

Of Liberty and Necessity

*The Free Will Debate in
Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy*

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C L A R E N D O N P R E S S · O X F O R D

PREFACE

Historical studies of philosophical ideas and arguments are sometimes motivated by an interest in what the philosophers of the past have to teach philosophers of the present day. Such an approach need not be predicated upon the assumption that the philosophers of the past in question were wiser and closer to the truth than philosophers of the present day. It could be that what is to be learned from are the mistakes of the past. Nevertheless, this approach to the history of philosophy justifies itself, when it is asked to do so, by adverting to the use of historical work for live and ongoing philosophical research projects. My concerns here are less ambitious. I mean to do no more than understand a particular period's treatment of the free will question in that period's own terms. I am interested, that is to say, in what is characteristic of eighteenth-century thought about the will, and in what differentiates it from the thought that went before and the thought that came after. While it is arguable that the central problems of philosophy are timeless, in the sense of being questions that all reflective people must find pressing, regardless of historical and geographical circumstance, it would be plainly false to claim that there is just one style of reasoning appropriate to all attempts to solve those problems. The eighteenth century in Britain echoes with declarations to the effect that a new, 'experimental', method is called for in the philosophy of mind. In what follows I hope to capture how this new philosophical method shapes discussion of the will and its freedom.

Just as an exercise of the present kind stands a chance of frustrating philosophers, so also it is all too likely not to satisfy historians. I say little about several contexts—religious, scientific, and political—consideration of which would be necessary to a full understanding of any eighteenth-century British philosophical dispute. My focus is upon the play of ideas, upon argument and counterargument, rather than upon what might be responsible for the fact that particular ideas and arguments appeal to particular people in particular times and places. This is, then, a fairly conventional

work in the history of philosophical ideas. I do, however, believe that the kind of history of ideas that concentrates only upon canonical texts is bound to produce a more distorted view of its period than the kind that juxtaposes the canonical with the almost forgotten. Minor figures in the history of philosophy provide the background against which the achievements of the major figures can best be identified and understood. They often voice the received wisdom and generally held assumptions which one does well to keep in mind when assessing what a major figure is trying to do. To the extent, then, that I attend to writers who are no longer very widely read as well as to much more familiar figures, I do not ignore context altogether.

This book does not pretend to provide a comprehensive account of every aspect of the question concerning the nature and extent of human freedom as discussed in eighteenth-century British philosophy. The thread of argument that I follow is identified and characterized in the Introduction. In the texts that I focus upon, this thread is very often entangled with others, and it would require a much longer book to separate them all out, and to give equal attention to each. Several issues that are central to eighteenth-century discussions of freedom of will are therefore touched on only in passing. I say little about contemporary discussions of the relation of human freedom to divine foreknowledge and to predestination. Nor do I treat at any length the related issue of how to explain the presence of evil in a world supposedly under the governance of a supremely benevolent, intelligent, and powerful deity. I give much less space than might be expected by a reader familiar with the present-day free will debate to views about the conditions of moral responsibility, and about the moral basis and practical justification of punishment.

I do not marginalize these things because I consider them insignificant to the philosophers that feature in my narrative. The importance of religious issues, in particular, to almost all philosophers of the eighteenth century is difficult to exaggerate. While the official view, so to speak, in this period is that we come to know the mind of God through analogical study of the mind of man, it is surely very likely that theological presuppositions have a tendency to shape in advance a writer's conception of the powers of the human mind. It would be naive to imagine that religious belief never plays a role in the initial formation of a particular position with respect to the freedom of the will, and to take on trust statements to the effect that it is 'experience' and experience alone that has determined that position. However, detailed research on the interplay between theology and philosophy in

the eighteenth century remains in its infancy. For far too long it was assumed that the philosophy in the texts of, for example, Locke or Reid could be understood and debated quite independently of the theology. The situation is improving, but a great deal more needs to be done before we will be in a position from which to see a Locke or a Reid in the round. The thread of argument that I follow here will, I hope, find a place in a history of eighteenth-century British philosophy, yet to be written, that does full justice to the complexity of the period's enquiries into the various powers of the human mind.

