pattern):

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<sup>46</sup> (Anathaswamy 2018)

<sup>47</sup> (Anathaswamy 2018)

<sup>48</sup> (Albert 1992)

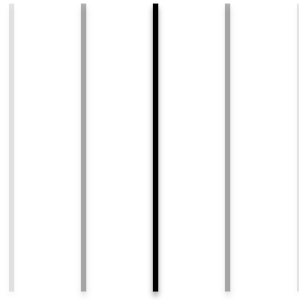


Figure 1.4

The strongest point that the light hits is the middle, and the strength of the frequency degenerates as it expands. Nothing abnormal about this pattern when measuring light, as light is a wave that expands in space. The peculiar part about this experiment is that when the particles were fired with both slits open, the particles formed a pattern that was exactly like the pattern one would expect from a light wave (figure 1.4).<sup>49</sup>

To make sure that this couldn't be explained away, by say, the particles bouncing off one another and forming this pattern, the researchers fired one particle at a time. Over time, with each particle hitting the background wall, the same pattern in figure. 1.4 formed, suggesting that somehow, the individual particle was functioning as a wave. Yet, we know that the reason that a wave formed this pattern is because the wave expands, making it capable of going through each slit at the same time. Individual particles do not expand; they are singular objects that move through space (in the same way that say, a tennis ball would). Yet, by firing a particle one at a time, a wave pattern eventually forms on the back plate. It would seem that each *individual* particle is somehow functioning as a wave pattern that interferes with another particle, yet the very concept of *interference* requires the presence of something to interfere with, and the particles fired one at time do not have such an opportunity.

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<sup>49</sup> (Anathaswamy 2018)

This enigma is explained in quantum theory as a particle being in *superposition*. The superposition of the double slit experiment can be explained in the following way:

The photon (or particle) is in a superposition of two states, one state in which it goes through one path, and another state in which it goes through another path. But this is not the same as saying that it went through both paths, and that it went through one or the other path, or that it went through neither path.<sup>50</sup>

This is to say that the particle does not have a specified property, like that of being a wave, or being an individual particle. It is in a state of *multiple possibilities* and to attempt to isolate one of those possibilities would take the system out of superposition, or in other words, out of a state of multiple possibilities.<sup>51</sup> This is why it is a mistake to say that the “particle went through both” or that “it went through one and not the other” because these isolated states cannot be removed from the web of possibilities if the system is to stay in superposition.

The state of superposition in the double slit experiment is prior to the observation of the particle. Observation, or *measurement* in quantum mechanics has a causal influence on the behavior of the system that classical mechanics would not allow.<sup>52</sup> This is typically called the “measurement problem”, which results in *wave function collapse*. In the double slit experiment, researchers attempted to directly observe the individual particles that were seemingly functioning as a wave. Upon doing so, the individual particle, which was somehow forming an interference pattern, went back to behaving like one would intuitively think. The particles, once they were measured, did not form a wave pattern, but rather formed a single cluster, or “strip” of particles

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<sup>50</sup> (Anathaswamy 2018)

<sup>51</sup> I understand the “system” to mean the total number of possible states that define an individual particle in the double slit experiment.

<sup>52</sup> (Anathaswamy 2018)

that mirrored whichever slit they went through.<sup>53</sup> In the same way that the particles originally functioned when only one slit was open, measurement or observation makes the mysterious wave-like behavior of the particles collapse into one state, i.e., the state of behaving like a single particle.

Presumably, what *causes* the wave-like behavior of the particles to cease is the observation of measurement itself (stop measuring the particles and we get interference patterns again). What is to be made of these strange discoveries at the quantum level? The dust of that question, given the complexity and philosophical implications, has not yet settled, and it is not within my reach to attempt to do such a thing. But, what we will do is articulated an analogy that will serve as *prima facie* explanations for the experiences of “freedom” and “determinism” articulated in the previous section. This analogy will be something like the following: 1) the quantum concept of *superposition* allows for multiple possibilities of a given system, and this system could be imagined as something like the human brain: 2) *wave-function collapse* due to observation could be applied to human decisions. These assumptions are of course something that would need more empirical research to verify, but it is at least *prima-facie* possible that the quantum happenings in the brain could function as the empirical basis for the phenomenology of freedom that was referenced in the previous section.

