

LIBERTARIANISM AND AGENTIVE EXPERIENCE

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Libertarianism about free will is the conjunction of two more basic theses. The first is that some of us sometimes have free will (the free will thesis).¹ The second is that free will requires behavior-relevant indeterminism (the indeterministic requirement).^{2, 3} Here I assess the extent to which the first-person experience of our own agency (agentive experience, I'll call it) supports the libertarian view of free will. I argue that such experience does nothing to support the indeterministic requirement at the heart of the view, and so gives us no reason to prefer libertarianism to competing theories of free will that don't include that requirement. This is so, I argue, even if, as some have claimed, our experience of our own agency sometimes represents our behavior as being undetermined in precisely the ways libertarians say is required for free will. However, I go on to argue that agentive experience still has a role to play in an overall case for libertarianism, insofar as it provides some (defeasible) support for the free will thesis. I conclude by defending this last claim against two prominent objections.

1. The Argument from Agentive Experience

I begin with a claim attributed to some libertarians that their view more accurately represents our experience as agents than do competing views of free will and is to that extent preferable to those other views.⁴ This claim suggests what Tim Bayne calls "the argument from agentive experience," the gist of which is that "Libertarianism...is pro tanto justified in virtue of the fact

that we experience ourselves as exercising libertarian free will” (2016, p. 641). I’ll consider a more detailed version of the argument momentarily, but this brief statement of it will do for now.

What to make of the argument from agential experience? Many critics reject its central premise, the claim that we experience ourselves as exercising libertarian (i.e., indeterministic) free will. They contend that our experience of our own agency never represents our actions as being causally undetermined.⁵ Indeed, some doubt that it’s even possible for indeterminism to be represented in agential experience. Richard Holton, for example, says that “if freedom is really understood to be something that is incompatible with determinism, it is hard to know what such an experience would be like. What is it to experience one’s action as not causally determined...? I have no idea how that could be the content of an experience” (2009, p. 416). In a similar vein, Bayne contends that “An experience as of libertarian freedom would need to represent (if only implicitly) that determinism is false, and it is far from clear how that might be possible.... Intuitively, claims about the falsity (or truth, for that matter) of determinism are no more amenable to experiential representation than claims about the date on which the Taj Mahal was completed” (2016, p. 635).⁶ If that’s right, if it is indeed impossible for indeterminism to be represented in experience, the central premise of the argument from agential experience is false.

Those who think we experience ourselves as exercising indeterministic free will typically respond to these objections by insisting that if we pay careful attention to the phenomenology of choice, to what it feels like from the inside to deliberate, make decisions, and perform other actions, we will find that the objections are mistaken, that our experiences as agents really do represent some of our actions as being undetermined (or at least have contents that could be veridical only if the actions in question are undetermined).⁷ And perhaps they are right to do so. Perhaps those who say otherwise aren’t paying careful enough attention to their own experiences

as agents, or perhaps their theoretical commitments are distorting the way they interpret those experiences.⁸ Another very real possibility, though, is that those who claim to experience (some of) their behavior as fundamentally indeterministic episodes are misinterpreting their experience, reading something into it that isn't there, or are making an unjustified inference from their experience to the judgment that their behavior isn't causally determined.⁹ It's thus far from obvious that an indeterministic interpretation of agentic experience is warranted.

Suppose, though, for the sake of argument, that we do sometimes experience our choices and other actions as causally undetermined. Suppose further that the nature of those experiences can't plausibly be explained away (e.g., by supposing their indeterministic element to result from cognitive penetration or from an unjustified assumption that we are introspectively aware of all the causes of our acts). Would that give us experiential evidence for libertarianism? It would not. At most, it would support the conclusion that we sometimes make undetermined choices. But that conclusion doesn't entail libertarianism and is even consistent with many contemporary compatibilist theories of free will, namely, those according to which free will is compatible with both determinism and indeterminism. Theories of that sort can easily accommodate the claim that we sometimes make undetermined choices. Evidence for that claim therefore wouldn't give us reason to prefer libertarianism to these competing compatibilist theories of free will.