This book has its origins in an Oxford University D.Phil. thesis, and my thanks go first to my supervisor, Galen Strawson, who was throughout patient, encouraging, and helpful in every way. I hope he will forgive my continuing resistance to the notion that it is a task of the historian of philosophy to point out the relevance of old ideas to present-day debates. Ralph Walker supervised my work during my first year as a doctoral student, and continued to read through drafts when he had many other duties to attend to. Alexander Broadie, Dan Robinson, Paul Russell, Agnieszka Steczowicz, John Stephens, M. A. Stewart, and Wayne Waxman all provided very useful comments on parts of my thesis. David Wiggins was a great support while I was a graduate student at Oxford, and I should like to record my gratitude to him here. I am grateful also to the Humanities Research Board of the British Academy and the Royal Institute of Philosophy for financial support during my doctoral research. I finished my thesis at the University of Glasgow, and I thank the trustees of the Gifford Trust, and Alexander Broadie in particular, for the honour of election to a Gifford Research Fellowship.

As I have revised the thesis, I have sought to make the best possible use of the comments of my examiners, Michael Ayers and Knud Haakonssen. Since that first encounter in 2000, on the birthday of both Hume and Reid, Knud Haakonssen has been a constant source of wisdom and advice. M. A. Stewart has been another invaluable guide and teacher. It is, however, all too likely that this book will fail to meet the standards set by Haakonssen and Stewart for historians of eighteenth-century British philosophy. Those who have helped me minimize the number of mistakes and infelicities include John Hedley Brooke, Thomas Dixon, Allen Guelzo, Peter Millican, Victor Nuovo, Agnieszka Steczowicz, Matthew Stuart, Paul Wood, and an anonymous reader for Oxford University Press. I am especially grateful to Gideon Yaffe for having read the entire typescript with the care and acuity that

characterizes his own work on the free will problem in eighteenth-century British philosophy. Needless to say, all remaining errors of fact and interpretation are wholly my own responsibility.

I turned my doctoral thesis into this book while a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow. I hope that the Fellowship of the British Academy will be satisfied that I have made the most of the enormous privilege of three years of generous financial support. St Catherine's College, Oxford, was my academic home during my tenure of the British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship, and I was made extremely welcome there by the Master and Fellows. I owe a special debt of gratitude to my 'mentor', Bill Brewer, for inviting me to come to St. Catherine's in the first place, and for ensuring that I had the time and space that I needed for my work. Almost all of the research for both thesis and book was done in the Upper Reading Room of the Bodleian Library, and I should like to express my gratitude to the staff of the Upper Reading Room for their unfailing amiability and helpfulness. Like every member of Oxford's Faculty of Philosophy, I have been aided in many ways by Karen Heald, the Faculty's Administrator. Encouragement and advice have been freely given me by my editor, Peter Momtchiloff, who has made the process of writing a first book much less intimidating than it might otherwise have been.

It would not have been possible for me to start on the road towards a career in academia without the support of my family. I am conscious that in particular I owe a great deal to my paternal grandparents, James Cole Harris and Melloney Harris, and it saddens me greatly that neither lived long enough to see tangible proof, as I hope, that I have not wasted the opportunities they helped provide me with.

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Introduction

From Locke to Dugald Stewart

It were better perhaps to treat of this abstruse subject after the manner of experimental philosophy, than to fill a thousand pages with metaphysical discussions concerning it.