## 2.8 -Observing Ourselves: Retooling the Scale of Freedom

♦“At every step in his argument, instead of asking one question only, as in the exact science, namely ‘What follows from the premises?’ he has to ask another as well: ‘Does that conclusion agree with what we find in actual experience?’” Robin George Collingwood- (*EPM*) (164)

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<sup>53</sup> (Anathaswamy 2018)

Figure 1.3 gave us the bare structure of a scale of freedom, one in which needed relief from the pressure of the empiricist. Given our exploration of the double slit experiment, and the concepts that were birthed due to its results, our scale of freedom might find the support that it needs. In this section, I will retool our scale with the aid of our quantum concepts, while introducing one last philosophically archaic one. This concept will be what Epicurus called *the swerve*, which is the idea that atoms must behave with some degree of randomness at certain times (i.e., some type of indeterminism). The swerve will form the highest point of our scale, one in which coincides with phenomenology of *self-forming actions* and the concept of quantum measurement. This apex will be the manifestation of libertarian free will, which is founded in the phenomenology and aided by the quantum world.

Before we reach the summit, we must begin our climb upwards. In figure 1.3, we claimed that there is a phenomenological basis for the concept of determinism. We do not experience most of our decisions as one would in experiencing a *self-forming action* in an *unready-to-hand* state. These phenomenological experiences are rare, and it seems that most of our day-to-day interactions with the world are experienced in a *ready-to-hand* state where our agency is in an undeveloped, minimalized state. What I mean by this is rather simple: the majority of our experiences do not involve robust decisions where we must grapple with our agency while reconciling how to cast our agency forward. The majority of our experience in a *ready-to-hand* state seems analogous with how particles behave in the double-slit experiment when only one slit is open. Recalling our discussion of the experiment, when researchers fired particles at the screen with only one slit open, the particles were, in a sense, “determined” to form a pattern on the background resembling the slit.

Most of our decisions in a *ready-to-hand* state phenomenologically mirror this structure. When driving a car, or typing on a computer, or doing any of the routine tasks that most of us do on a daily basis, we are not *thinking* of doing otherwise, so the fact that only “one door is open” is unproblematic. To use our metaphor articulated previously, this is when our actions are most “chain-like”. Our routine actions are going through the only slit open and resulting in the way that we would expect. I drive my car and make it to my destination, I press the power button on my computer and it turns on: the results of my actions are orderly, determined, and expected.<sup>54</sup> The bottom half of our scale will be represented by the analogy to the “one door open” aspect of the double slit experiment, while referencing the phenomenology of the *ready-to-hand* state.

The higher half of our scale will be split into two stages. The first will represent “ordinary” *unready-to-hand* state, which was, described as the experience of disruption to our *ready-to-hand* state but not as valuable as a *self-forming action*. This state is usually where an agent actively conceives of multiple ways in which the future could develop. Using our example from earlier, the academic who experiences a computer failure must reflect on how to resolve the situation by imagining different scenarios in which the computer could be fixed. This experience seems to be analogous to the stage in the double slit experiment where both doors are opened and the particles enter a state of *superposition* (i.e., this is when the “chain” of our actions becomes

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<sup>54</sup> At this point, one might object that while this may be an accurate representation of our experience, the formation of our scale, by accepting both determinism and indeterminism, we are fundamentally resting our argument on a contradiction. To this, I would point to nature and ask the following question: does nature not follow this dialectical structure? At the microscopic quantum level, certain natural phenomena are present that is not seen at the macroscopic level. At the macroscopic level, the physical world *does* seem to be deterministic, as we are able to, with enough knowledge, predict the future happenings of a physical system. This is not the case at the quantum level, as it seems the more information that is available to the knower, the less predictable things become. Yet, the microscopic quantum level and the deterministic macro-level inhabit the same world. Every macro-level object is made of micro-level particles, so any system in nature is by default, going to be structurally composed of this dialectical structure.

“broken”). The superposition of our experience is when multiple possibilities reside within our imagination, and these possibilities are thought to be genuinely *real* representations of how the future could turn out. In the same way that a system of particles enters a state of superposition when exposed to multiple doors, our “system” (i.e. our brain) enters a state of superposition when *thought* is attempting to actively configure the future state of the world. By this I mean something like the following: when thought is attempting to figure out how “things could be”, the agent is actively thinking of how the future state of her “world” will turn out.