For our experience of own agency to support libertarianism, it's not enough for the experience to represent our choices and other actions as undetermined or as having features that are incompatible with determinism. In addition, the experience would have to represent behavior-relevant indeterminism as being necessary for free will. But if it's difficult to see what it could be like to experience one's action as undetermined, it's even more difficult to see what it would be like to experience behavior-relevant indeterminism as being required for free will.

Indeed, it seems rather obvious that that couldn't possibly be the content of an experience. Whether free will requires behavior-relevant indeterminism just isn't the sort of thing that could possibly be represented in agentic experience. The phenomenology of choice and action therefore doesn't support the conclusion that free will requires behavior-relevant indeterminism and so doesn't give us any reason to accept the libertarian view of free will.

My focus thus far has been on a rudimentary version of the argument from agentic experience. But the problems I've highlighted with that basic version of the argument are present in more complex versions as well. To see this, consider the following detailed version of the argument, which Oisín Deery (2015c; 2021) attributes to several prominent libertarians:

1. The content of our experience of freedom is (presumptively) veridical.
2. Our experience of freedom has libertarian content.
3. If our experience of freedom has libertarian content, then our experience is veridical only if libertarianism is true.
4. So, libertarianism is (presumptively) true. (Deery 2015c, p. 319; see also Deery 2021, p. 118)¹⁰

The "libertarian content" mentioned in premises 2 and 3 is that we are free to do otherwise in an unconditional sense that requires holding fixed the past and laws of nature.

Some critics will perhaps reject the first step of this argument. Following Hume (1739, Bk. II, Part III, sec. II), they might maintain that we have a false experience of being free to do otherwise in an unconditional sense. And, as we have seen, serious doubts can be raised about

step 2 of the argument as well. But even if steps 1 and 2 of the argument are ultimately defensible, the argument is nevertheless unsound, for, as I'll now argue, 3 is false.¹¹

Step 3 of the argument is equivalent to the claim that if our experience of freedom has “libertarian content” and is veridical, then libertarianism is true. But that claim is false. It might be true that our experience of freedom represents us as being free to do otherwise in an unconditional sense, and it might also be true that we are free to do otherwise in that sense (i.e., our experience of freedom might be veridical). But it doesn't follow that libertarianism is true because it doesn't follow that the indeterministic requirement is true. The claim that my action is undetermined and that I'm free to do otherwise in an unconditional sense doesn't entail that free will *requires* being free to do otherwise in an unconditional sense and thus doesn't entail the indeterministic requirement on which libertarians insists. Our experience of freedom therefore might have the relevant libertarian content (i.e., it might represent us as being free to do otherwise holding fixed the past and the laws of nature), and it might even be veridical (i.e., we might actually be free to do otherwise holding fixed the past and laws of nature), even if the indeterministic requirement is false and thus even if libertarianism is false.

Premise 3 of the argument from agentic experience therefore isn't true, and it can't be salvaged by trying to build the indeterministic requirement into the “libertarian content” mentioned in premises 2 and 3. As I pointed out in connection with the basic version of the argument, the indeterministic requirement isn't something that can be represented in experience and so can't be part of the content of our experiences. We therefore can't acquire evidence that the indeterministic requirement is true, and thus can't acquire evidence that libertarianism is true, simply by reflecting on our experience of our own agency. Determining whether the indeterministic requirement is true requires philosophical analysis and argument, not experience.

The central difficulty with the argument from agentic experience can be summarized as follows. To show that libertarianism is true, it's not enough to show that there is behavior-relevant indeterminism. We would also need to show that free will requires behavior-relevant indeterminism. But that isn't something we can establish simply by reflecting on our experience of our own agency, as the indeterministic requirement isn't something that could be represented in experience. Reflection on agentic experience is therefore of no use when it comes to establishing that element of the libertarian view and so provides no reason to prefer the view to competing theories of free will that don't include the indeterministic requirement. It may, however, have a role to play in supporting the other key element of libertarianism (viz., the free will thesis). It's this possibility that I'll explore in the remainder of the paper.