Colin Maclaurin, *An Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophical Discoveries*, Book I

The eighteenth century covered in this book is a long one. It begins with the appearance in 1690 of John Locke's *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, and closes in 1828 with the last of the works by Dugald Stewart published in his own lifetime, *The Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man*. The idea that Locke's *Essay* ushered in a new era in the history of British philosophy is uncontroversial. It is true that no one could claim that there was immediate and widespread agreement with the central doctrines put forward in the *Essay*. Many of the early responses were very hostile, especially with respect to Locke's attack on innate ideas, his account of personal identity, and his apparent admission of the possibility of thinking matter. Locke was regarded by some as indistinguishable from the deists and worse—John Toland, Anthony Collins, Voltaire, and others—who were prominent among the *Essay*'s first admirers. It took forty years for the *Essay* to appear on the curricula of the universities of England and Scotland, and even then its position was not secure. But the opposition that Locke provoked is testimony to the seriousness with which he was taken. In time, charges of secret Socinianism or Spinozism became less frequent. Though there remained a great deal of criticism of his positive views, Locke was increasingly recognized as having had a significant and beneficial effect on the manner in which

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philosophical questions were being discussed. Where before Locke there had been the barbarous terminology and innumerable distinctions within distinctions of medieval philosophy, afterwards, so it was claimed (with some unfairness to Hobbes), philosophy was written in plain English, with every effort made to define as clearly as possible the terms used and to minimize technicality.¹

Fidelity to experience is the principal concern of the Lockean philosopher. In a reaction against the extravagant claims made on behalf of *a priori* reasoning in the age of Descartes, Spinoza, and Malebranche, eighteenth-century enquiry into both inanimate nature and the human mind is self-consciously limited to what can be given ‘experimental’ confirmation. In his *Cyclopaedia* of 1728 Ephraim Chambers wrote that ‘Experiments, within these fifty or sixty years, are come into such vogue, that nothing will pass in philosophy, but what is founded on experiment, or confirm’d by experiment, &c. so that the new philosophy is altogether experimental.’² In the eighteenth century, an ‘experiment’ is not necessarily an investigation specifically designed to test a certain theory, and carried out in a laboratory or in some other form of controlled conditions. Experimental philosophy is, simply, philosophy that aims to be true to the facts of experience, and the experience in question might well be that of everyday life. An important factor in Locke’s success was the manner in which he succeeded in making it possible for his readers to think of themselves as practising philosophy when they compared the description of the mind given in the *Essay* with their own experience of themselves, their acquaintances, and the world in general.³ In the Introduction to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume puts Locke at the head of a list of ‘some late philosophers in *England*, who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing, and have engaged the attention, and excited the curiosity of the public’.⁴ Though these philosophers—in addition to Locke, he names Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Butler—‘differ in many points among themselves’, Hume later added, ‘they seem all to agree in founding their accurate disquisitions of human nature entirely upon experience’.⁵

¹ For the reception of Locke in the eighteenth century, see, e.g., Maclean (1936), Yolton and Yolton (1985), pp. 1–37, Aarsleff (1994), Porter (2000), pp. 66–71.

² Chambers (1728), vol. i, p. 368.

³ Stewart attributes Locke’s success to the way in which he ‘prepar[ed] the thinking part of his readers, to a degree till then unknown, for the unshackled use of their own reason’ (Stewart (1854), p. 223).

⁴ Hume (1739–40, 2000), p. 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5; Hume (1740, 2000), p. 407.

The suggestion is that it is *because* the new wave of British philosophers rested their disquisitions upon experience that they excited public curiosity.

According to Bolingbroke, in reading the *Essay* one is 'led, as it were, thro a course of experimental philosophy. I am shewn my self; and in every instance there is an appeal to my perceptions, and to the reflection I make on my own intellectual operations.'⁶ Locke's achievement, so those who came afterwards thought, was to show the way towards the replication in *moral* philosophy what had already been done in the philosophy of nature: towards, in other words, a 'Newtonianism of the mind'.⁷ Sir James Mackintosh, for example, claimed that the *Essay* was 'the first considerable contribution in modern times towards the experimental philosophy of the human mind', and that 'before Locke, there was no example in intellectual philosophy of an ample enumeration of facts, collected and arranged for the express purpose of legitimate generalization'.⁸ Mackintosh, like many other writers of the period, regarded Bacon as the source of modern experimentalism. Newton had shown what could be achieved in natural philosophy using Bacon's inductive method: Locke showed its fruitfulness in the philosophy of mind. The poet Edward Young had in his study busts of Newton and Locke, each with its motto: Newton's read 'Hic Natura Clavis est'; Locke's read 'Hic Hominis ostendit Tibi Te.'⁹