In the double slit experiment, the observation of a conscious observer results in the collapsing of the super positioned state. Analogously, when an agent decides to act on a possible situation that resides within thought, it is if that decision itself is the system reacting to the observer. When deciding to act, the state of superposition within the agent collapses by way of the agents *observing themselves* (i.e. seeing through a decision). The collapse of superposition can be thought of as the broken chain becoming *mended* again. This will form the highest point of our scale, and in order for this to avoid the determinist’s objection; it must be the case that the apex of human freedom involves some type of indeterminacy. The observer in the decision making process must be free from prior casual influence, and this is where Epicurus’s idea of the “swerve” may come to our aid.

As an atomist, Epicurean conceived the universe to be composed of atoms, that at times, “swerve” from their determined path in order to collide with other atoms.<sup>55</sup> The swerve is a bit of randomness that cannot be predicted prior to the happening itself. This unpredictability has been shown to be true in the quantum world, as the *uncertainty principle* claims that the more that is known about a given property of a particle, the less that the behavior of the particle can be

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<sup>55</sup> (David Sedley 1983)

predicted.<sup>56</sup> We must be careful here, as although we need the highest point of our scale to be the least determined, postulating “randomness” as the cause of *self-forming actions* would leave use prey to the objection that our most important decisions are a matter of mere chance. Our swerve must be something like the following: undetermined to such a degree that when a decision is made, it was not determined to that outcome (i.e., it could have been otherwise), and not wholly detached from prior states that this function would fall prey to decisions being a matter of chance.

We can tell a story of our swerve in the following way: imagine that you find yourself in an *unready-to-hand* state and there are multiple ways in which the future could conceivably turn out. Let this scenario represent a *self-forming action*, one in which is of monumental importance to the trajectory of your self (deciding between careers, deciding to have children, etc.). Let PF stand for possible future, and let the  $Dx$  stand for the probability that you will decide to bring that possible future forward:

PF1: D-0.4

PF2: D-0.5

PF3: D-0.1

Now given these probabilities, there is a good chance that you will choose to do bring about possible future 2. Lets say this possible future has strong reasons for deciding to do this, and these reasons are formed due to antecedent events in your life. Although the probability is high due to strong reasons pertaining to the scenario, this does not mean that you are *determined* to

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<sup>56</sup> (Albert 1992)

bring about this possible future. In sticking with our quantum analogy, once a state is in superposition, the determined nature of the system prior is “broken” into a state of indeterminacy. In the double slit experiment, the particles going through one door are (loosely speaking) determined to go through the one door and form the strip on the background screen. Once both slits are opened, it becomes a matter of probability where the particle will land on the interference pattern (see figure 1.4).<sup>57</sup>

If the state of superposition in our brain is probabilistically based, then the future is in fact open when making decisions. Yet, the probability will not alone “move” the decision forward: it must be the agent that “observes” the possible future, causing the events to “swerve” in a given direction. In the double slit experiment, the system must be observed in order to collapse, and comparatively, we must observe our decisions in order to collapse the *unready-to-hand* state back into a *ready-to-hand* state. In the case of *self-forming actions* I imagine the probability of each scenario to be closer to each other, as this is what makes the decision feel “torn”, whereas the “ordinary” *unready-to-hand* state involves situations where the probabilities are differentiated more drastically. To think of it in a simple way, the *unready-to-hand* state with “ordinary” decisions involves scenarios in which we “mostly know” (higher probabilities) how we will resolve it, while the *unready-to-hand* state with *self-forming actions* involves scenarios in which we are truly torn and do not know how we will choose (more equal probabilities).

Our analogies to the double slit experiment and the principals of quantum mechanics is not meant to be taken as a fully development commitment to the order and application described. All the analogy to quantum mechanics is meant to do is express the tenets of the authors experience in a more developed and intelligible fashion. This does not preclude that there is more

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<sup>57</sup> (Anathaswamy 2018)

work to be done and more problems to be reconciled. Our final scale for this project will not be resolute, but only a mark of a developmental process, one in which will continue to develop in the thoughts of many philosophers to come. Let our final scale resemble something like the following:

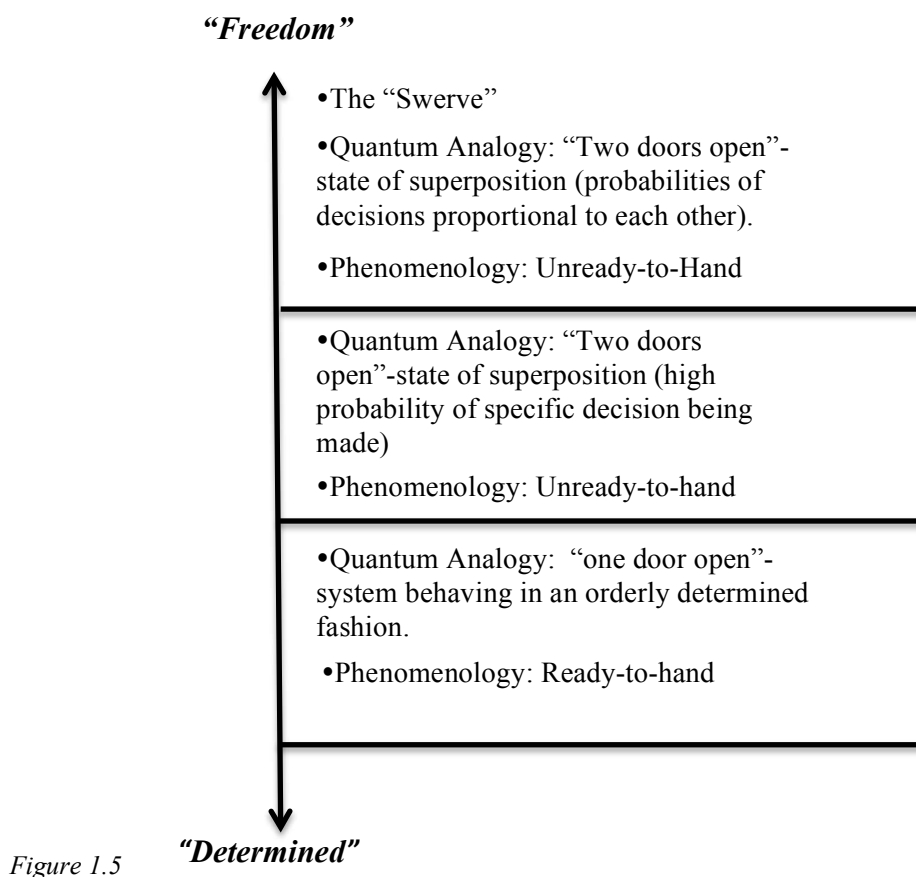


Figure 1.5

## 2.9 Conclusion

I see the structure of this thesis as something like the conformation of Collingwood’s emphasis that philosophical thought starts from existential reference points, and only comes to know that which was already known in a better way. The fundamental structure of the ontological argument was implicit in the background of our analysis, as we were developing our scale based on the *essence* of the concepts, which was never divorced from the existence of the

concepts themselves. Our support from the quantum world was not a confirmation of existence, but only reformulation of that which we knew to exist.

Our scale is an articulation of experience. This, according to Collingwood, is what philosophy ought to do. It ought to do this because the experience of philosophical concepts is the starting point for philosophical thought, and the consequences of abandoning these starting point results in the removal of the very foundation in which philosophical thought began. This is to say, that once one removes the structure of the ontological argument from philosophy, i.e., that by knowing something's essence (through experience) it is assumed to exist, one is removing the *conditions* that made systematic thought about the essence or experience possible in the first place. In applying this to our current concept of free will, the experience of freedom is what enabled thought to be had about the subject for thousands of years. One could even say the same thing for the concept of "determinism", as the first deterministic arguments were based on the experience of the Stoic philosophers.<sup>58</sup> This is why our scale embodies two opposing essences, as both find themselves in our experience, and both are supplemented by physical theories (i.e., classical physics and "determinism"-quantum theory and "freedom"). Due to the experiential basis for these concepts, any articulation of these concepts must be *categorical*, or in other words, presumed to exist prior to any articulation.

Collingwood's framework for philosophical concepts results in the preservation of our phenomenological experience of the world. In our day and age, when naturalism and scientism holds dominion over social and academic thought, the rationalist philosopher, one who holds that

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<sup>58</sup> Chrysippus, in illustrating the idea of a causal network in the world gave the following example: "If you throw a cylindrical stone down a steep slope, you are indeed the cause and origin of its descent, nevertheless the stone afterward rolls down not because you are still doing this, but because such is its nature and the 'rollability' of its form, similarly the order and reason and *necessity of fate* set in motion the general types and starting points of the causes." (Gerson 2008)

by way of reason and experience one can know something genuinely *real* about the world, must expose her thought from under the rose, and force the collective consciousness to acknowledge that this philosophical approach alive and well. This approach, which comes to know the old (the experience), preserves the living experience of human life as rich, robust, and more importantly *real*.