2. The Feeling of Freedom

A bit of self-disclosure: it sometimes seems to me that it's at least partly up to me whether I behave in one way or another, and, having behaved in one way, that I could have behaved in some other way instead. The qualifier "at least partly" is important. It never seems to me that what I do is *completely* up to me (whatever that might mean). I recognize that my behavior is constrained by various factors, including aspects of my psychology and the circumstances in which I find myself. Nevertheless, within these parameters, it sometimes seems to me that it's partly up to me whether I take one course of action or another, and, having taken a particular course of action, that I could have taken an alternative course of action instead. In short, I sometimes have a feeling of freedom, an experience as of doing things of my own free will.

This experience isn't unique to me either; other people report having similar experiences, though their descriptions of them sometimes differ to a greater or lesser extent. Consider, for

example, the following remarks by John Searle: “Reflect very carefully on the character of the experiences you have as you engage in normal, everyday human actions. You will sense the possibility of alternative courses of action built into these experiences.” Searle goes on to say that “In normal behaviour, each thing we do carries the conviction, valid or invalid, that we could be doing something else right here and now, that is, all other conditions remaining the same” (1984, p. 95). Similarly, Terrance Horgan says, “Normally when you do something, you experience yourself as *freely* performing the action, in the sense that it is *up to you* whether or not to perform it. You experience yourself not only as generating the action...but also as generating it in such a manner that you *could have done otherwise*.” Horgan calls this last feature of our experience the “core-optionality aspect of agentic phenomenology” (2015, p. 36-37). And, according to Galen Strawson, often when you find yourself in a choice situation, “It...seems absolutely clear to you...that it’s entirely up to you what you do next,” and that “you are truly, radically free to choose what to do.” Strawson goes on to say that such experiences “of freedom of choice and action” are “at the very heart of the human experience of agency” (2021, p. 352).

I would quibble with certain claims in the passages just quoted. For example, when I reflect on my own experiences as an agent, I’m not sure that I ever feel “radically free to choose what to do” (though I confess that I’m not entirely sure what Strawson means when he speaks of radical freedom). Nor is it clear to me that “each thing [I] do carries the conviction...that [I] could be doing something else right here and now,” or that, as Horgan puts it, core optionality is present “even when one acts under extreme coercion or duress...[or] when one acts with an extreme phenomenological ‘imperativeness’—for example, a mother’s unhesitatingly leaping into the river to save her drowning child.” (2015, p. 37). Indeed, some of my agentic

experiences seem not to involve this sense of optionality. When my toddler is about to fall off the bed or stick a fork into an electrical outlet or dart into traffic and I instinctively act to avert the impending disaster, I don't clearly "sense the possibility of alternative courses of action built into" these experiences. It doesn't seem to me that it was a genuine option for me to knowingly allow my kid run out in front of an oncoming bus, for example. The only thing I could have done given my character at the time, it seems, is what I did—pull the lad to safety.¹² But these are, as I say, quibbles. The main thing I'd like to emphasize is that, when we reflect on our experience of our own agency, it seems to many of us that it's sometimes at least partly up to us whether we behave in one way or another and that we sometimes could have avoided behaving as we did.

Recent empirical studies bear this out. In one study, participants were asked to choose between two charities. Once the participants had made their choice, they were asked whether it felt to them, as they were making their decision, that they could have chosen either charity. Most of the participants said that they did indeed feel as if they were free to choose either option.¹³

This feeling of freedom, as I'm calling it, has representational content and in that respect is like a belief. But the feeling of freedom is not itself a belief, contrary to what some have suggested.¹⁴ It's entirely possible to have an experience as of doing something of your own free will without believing that you did, in fact, exercise free will on that occasion, just as it's entirely possible to have a visual experience without believing that the experience is veridical. The feeling of freedom is thus distinct from the belief that we have free will, but, as I'll now argue, it does support that belief in much the same way that other experiences support other beliefs.