Entailed by the commitment to experimentalism that Locke shares with Newton is a clear sense of the distinction between questions that philosophy can answer and those that it cannot. Newton famously refuses to frame hypotheses about the cause of gravitational attraction; Locke says that he

⁶ Quoted by MacLean (1936), pp. 11–12. Here Bolingbroke echoes Voltaire's pronouncement in his *Philosophical Letters*, written soon after his time in England in the second half of the 1720s, that where previous philosophers had only written 'the Romance of the Soul', Locke 'gave, with an Air of the greatest Modesty, the History of it' (Voltaire (1733), pp. 98–9). 'In the eyes of the eighteenth century,' Gerd Buchdahl writes, '[Locke] is the philosopher of "experience" *par excellence*' (Buchdahl (1961), p. 21).

⁷ It would be an overstatement, and perhaps simply wrong, to say that Newton had a direct influence on the *Essay*: see Rogers (1978). My concern here is with the way in which Locke and Newton came to be associated with each other in eighteenth-century eyes: see Feingold (1988). The phrase 'Newton of the mind' appears to have been Kant's, in remarks on Rousseau: see Neiman (1994), pp. 36, 193–6.

⁸ Mackintosh (1821), p. 240. A late-eighteenth-century German history of philosophy makes a similar point: 'discarding all systematic theories, [Locke] has, from actual experience and observation, delineated the features, and described the operations, of the human mind, with a degree of precision and minuteness, not found in Plato, Aristotle, or Des Cartes' (Enfield (1791), vol. ii, pp. 585–6).

⁹ Feingold (1988), p. 299.

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hopes ‘to prevail with the busy Mind of Man, to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its Comprehension; to stop, when it is at the utmost of its Tether; and to sit down in a quiet ignorance of those Things, which, upon Examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our Capacities’.¹⁰ One of the things of which we must remain ignorant, according to Locke, is ‘whether any mere material Being thinks, or no’: ‘it being impossible for us, by the contemplation of our own *Ideas*, without revelation, to discover, whether Omnipotency has not given to some Systems of Matter fitly disposed, a power to perceive and think, or else joined and fixed to Matter so disposed, a thinking immaterial Substance’.¹¹ Locke begins the *Essay* by making it clear that his investigation into the capacities of the mind is to be carried out independently of the question of ‘wherein its Essence consists’.¹² The mind–body question does not disappear completely from British philosophy of mind in the eighteenth century. On the contrary, and as already mentioned, Locke himself provoked a great deal of debate because he suggested that our ignorance of the essence of the mind leaves it open that, for all we know, thought might be a property of matter.¹³ Nevertheless, it is for the most part true that self-consciously ‘experimental’ philosophers do not regard ontology as the foundation of inquiry into the mind’s powers. Those who came after Locke believed that the question of what the mind is made of could be ignored while one sought to discover how it worked.¹⁴

The Free will Problem in the Eighteenth Century

My concern in this book is with eighteenth-century British discussion of the faculty of will. Locke defines the will as ‘a *Power* to begin or forbear, to continue or end several actions of our minds, and motions of our Bodies,

¹⁰ Locke (1690, 1975), pp. 44–5 (i.i.4).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 540–1 (iv.iii.6).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 43 (i.i.2).

¹³ This debate is chronicled in Yolton (1983).