*On the Ropes: Addressing Objections:*

*1. “Even if our decisions at the highest end of the scale are presumed to be undetermined, it still seems luck objection could be applied.”*

To start, let us explain what the luck objection is to the reader unfamiliar with the overfastidious interworking’s of the free will debate. The luck objection is typically leveled against any account of libertarian free will. This objection states something like the following: if an action is undetermined, or lacks sufficient prior causes, whatever action the agent “chooses” seems to be a matter of luck. Let us use an example of the luck objection articulated by Peter van Inwagen:

Suppose that some agent S is torn between two options, A and B, and eventually chooses A in a torn-decision sort of way. And now suppose that God “rolls back” the universe and “replays” the decision.... if the decision is undetermined, then if God “played” the decision 100 times, we should expect that S would choose A and B about 50 times each.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> (Mckenna and Pereboom 2016)

The thrust of this objection is that it seems to remove the “up to us” component of libertarian free will because there is an element of chance in torn decisions. To put it another way, a torn decision would seem to be analogous to a coin flip. Imagine a person who predicts that a flipped coin will land on the “tails” side and ends up being correct in the original prediction. This event would be described as luck, rather than skill or ability, as the attributes that involve skill or ability imply that the effect of an event is due to the particular skill or ability of the agent. For example, imagine a successful boxer who trains meticulously in order to develop the skills of punching power, elusiveness, speed, defense, etc. If this boxer exercises these skills in a fight, it would be odd to describe the act of dodging a punch, or landing a powerful blow as a matter of “luck”. The well-trained boxer who dodges a jab in order to land a hook is praised for such a maneuver because it is assumed that the boxer was the *cause* of the event. In the example of one predicting a coin flip, the opposite assumption is made, as the agent who predicts which side a coin can land on isn’t exercising any skill or ability, the event just *happened* to line up with the initial prediction-it was, in other words, a lucky guess.

The luck objection is typically leveled against most, if not all versions of libertarian free will. Yet, it has always seemed unclear to me what is precisely the force of the objection. First, the word “luck” is vague and ambiguous, and if it is going to genuinely undermine the ability and control condition of libertarian free will, we need to explore what is meant by something being lucky. Neil Levy, in his book *Hard Luck*: offers an account of luck that incorporates three factors of luck: chanciness, significance, and lack of control.<sup>60</sup> An event is explained as being chancy if it has a low probability of happening, significant if it matters to the agent in any way, and lacking control if the agent has a paucity of ability to bring the event about. For example, the

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<sup>60</sup> (Levy 2014)

event of winning the lottery would meet all of these conditions because such an event has a low probability of happening, it would presumably matter to the agent who won, and the agent lacked any significant ability to bring it about (buying a lotto ticket, or even multiple tickets, still results in minuscule odds).

Recalling our account of libertarianism at the highest stage of our scale, we claimed that one is most free when the probabilities of differing actions are most equal to each other. We could interpret this as meeting the first condition, as given our example from earlier of an agent faced with multiple possible futures with differing probabilities, we could say that a torn decision has a low probability of one possible future being chosen over another. To restate our example, Let PF stand for possible future, and let the  $Dx$  stand for the probability that one will decide to bring that possible future forward:

PF1: D-0.4

PF2: D-0.5

PF3: D-0.1

The probability that PF2 is brought about over PF1 is low, as PF2 is only 0.1, or 10% more probable to be decided upon. The decision at the highest stage of our scale also meets the second condition of significance, as we incorporated *self-forming actions* at the highest stage, which we described as those of that are determinative of our life projects, character, etc. The last condition, which involves ability and control, might be undermined, if it were the case that the agent did not have any causal control, but in our analogy with the *double-slit* experiment, we said that cause of the system collapsing is the *act of the agent deciding*. This response, in remaining consistent

with the rationalist approach of this thesis, is wholly consistent with our phenomenology. The decisions that are made at the high end of our scale are not experienced as something out of the blue or unexpected. If I, in typing this paper, were to stand up and start doing jumping jacks in the middle of the library, that would be a phenomenologically random experience. This is the polar opposite of a decision being made at the highest stage of our scale. One makes a *self-forming decision* in a rational way that involves weighing reasons, searching for contradiction and consistency, etc.