3. Experiential Evidence for Free Will

Experiences of many kinds play a role in justifying our beliefs, and agentic experience is no exception. Just as we often treat sensory experience (perhaps in conjunction with other background beliefs and experiences) as providing pro tanto justification for beliefs about our physical environment, so too we often take agentic experience (again, perhaps in conjunction with other background beliefs and experiences) to provide pro tanto justification for beliefs about our own agency. Take, for example, my (presumably justified) belief that I'm currently typing this sentence. What justifies that belief? I'd be amazed if my experience as of typing the sentence didn't figure in an answer to that question. Or consider our (presumably justified) belief that we often behave intentionally. What justifies that belief? Surely our experience as of doing things intentionally has a role to play here, too. At the very least, it provides, or plays a role in providing, some defeasible support for the claim that much of what we do is done intentionally.

The agentic experiences just mentioned aren't infallible, of course; even very basic experiences, including basic experiences of our own agency, can be non-veridical. But an experience needn't be infallible to play a role in justifying the relevant beliefs, provided, of course, that we lack good reason to believe that the experience is non-veridical. And I take it that for many of our agentic experiences—for example, typical experiences as of (intentionally) performing a certain action—we do lack any such reason to be skeptical of their veridicality.

Given the role agentic experience plays in the justification of other beliefs about human agency, defenders of the free will thesis—libertarians included—could plausibly claim that we should accord it a similar role in the justification of beliefs about free will. More precisely, they could plausibly claim that we should regard the feeling of freedom (again, perhaps in conjunction with other background beliefs and experiences) as providing defeasible support for

the free will thesis. This is so, moreover, even if agentive experience doesn't represent our actions as being undetermined in the way that, if libertarians are correct, is required for free will.

This last point is important. To appreciate it, consider an analogy with visual experience. The relationship between the content of my visual experience as of an apple and the nature of apples isn't straightforward. As Bayne points out, "some of the properties that are necessary for being an apple—such as having a particular genetic structure—cannot be experientially represented" (2016, p. 635). I therefore can't understand the nature of apples simply by reflecting on my visual experiences of apples. Presumably, though, this fact doesn't undercut the epistemic justification to which such experiences typically contribute. Having a visual experience as of an apple on the table provides pro tanto justification for believing that there is an apple on the table, and this is so even though some of the necessary conditions for being an apple, such as having a certain genetic structure, are not, and indeed cannot be, represented in my experience.

The same is true of our experience as of free will. No doubt some of the necessary conditions for free will can't be represented in agentive experience, in which case we can't gain a complete understanding of the nature of free will simply by reflecting on our experience of our own agency. And this is true, you'll notice, on pretty much every theory of free will, including many of the best contemporary compatibilist theories. But contrary to what some have suggested (see, e.g., Vicens 2019), this fact arguably doesn't undercut the epistemic support to which such experiences contribute. Having an experience as of doing something freely provides pro tanto justification for believing that one did in fact act freely, and this is so even if some of the requirements for free action—which, if libertarians are to be believed, includes behavior-relevant indeterminism—are not, and indeed cannot be, represented in that experience.

It's important to distinguish this rather modest claim from the much stronger claim that "we can know by introspection that...we have free will" (Lehrer 1960, p. 157). The modest claim for which I've argued doesn't entail this stronger claim and is consistent with the view that no one knows whether we have free will (free will agnosticism) and with the view that, on balance, the evidence favors rejecting the free will thesis (free will skepticism). Yet despite its modesty, the claim that the feeling of freedom provides some support for the free will thesis isn't uncontroversial. I'll now consider two objections that have been leveled against it.