¹⁴ Gary Hatfield writes in a study of eighteenth-century psychology across Europe that ‘Ontological questions were bracketed in order to concentrate on study of mental faculties through their empirical manifestations in mental phenomena and external behavior. . . . Psychological theorizing was only rarely pursued as part of an attempt to cast doubt on (or to secure) the existence of immaterial souls or their connection with things divine’ (Hatfield (1995), p. 188). As Cassirer puts it, ‘The metaphysics of the soul is to be replaced by a history of the soul, by that “historical, plain method” which Locke had maintained against Descartes’ (Cassirer (1932, 1951), p. 99).

barely by a thought or preference of the mind ordering, or as it were commanding the doing or not doing such and such a particular action'.¹⁵ This power, Locke adds in the second edition of the *Essay*, is not simply a matter of the reliable determination of one's actions by one's passions and desires. Exercise of the will is self-conscious selection of one particular course of action as the one to be pursued: to possess a will is to have the power to *choose* to act in one way rather than in another. 'The faculty of will', says Jonathan Edwards, 'is that faculty or power or principle of the mind by which it is capable of choosing: an act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice.'¹⁶ Reid describes the will as, simply, 'our determination to act or not to act'. The will, Reid continues, cannot be defined, for 'the most simple acts of the mind do not admit of a logical definition': 'The way to form a clear notion of them is, to reflect attentively upon them as we feel them in ourselves.' Nevertheless, there are some means by which to distinguish volitions from other acts of the mind. When one wills something, one has a conception, more or less distinct, of what it is that one wills (this differentiates voluntary acts from things done from instinct or habit); what one wills is always an action of one's own (as is not true of desires and commands); what one wills (as opposed, again, to what one desires) is always something one believes oneself able to do; and, finally, 'in all determinations of the mind that are of any importance, there must be something in the preceding state of the mind that disposes or inclines us to that determination'.¹⁷ Not all, but by far the greater number of the philosophers of the period hold, with Reid, that, if the will is ever in a state of perfect indifference, the resultant actions are trivial to the point of insignificance. The business of the will is with the 'principles of action' that, according to Reid, God has given us to choose among. These principles are of various kinds. They include instincts and habits; appetites, desires, affections, and passions; and considerations of prudence and duty. All of these are very often described as 'motives'. One important element of eighteenth-century discussions of the will is the analysis and categorization of different kinds of motive. Here, however, I focus upon a different question, concerning the nature of the relation between motives, on the one hand, and acts of choice, on the other. At its starkest, the question is this: are we free in our volitions? or is

¹⁵ Locke (1690, 1975), p. 236 (II.xxi.5).

¹⁶ Edwards (1754, 1957), p. 137.

¹⁷ Reid (1788, 1969), pp. 58–63 (II.i).

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the influence of motives such that they do not merely ‘dispose’ or ‘incline’ choice, but in fact necessitate it?

This was of course by the time of the eighteenth century already an ancient question. Being an ancient question, it had many aspects, and there were various ways in which it could be framed. In different periods, people had found different things threatening to the freedom of the will. For around a century after the Reformation, doctrines of predestination and an inherited original sin were regarded by some as an obvious danger to man’s sense of his moral responsibility for his actions—and as incompatible with the justice of divine punishment of human sin. During the seventeenth century, however, as the storm created by Luther and Calvin slowly died down, there gained ground the notion that it is not only in theology that problems are generated for belief in the freedom of our choices. Just in so far as acts of choice are part of the causal order of the universe, it began to be claimed, and irrespective of whether that causal order has a basis in the divine will, our volitions could be regarded as determined by factors over which we have no control. This line of thought, which had its proximate source in the more radical elements of Italian Renaissance humanism (in Pomponazzi, in particular), was articulated forcefully by Hobbes in a debate with the Bishop of Derry, John Bramhall.¹⁸

Bramhall’s position, which he took himself to share with ‘the much greater part of philosophers and Schoolmen’, was that a human agent has absolute power over the choices he makes. No matter how strong the motive to act in a certain way, there is always the possibility of choosing to act in a different way. No normal, healthy human agent can ever truly claim that he *has* to choose as he does. In the case of any choice made in the past, it was possible for the agent to have chosen differently. But this is not to say that the will is indifferent to the deliverances of the understanding. Bramhall says that there is a middle way between motives having no influence on choice and their taking away the capacity of choosing differently. ‘Motives determine not naturally but morally,’ he says, ‘which kind of determination may consist with true liberty’.¹⁹ It will be seen in this study that the notion of a