To use contemporary free will language, this account of free will could be describe as something like an agent-as-a-substance, which has causal power to determine the state of a system (i.e., the brain). The agent-as-a-substance can be thought of as a type of *dualism* where the conscious activity of the agent is separate in some way from the system of the brain. My brand of dualism would be something like the following: the agent-as-a-substance is not wholly divorced the brain in a Cartesian sense, but rather is constituted by the brain. It can be thought of as an *emergent property* of mental states that is constituted by brain activity, but not a slave to that brain activity.<sup>61</sup> It is a property that can have some type of downward causation that can, to use our quantum analogy, make the system collapse. Of course, expanding more on this account of agent-as-a-substance would require much more work and space, but it is only my intent to highlight this underlying feature as to avoid the luck objection. If the agent is something like a separate substance that has causal power, and if a decision is an exercise of that causal power, then the last condition of our analysis (ability and power) holds steady.

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<sup>61</sup> An emergent property can be thought of in the following way; imagine a system *S* composed of *XYZ* properties. The combination of *XYZ* properties produces a new property, *Y* that is constituted by but not *the same* as the properties.

2. *“Our experience of world can be mistaken. The experience of free will may assume existence, but this does not mean that free will is extended into the actual world.”*

This objection is based in the intention/extension distinction. To the reader unfamiliar with this distinction, the intention of a concept is typically used to denote the meaning of a concept, whereas the extension picks out the empirical happenings in the world that align with the meaning of the concept. For example, the meaning of “free will” could be thought of as the experience of multiple possibilities and control, while the extension can be thought of as the empirical happenings that underlie that meaning. This objection is claiming that we are basing the existence of “free will” based on solely the intension, while ignoring the extension.

To this objection, I think it might be useful to recall our discussion of Collingwood’s anti-naturalism. We stated in section 2.3 that Collingwood distinguished rational concepts from empirical concepts, and we gave a few arguments to support this distinction. In the spirit of this current objection, I will expand on these arguments by highlighting Collingwood’s distinction between an action and an event. For Collingwood, an action is always synonymous with a rational concept and the experience of human agency. To elucidate, we understand human agency not in reference to the empirical concept of “human being”, as all the empirical concept of “human being” would tell us is that we are vertebrates, bipedal, etc. When attempting to understand human agency or human action, we are attempting to understand the rational workings of the mind. To use a simple example, if the person across the table from myself at this very moment were to stomp on my foot, I would presumably inquire as to why one would do such a thing. In asking such a question, I am not inquiring as to the empirical causes of the event,

for example, if one responded with “well the reason as to why I did that is because certain fibers XYZ fired my brain”, but rather, I want to know what the person was *thinking*.

An inquiry into the understanding of action involves an attempt to understand the rational thought (or mind) of oneself or another, while inquiring into an event involves finding strict causal relations among *matter*. This would mean that if the intention of free will is an action that involves deliberating, conceiving, and choosing, then extension would be the actions that most resemble these conditions. The extension “free will” is not the interworking of the brain, but rather the interworking of the mind. This is consistent with one of the most pivotal themes of this thesis, i.e., that our experience must be the starting point and reference point for philosophical exploration. If one wanted to find a specific case of “free will” in the world, one is remiss to look at neuronal firing in the brain, as what one ought to do (under this framework) is ask the agent under question about their *experience*, “did you think out different alternatives?” “Were these alternatives viable options?”, “did you feel obstructed in any way when making your decision?”.<sup>62</sup>

How do we know if what we experience is mistaken? To put it more precisely, how do we know that our judgment *about* our experience is in error? To this concern, I would like to take a common-sense approach, one, which claims something like the following: an error in judgment is made when one slips from *concreteness* to *abstractness*. This formulation of erroneous judgment is one that is supported by Collingwood, and in sticking with the theme in this thesis; we will form a scale of concrete judgments, and abstract judgments.<sup>63</sup> To start, we must define our concepts of “concrete” and “abstract”. By concrete, we mean thought that *does not* separate the concept from its place in experience. For example, a judgment in ethics would

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(Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis* 2011)

be concrete if it studied the concept of thought *through* the experience of the concept, rather than isolating the concept and attempting to think of it “by-itself”. The last sentence may have sounded rather obscure, so let us apply this to an easy example. My advisor for this thesis, Bernard Rollin, generally holds the view that in certain cases, our common sense observation about the world can tell us all we need to know about the instantiation of certain concepts. In a documentary about animal experience and pain, Rollin responds to the question “are there experiments that can prove that animals that think and feel pain?” in the form of a story:

I called one of the few veterinarians who said that animals feel pain and tried to address what you should do about it. I called him up and said, “look, I’m working on this issue and there’s a lot of people in your field that deny that animals feel pain” and he said “yeah I know”, I said “so when you encounter these people, what do you do?” He was a pretty colorful guy, he says “I encounter one of these guys that deny that animals feel pain, I tell them, I have an experiment that you should run: put a dog up on your examining table, make sure it is something like a male Doberman, get a vice grip and then adjust the vice grip to fit his nuts, and then squeeze it. This will show you that he feels pain, he’ll rip your goddam face off”. This is essentially a common sense response.<sup>64</sup>

Rollin continues:

In my writing, I say look behavior is similar. In animals and people, when they are in pain, they guard the limbs, they vocalize and the physiological substratum is the same.<sup>65</sup>

Rollin is arguing here that what is given to us through observation is something that is *concretely* known, i.e. when an animal appears to be in pain, *it is in pain*, and this is something that is

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<sup>64</sup> (Mcanallen 2012)

<sup>65</sup> (Mcanallen 2012)

perfectly consistent with the science. From our experience of the concept of pain, we can know that others feel pain by way of finding commonalities in the expression of that experience (crying, whining, guarding limbs, etc.).

It is when a concrete judgment becomes *abstracted* that we run into inconsistency and error. In proceeding with our previous example, Rollin attributes the separation of the concept of “pain” from the subjective experience of pain to the Cartesian and Newtonian “attack on the senses and common sense, which was intended to undercut the old world-view and prepare people to accept that reality is not as it appears to be”.<sup>66</sup> This attack on common-sense thought and observation led to the view that although animals appear to be in pain, pain is not measurable by the observation of a subjective experience (stepping on a dogs tail and witnessing it whine), but rather the concept of “pain” must be studied in an objective matter that looks at the concept of “pain” in isolation. This abstraction of pain away from concrete judgments about experience leads to numerous issues, as Rollin claims, “to the first claim that pain is merely subjective, the reply is simple: first, that is equally true for adults and second, what is subjective is very real for the experiencer (the essence of pain is that it *hurts*)”<sup>67</sup>

Rollin is essentially claiming here that abstracting the concrete experience from the concept of “pain” leads to absurd and unacceptable consequences. If one were to accept this abstraction of pain, then one would have to deny that subjective experiences, like that of being in pain, are utterly unreal.

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<sup>66</sup> (Rollin, Science and Ethics 2006)

<sup>67</sup> (Rollin, Science and Ethics 2006)

In shifting to the free-will debate, we can see how the concrete experience of certain concepts, when abstracted away from experience leads to errors in judgment. Take the following example of abstraction within the concept of “determinism” in the form of a scale:

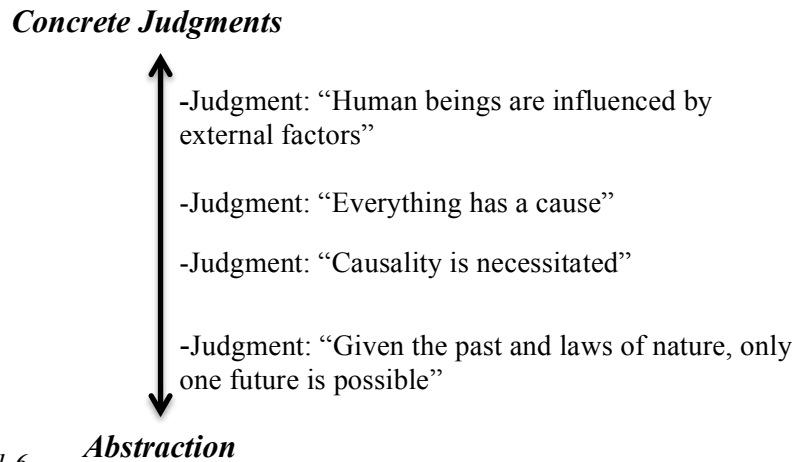


Figure 1.6

As we can see in our scale, the concrete judgment that “human beings are influenced by external factors” is a judgment with experience built into it. We can reflect on personal experiences where external factors, those that were outside of our control, influenced our decisions. From there, things begin to lose an experiential standpoint and become more abstracted. Can one reflect on one’s own experience to form the judgment “causality is necessitated?” It does not seem so, as such a judgment is not one derived from a concrete, or practical situation that one may find oneself in.