4. The Spinozan Objection

Perhaps the most well-known objection to the claim that agentic experience provides some support for free will thesis is based on Spinoza's claim that "Men believe themselves to be free, simply because they are conscious of their actions, and unconscious of the causes whereby those actions are determined" (1887 [1677], p. 134). Taken at face value, this claim is questionable. Without the feeling of freedom, I suspect many of us who believe that we have free will would cease to do so (or would hold the belief less strongly than we do), even if we continued to be "conscious of [our] actions, and unconscious of the causes whereby those actions are determined."¹⁵ If I'm right about that, it suggests that many of us who believe that we have free will do so in part because we sometimes experience the feeling of freedom and not, as Spinoza suggests, "simply because [we] are conscious of [our] actions, and unconscious of the causes whereby those actions are determined." Our ignorance of the etiology of our behavior, without a concomitant feeling of freedom, seems unlikely to yield (as strong) a belief in free will.

Though questionable, Spinoza's claim is sometimes taken to suggest a reason why the feeling of freedom is of no use (especially to libertarians) when it comes to defending the free will thesis. According to Derk Pereboom, for example,

the Spinozan response to the claim that we have...phenomenological evidence [for the reality of free will] has not been successfully countered. Spinoza contends that people believe they have "absolute" or libertarian freedom only because they are ignorant of the complete causal account of their actions...While people generally are aware of their desires and volitions, they are not cognizant of the complete causal account of these desires and volitions. Given that desires and decisions have neural causes, or subconscious psychological causes, it is clear that this is correct. The lesson to draw from this observation is that the phenomenology apt to generate belief that one has libertarian free will would be just as it is if desires and decisions were instead causally determined and we were ignorant of enough of their causes. For this reason, the phenomenological evidence for our having libertarian free will is not especially impressive. (2004, p. 282)

The central lesson of Spinoza's claim, according to Pereboom, is that the experiences that I've claimed support the free will thesis would be the same even if determinism were true and thus, given the indeterministic requirement, even if free will were an illusion.

Carl Hempel made essentially the same point almost fifty years earlier by inviting us to consider "a timid man in a hypnotist's audience...who gets up to make a speech." Hempel points out that the man "may truthfully protest a feeling of complete freedom in choosing to do so," and that this feeling is "quite compatible with the possibility that his choice was causally determined

(via general laws concerning the effects of hypnosis) by the instructions he received earlier under hypnosis” (1958, p. 161). The fact that the timid man was causally determined to make the speech, and, given the indeterministic requirement, that he therefore didn’t make the speech of his own free will, is consistent with him having an experience as of his action being done freely.

Pereboom and Hempel are no doubt correct that the phenomenology apt to generate belief in free will might remain the same even if our actions are causally determined and even if free will is an illusion. Our experience as of exercising free will is therefore compatible with determinism and compatible as well with there being no free will. But what conclusions should we draw from this fact? The conclusion Pereboom and Hempel seem to draw is that we can’t reasonably appeal to that experience to support our belief in free will. But why not, exactly?

The answer can’t be that it’s possible that our experience is misleading, for, as Keith Lehrer notes in response to Hempel’s version of the objection, “It simply does not follow from the fact that a person may be deceived in accepting a hypothesis on the basis of some experience that his having that experience does not give him adequate evidence for accepting the hypothesis” (1960, p. 152). If it did, then, as Lehrer points out, a similar argument would show that we can’t base our beliefs on any experience, sensory experiences included, that could, in principle, be deceptive. Radical epistemological skepticism notwithstanding, though, we don’t take the bare metaphysical possibility that our sensory experiences could be radically deceptive to undercut the pro tanto justification typically provided by those experiences. Why, Lehrer suggests, should things be different when it comes to our experience as of exercising free will?

The pro tanto justification to which that experience typically contributes would be undermined if it could be shown that there is good reason to believe that the relevant experience is, or is likely to be, inaccurate somehow. Hempel’s example provides a nice illustration of the

point. We may assume that the timid man knows that he likely has been hypnotized and that the feeling of freedom he experiences in giving the speech is probably not veridical. This knowledge provides the man with an undercutting defeater of the justification to which that feeling would otherwise contribute for believing that he exercised free will in giving the speech.¹⁶ But ordinary agents like you and I aren't in a similar position. Unlike the timid man, we have no reason to suspect that the feeling of freedom we experience is likely the product of hypnotism or some similar freedom-undermining process and thus have no comparable undercutting defeater of the pro tanto justification for believing in free will to which the experience contributes.