¹⁸ For the Renaissance debate, see Poppi (1988). Sleight, Chappell, and Della Rocca (1998) is a general account of the seventeenth-century free will debate. The key texts in the Hobbes–Bramhall dispute are Hobbes (1654); Bramhall (1655); Hobbes (1656a), Bramhall (1658). A selection from these texts is provided in Chappell (ed.) (1999). The fullest accounts of the circumstances and content of the Hobbes–Bramhall dispute are given in Lessay (1993) and Foisneau (1999).

¹⁹ Bramhall (1655), p. 167; Chappell (ed.) (1999), p. 56.

'moral necessity' supposedly distinct from 'natural' or, as some say, 'physical', or 'literal', necessity plays a central role in discussions of the will in the eighteenth century. It allows, or perhaps merely *appears* to allow, the believer in the freedom of the will to distinguish between, on the one hand, the way in which a cause determines its effect, and, on the other, the way in which a motive influences a choice. A motive, according to believer in the freedom of the will, is not, properly speaking, the cause of an act of will. A motive is better thought of as an *occasion* for the agent to exercise his will in a particular way. Most of those eighteenth-century philosophers who reject the idea that choice is necessitated by motives agree with the essential features of Bramhall's position. A small minority are suspicious even of the 'moral' necessitation of the will by motives, and affirm that freedom lies in the will's natural indifference.

I shall use the term 'libertarian' as shorthand for the view that the influence of motives, however characterized, is not such as to eliminate freedom of choice. It is perhaps worth drawing attention to the fact that *no* opponent of the doctrine of necessity believes that it is the mark of a free action that it lacks a cause. Nor is there any talk of the will as subject to some form of 'indeterministic' causation. The libertarian of the eighteenth century is a believer in what philosophers of today call 'agent causation'.²⁰ In other words, he holds that there is an alternative to regarding motives as the causes of choices and actions. Sometimes libertarians talk of the will as the cause of its own acts; at other times they talk of the agent as cause. That either way of talking is apt to sound strange to us now is a sign of significant differences between, so to speak, eighteenth and twenty-first-century philosophical environments. It is these differences (rather than the obvious similarities) that I hope this book will illuminate.

I shall follow late eighteenth-century usage and call those who believe that the influence of motives *is* such as to remove freedom of choice 'necessitarians'. 'Determinist' and 'determinism' are words coined in the nineteenth century.²¹ It is very common for necessitarians to argue that, despite what libertarians might say, the libertarian position does involve a commitment to events without causes. Hobbes made this charge against

²⁰ For a representative sample of recent discussions of agent causation, see O'Connor (ed.) (1995). The most sustained recent elaboration of an agent causal theory of human action is O'Connor (2000).

²¹ The *OED* cites one Sir William Hamilton's notes to his edition of Reid's collected works as the first use of the word 'determinism' (see Hamilton (1863), p. 87). In a letter to James Gregory,

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Bramhall, and most eighteenth-century necessitarians follow suit. The libertarian picture of freedom, Hobbes claimed, 'implies a contradiction, and is non-sense'.²² Bramhall would have it *both* that there is a cause—a motive, or set of motives—sufficient to explain a particular choice *and* that that choice might not have been made; and, Hobbes argues, this amounts to saying that the choice *both* has a cause *and* does not have a cause. For a cause of an event is by definition something sufficient to explain why the event took place when and where it did; and what is sufficient to explain an event is by definition something that necessitates that event; since if it were still possible for the event not to take place, it would be clear that the claim to sufficiency was not true.²³ A motive, then, cannot be *sufficient* to explain an action and yet not thereby *necessitate* that action. In so far as he rejects the doctrine of necessity, Bramhall must be affirming that choices are radically underdetermined by motives, and that free choice is arbitrary, random, and disconnected from the exercise of practical reason. Hobbes is, moreover, sharply critical of the notion of a merely 'moral' necessity. He says he can make no sense at all of a necessity which does not involve genuine necessitation. Necessity by definition takes away the freedom to choose and act otherwise than in line with one's motives. He also argues that there is no threat to freedom from the 'natural' necessitation of choice by motives, since liberty is simply a matter of not being prevented from acting in line with the most pressing motive. What we call the will is in fact simply the motive, or 'appetite', that immediately precedes action; and deliberation is 'nothing else but the *alternate* imagination of the *good* and *evil* sequels of action, or (which is the same thing) alternate *hope* and *fear*, or alternate *appetite* to do or quit the action of which [a man] *deliberateth*'.²⁴