One may ask, what is the error in the abstract judgment that “given the past and laws of nature only one future is possible?” In our discussion of abstraction of “pain” in the pages prior, the inconsistency and error was clear, but in this case, it is more elusive. This elusiveness can be avoided by accentuating what Alfred North Whitehead called the fallacy of misplaced

concreteness. In its most simple formulation, this fallacy involves mistaking an abstract concept for a concrete situation. A simple example of this fallacy can be articulated in the proposition “masculinity is the reason as to why the boy is violent”. The concrete event was the violent behavior of the boy, while the abstract concept is taken to be the concrete explanation for the event. The problem with this statement is that the concept “masculinity” is rather vague to most ears, and I would argue is too vague to be explanation for any concrete event. To avoid this fallacy in this example, we could say something like “the boys anger caused him to be violent”.

Whitehead believed that the fallacy of misplaced concreteness occurs particularly when the full range of experience fails to be accounted for.<sup>68</sup> This would mean that any application of universal determinism to human experience would result in the failure to account for when our experience indicates that we are free. The fallacy of misplaced concreteness would also occur when using any abstract deterministic explanation for concrete events. For example, if one were to ask me “why did you have an extra cup of coffee today?” and I responded with- “well, given the past and laws of nature and the time prior to this, I was causally necessitated to have another cup”, this would be a fallacious answer, as the person who is asking me why I had another cup is inquiring into the concrete experience of my *decision* to have another cup. A more adequate and less vague response would be something like “I was feeling very tired today, so I felt compelled to have another cup”. This response is *concrete* in the sense that it is explaining my lack of freedom due to my overwhelming tiredness, yet it is not divorced from the actual experience that I have.

It might be useful now to recall the original question that we have attempted to answer- “when is our judgment about our experience in error?” To this, we answer will answer the

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<sup>68</sup> (Thompson 1992)

following way: our judgment about our experience is mistaken when we abstract away from our experience. I will now tie together all of the concepts that we have discussed in this section. Using our distinction from Collingwood, we said that an *action* requires a rational explanation, rather than a casual explanation (as opposed to an *event*). Furthermore, we stated that judgments about experience must be *concrete* rather than *abstract* in order to avoid the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Let the following deduction serve to synopsise this section:

P1: The concept of “free-will” denotes *action* rather than *event*.

P2: Action requires rational explanation about experience rather than casual explanation about matter.

P3: Rational explanation is concrete rather than abstract.

C: Judgments about “free-will” must be *concrete*.

The conclusion of this argument is harmonious with the framework of this thesis. We stated in section 2.2 that the experience of philosophical concepts is analogous to the foundation of a building. This would mean that abstracting away from the foundation is analogous to the removal of that foundation. Once judgments about concrete concepts such as free will are abstracted into the oblivion, the original experience is lost, and if the original experience is lost, so too is the original concept.

3. “*Using quantum mechanics to justify how we could have a more concrete understanding seems to be adding a layer of complication to an already complicated topic. Does this really help the philosopher of freedom?*”

Upon reading the previous reply to the last objection, the reader might object, if you believe that the concept of “free-will” is a concrete, then doesn’t the application of quantum mechanics make it slip into abstraction? To this, I will reply with the following: the analogy to quantum mechanics is meant to simply be a story, a story that illustrates the experience of free will in a way that might shift our thought away from the stagnant classical framework. Now that I am nearing the end on this journey, I would like to be rather blunt if the reader would so allow- I find the question of how the quantum happenings in the brain work to be a rather dull inquiry. I believe that the beauty in Collingwood’s work is an underlying metaphysical theme that claims the following: that which is most real is that which is most good. The experience of freedom, and the consequent concept of “free-will” I believe is genuinely *good*. It is good for two chief reasons: because it preserves (as I argued in the first chapter) normative moral systems, and it preserves human agency as being a product of self-development, something that, if done properly, one can be genuinely proud of.

I might be accused of doing some dancing at this moment, so let us focus. It might be reasonably leveled against me that I have committed the fallacy of misplaced concreteness in using quantum mechanics to articulate our scale of freedom. I would argue that this isn’t so, because our scale of freedom never loses sight of the concrete experience of freedom. It also isn’t claiming to rectify the quantum story that was told. Like I said previously, the story told might not be how things happen in the brain. The quantum analogy could be removed with ease from our scale, and according to our framework articulated earlier, this would do nothing to damage the “existence” of free will. It is only a mirror that attempts to reflect our experience with the physical world.

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