But doesn't the possibility that all our behavior might be causally determined by factors beyond our control, together with the indeterministic requirement, provide such a defeater? It does not. The feeling of freedom that many of us experience provides pro tanto justification for believing that we sometimes have free will, justification that, given the indeterministic requirement, would indeed be defeated *if we had compelling evidence that a deterministic view of human agency is (or is likely to be) true*. But have we any such evidence? Not that I'm aware.¹⁷ And the mere possibility that we might one day uncover such evidence isn't enough to undercut the justification the feeling of freedom provides for believing in our own free will.

Alfred Mele makes a related point in discussing the feeling of freedom argument as deployed by compatibilists about free will. He notes that "our having [an] experience [as of free will] does not entail that we [have free will]...But, as compatibilists, we would notice that the hypotheses whose truth would entail that we lack free agency...are either unsupported by evidence, or, at best, supported only by very weak evidence; and being reasonable people, we do not think that unsupported hypotheses and hypotheses enjoying little support should be allowed to stand in the way of our believing on the basis of our experience" that we have free will (1995,

p. 247). Though Mele makes these points in connection with compatibilist theories of free will, it seems to me that they apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to libertarian theories as well. The hypotheses that entail that we lack free will on the libertarian view, which includes deterministic theories of human agency, “are either unsupported by evidence, or, at best, supported only by very weak evidence.” And libertarians, “being reasonable people..., do not think that unsupported hypotheses and hypotheses enjoying little support should be allowed to stand in the way of our believing on the basis of our experience” in the reality of our own free will.

5. The Martian-Control Objection

A second objection to the claim that the feeling of freedom provides defeasible support for the free will thesis is inspired by an argument of Peter van Inwagen’s (1983). Van Inwagen’s argument presupposes the following thought experiment about Martian manipulators:

When any human being is born, the Martians implant in his brain a tiny device...which contains a “program” for that person’s entire life: whenever that person must make a decision, the device [deterministically] *causes* him to decide one way or the other according to the requirements of a table of instructions that were incorporated into the structure of the device before that person was conceived. (1983, p. 109)

We may further assume that the device produces people’s decisions in a way that is undetectable by them and that is consistent with the feeling of freedom. The argument now runs as follows:

Some philosophers believe that it is possible to find out whether we have free will by *introspection*. But this seems just obviously wrong, since, if it were right, we could find out by introspection whether we were fitted with Martian devices...And, of course, we cannot do this. (1983, p. 204)

Although van Inwagen doesn't explicitly mention the feeling of freedom or agentic experience more generally, I take it that what he means by "introspection" in this passage is "reflection on our experience of our own agency." Thus, as I interpret his argument, it's an objection to the claim that "it is possible to find out whether we have free will by attending to our experience of our own agency." Now, that isn't a claim I've here endorsed. However, van Inwagen's argument could easily be transformed into an objection to the claim that I have endorsed (*viz.*, the claim that the feeling of freedom provides some defeasible support for the free will thesis).

Here's the transformed argument, which I'll refer to as the Martian control objection.

Some philosophers believe that the feeling of freedom supports the conclusion that we sometimes have free will. But this seems just obviously wrong, since, if it were right, the feeling of freedom would also support the conclusion that we aren't fitted with Martian devices. And, of course, it doesn't support that conclusion.

I don't know whether van Inwagen would endorse this argument, but it is a natural extension of his objection to the claim that we can find out by introspection whether we have free will.