Reid says he believes that Alexander Crombie 'may claim the merit of adding the word *Libertarian* to the English language, as Priestley added that of *Necessarian*' (Reid (2002), pp. 234–5). William Belsham in fact uses the term 'libertarian' before Crombie. The *OED* lists the title of Dudgeon (1739) as the first use of 'necessitarian'.

²² Hobbes (1654), p. 73; Chappell (ed.) (1999), p. 39.

²³ For discussion of Hobbes's definition of 'cause' see Brandt (1928); Leijenhorst (1996); Pécharman (1990); Zarka (2001). The connection made between causation and sufficiency is made before Hobbes by some in the Renaissance Aristotelian tradition. What is most obviously new in Hobbes is the notion that a cause is not by definition a substance: a Hobbesian cause may be a collection of accidents of two or more substances. Pécharman calls this 'la déréalisation de la cause' (p. 49). Leijenhorst notes how Hobbes blurs the traditional Thomistic distinction between 'internal conditions' and 'external circumstances', making both 'things requisite to produce the effect' (p. 432).

²⁴ Hobbes (1654), p. 68; Chappell (ed.) (1999), p. 37. For Hobbes's theory of mind, see Sorell (1986), ch. vii, and Gert (1996).

In all of this, especially in his claim that liberty is compatible with necessity, Hobbes was extremely influential. For present purposes, however, there is another element of his attack on the freedom of the will that is equally important. This is his use of the rhetoric of the new mechanistic science of motion.²⁵ The notion that ‘a man originally can move himself’, Hobbes claims, is one for which Bramhall ‘will be able to find no Authority of any that have but tasted of the knowledge of motion’.²⁶ In the movements of the mind it is as it is in the movements of body: every change is caused by something external. Bramhall describes the influence of motives upon the will as a species of ‘Metaphoricall motion’, and compares it to the manner in which ‘a man *drawes* a Child after him with the sight of a fair Apple, or a Shepherd *drawes* his sheep after him with the sight of a green bough’.²⁷ According to Hobbes, such talk is ‘insignificant’, or meaningless, and is a sign of his opponent’s lack of ‘philosophy’. ‘Moral motion is a meer Word, without any Imagination of the mind correspondent to it.’²⁸ Hobbes repeatedly presents himself in the debate with Bramhall as one who has meditated closely upon ‘this and other natural questions’ while the Bishop relies solely on ‘the authority of books’. Hobbes is a philosopher notoriously sceptical about the claims made by some of his contemporaries about the value of experience in the acquisition of knowledge, but he is, nevertheless, prepared to say that for his definitions of deliberation, of the will, and of freedom ‘there can no other proof be offered but every mans own experience, by reflection on himself. ‘But to those that out of custom speak not what they conceive, but what they hear, and are not able, or will not take the pains to consider what they think when they hear such words’, he continues, ‘no Argument can be sufficient, because *experience* and *matter of fact* is not verified by other mens Arguments, but by every man’s own *sence* and *memory*.’²⁹

Throughout the eighteenth century, opponents of the freedom of the will, whether consciously or not, echo Hobbes’s claim that experience provides sufficient proof of the necessitation of choice by motive. Necessitarians like to regard themselves as ‘philosophical’ reasoners: as, that is to say,

²⁵ For Hobbes’s conception of natural philosophy, see Brandt (1928) and Jessep (1996).