What to make of the objection? The first thing I want to note about it is that it seems to entail that agentic experience rarely (if ever) supports beliefs about our own agency. To see

this, suppose the Martian devices work like this: rather than causing decisions and other actions, they instead cause people's thoughts and movements directly, in a way that's completely independent of any causal activity of the agent or the agent's mental states. They also render both the people fitted with the devices and their psychological states causally impotent. In this version of the thought experiment, no one fitted with a Martian device ever acts intentionally. Indeed, no one fitted with such a device ever performs any kind of action, intentional or otherwise, for to perform an (intentional) action, your behavior must be caused in an appropriate way by you or by your mental states (e.g., your beliefs, desires, and intentions), and the behavior of people fitted with these devices is never caused by those people or their mental states.

With this version of the thought-experiment in mind, consider my (presumably justified) belief that I'm typing this sentence (i.e., that I'm performing an action of typing this sentence). What reason do I have for thinking that belief true? Again, my experience as of typing the sentence would seem to have an important role to play here. That experience provides some (defeasible) support for the conclusion that I did in fact perform an action of typing the sentence.

Or does it? Consider the following objection to that claim.

Capes believes that his experience as of (intentionally) typing the sentence supports the conclusion that he did in fact perform an (intentional) action of typing the sentence. But this seems just obviously wrong, since, if it were right, his experience would also support the conclusion that he isn't fitted with one of those Martian devices we just learned about. And, of course, his experience as of typing the sentence doesn't support that conclusion.

If the Martian control objection is a good objection to the claim that the feeling of freedom provides some evidence that we sometimes have free will, this would also seem to be a good objection to the claim that my experience as of (intentionally) typing the sentence provides some support for my belief that I did in fact (intentionally) type the sentence. Moreover, similar objections would seem to apply to virtually any attempt to support beliefs about our own agency by appealing to agentic experience. This is why I said earlier that the Martian control objection seems to entail the rather surprising—and to my mind quite implausible—conclusion that our experience of our own agency rarely (if ever) supports beliefs about our own agency.

The preceding point suggests that something must be amiss with the Martian control objection, but it doesn't tell us where exactly the argument goes awry. I think there are a variety of specific bones one might pick with the objection, depending on one's broader views in epistemology.¹⁸ But the main difficulty, as I see it, is with the objection's first premise, the claim that if the feeling of freedom supports the conclusion that we sometimes have free will, it also supports the conclusion that we aren't fitted with Martian devices. Why think that? The only reason I can think of would be that it follows from a more general evidence closure principle like if E is evidence that p , and (we know) p entails q , then E is also evidence that q . The problem with this strategy, though, is that evidence isn't closed under (known) entailment. As Roger White notes, "The appearance as of a zebra provides evidence that it's a zebra, but this appearance does not provide evidence that it is not a mule with painted stripes" (2004, p. 554).¹⁹ Similarly, the appearance as of doing something of one's own free will provides evidence that one has free will, but this appearance doesn't provide evidence that one isn't fitted with a Martian control device. Hence, premise one of the Martian control objection is false.

6. Conclusion

My central aim in this paper has been to clarify the ways in which agentic experience can and cannot contribute to a defense of the libertarian view of free will. I've argued that agentic experience does nothing to support the indeterministic requirement that distinguishes libertarianism from many of its competitors (viz., those that don't embrace the requirement) and so gives us no reason to prefer the libertarian position to these competing views. However, I've also argued that agentic experience does provide evidence for a component of libertarianism, one it shares with many other views of free will (viz., the free will thesis). So, although agentic experience doesn't give us reason to prefer the libertarian view of free will to some of its competitors, neither is it entirely irrelevant to a comprehensive defense of the view.

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Notes

¹ By "free will" I mean, roughly, having, and being able to select between, multiple options for action. The options must, of course, be "real" or "genuine" and not merely apparent. For similar definitions of "free will," see van Inwagen 1983 and Franklin 2018.

² A bit more precisely, the claim is that having free will requires that at least some of one's actions or their relatively proximal causes not be necessitated by circumstances beyond one's control.

³ The definition of libertarianism given here varies slightly from the traditional definition. Libertarianism is traditionally defined as the conjunction of the free will thesis and *incompatibilism*, the thesis that free will can't exist in a fully deterministic universe (see, e.g., van Inwagen [1983: 13-14] and Mele [2006: 4]). This traditional definition, fine for most purposes, isn't strictly equivalent to the definition given here. One could accept both the free will thesis and incompatibilism without embracing the claim that free will requires *behavior-relevant* indeterminism. One could say instead that we have free will, that free will requires indeterminism, but that the required indeterminism needn't be in any way connected to human behavior. Someone who believed this would be a libertarian on the traditional definition but not on the definition given here. Now, as far as I'm aware, no one has ever endorsed the position I just described (it's an extremely implausible view), which is why the traditional definition of libertarianism is fine for most purposes. But the definition of libertarianism given here more accurately reflects the position of actual libertarians precisely because it excludes this outré view.

⁴ This claim, or something very much like it, has been attributed to Campbell (1957), O'Connor (1995), Pink (2004), Reid (1788), and Swinburne (2011), among others.

⁵ For this sort of objection, see, e.g., Grünbaum (1952: 672), Mele (1995: 248-249), Mill (1885: 285), Nahmias et al. (2004), and Vicens (2019).

⁶ See also Bayne (2008: 196).

⁷ For the parenthetical point, see Sims (2018) and (2019), who argues that we often have experiences the content of which is that there is more than one physically possible future open to us. Given that determinism entails that there is only one physically possible future, it follows that determinism would have to be false for these experiences to be veridical. So, on Sim's view, while the content of our experiences isn't that some our actions are undetermined, it does include something which straightforwardly entails that some of our actions are undetermined. Note, though, that Sims isn't convinced that these experiences are veridical. He therefore doesn't defend the argument from agentive experience.

⁸ It's interesting note in this connection that there is some experimental evidence that non-philosophers who have no theoretical axe to grind view their own choices as fundamentally indeterministic episodes. See Deery et al. (2013) and Nichols (2012).

⁹ There are several suggestions about how and why this sort of thing might happen. See, e.g., Deery (2015a) and (2015b), Holton (2006), Horgan (2012), and Nichols (2012).

¹⁰ Deery attributes this argument to Campbell (1957), Reid (1788), O'Connor (1995), and Swinburne (2011).

¹¹ Deery (2015c; 2021: ch. 4) also objects to premise 3, though on different grounds.

¹² In cases like this where we might say that we had no choice or that it wasn't within our power to do otherwise, Horgan says that "there are further, superimposed phenomenological aspects... whose presence can render appropriate" these judgments, but that "the phenomenology of core optionality remains present" (2015: 37). I'll just report that my own experiences as an agent don't strike me as that phenomenologically sophisticated, nor does it always seem to me that I could have done otherwise. But perhaps I'm just not a very sophisticated person.

¹³ See Deery *et al.* (2013). See also some of the studies discussed in Nichols (2012).

¹⁴ For this suggestion, see Cornman, Lehrer, and Pappas (1992, p. 107).

¹⁵ I'm assuming, plausibly, that it's possible for people to remain "conscious of their actions, and unconscious of the causes whereby those actions are determined," without experiencing the feeling of freedom.

¹⁶ Very roughly, undercutting defeaters are considerations that call into whether one's reasons for accepting a certain conclusion actually do support that conclusion. See Pollock (1987, pp. 484-485).

¹⁷ Indeed, as Christopher Franklin notes, "our current observations of the brain cohere well with the requirements of libertarianism" (2013: 137).

¹⁸ Guillon (2014) contends that the Martian control objection is analogous to certain skeptical arguments about perception, and that whichever response one offers to skeptical arguments about perception will also serve, *mutatis mutandis*, as a response to the Martian-control objection.

¹⁹ The zebra example is Dretske's (1970). For other counterexamples to evidence closure, see Wright (1985) and Kotzen (2012).