²⁶ Hobbes (1656a), p. 37.

²⁷ Bramhall (1655), p. 172; Chappell (ed.) (1999), pp. 57–8.

²⁸ Hobbes (1656a), p. 231.

²⁹ Hobbes (1654), pp. 74–5; Chappell (ed.) (1999), p. 39. In *De corpore* he remarks, similarly, that ‘the causes of the motions of the mind are known, not only by ratiocination, but also by the experience of every man that takes the pains to observe these motions within himself’ (Hobbes (1656b, 1839), p. 73).

followers of the methods of reasoning advocated by Bacon and Newton. They dwell, in particular, upon observed regularities in human behaviour, upon constant conjunctions of types of motives and types of actions, as proof that motives are the causes of actions in just the same sense as *natural* phenomena are causally related to each other. An important part of what keeps the free will debate going in this period, however, is the fact that those who believe in the will's freedom reject absolutely the charge that there is something, as we might say now, 'unscientific' about their conception of human action. From their point of view it is, rather, the proponents of necessity who cling to theories at the expense of facts, and who are guilty of inadequate attention to experience. What we experience when we reflect on ourselves, they believe, is the inability of motives, so to speak, to make our choices for us. Motives have an influence on choice that is comparable to advice. No matter how strong the inducements to act in one way, we are conscious of a capacity to choose to do something quite different. And even if this is not apparent at the time of action, it can become so later, with the onset of remorse. What is often called 'consciousness' is in this way an essential element of the libertarian claim that *experience* is of the will's freedom, rather than of its necessitation. The importance attached to the deliverances of introspection is one of the most striking features of eighteenth-century argument about the freedom of the will. Some of those who reject the doctrine of necessity believe that consciousness of the freedom of the will is so clear and undeniable that any argument that appears to speak for necessitarianism may be regarded as worthless even before its faults have been revealed. Others provide a detailed examination of the arguments the necessitarian uses to try to establish the determination of the will by motives. It is a common charge that the necessitarian exaggerates the uniformity of the connection between types of motive and types of action: that actions are more irregular and unpredictable than the necessitarian is prepared to admit. There is, in addition, a belief among libertarians that the doctrine of necessity is shown to be untenable by the practical consequences, in morals and in religion, of taking it as true. But the philosophers I discuss here do not rest their case solely on arguments from consequences. For all of them the free will question is in the first instance a question of empirical fact.

This concentration of attention upon the experience of choice and action is accompanied by the lack of concern with ontological issues characteristic of Lockean thought about the mind. In the seventeenth century, it is not uncommon for arguments to run directly from materialism to necessitar-

ianism, and from the immateriality of the mind to libertarianism. Hobbes's necessitarianism is generally thought to be a consequence of his materialism;³⁰ and so Cudworth is able to write that 'it is a sufficient confutation of [Hobbes] to show that there is another substance in the world besides body'.³¹ In the eighteenth century, by contrast, this kind of argumentation is rare. Joseph Priestley, for example, claims that 'if man . . . be wholly *material*, it will not be denied but that he must be a *mechanical being*';³² but nevertheless makes an independent and wholly experimental case for the doctrine of necessity. He also argues that the immateriality of the soul would, even if true, fail to settle things in favour of the libertarian. If the mind is immaterial, he concedes, it follows that it is not subject to the laws of matter; 'but it does not, therefore, follow that it is subject to *no laws at all*, and consequently has a self-determining power, independent of all laws, or rule of its determination'.³³ The libertarian position 'can derive no advantage from the commonly received principles of the *immateriality of the human soul*'.³⁴ Other eighteenth-century necessitarians, such as Kames, Edwards, Hartley, and Tucker, believe the mind to be immaterial; some libertarians, such as Reid and Stewart, see no reason why, if matter could take on mental properties, a wholly material being might not also have freedom of will. Reid writes:

If matter be what we conceived it to be, it is equally incapable of thinking and of acting freely. But if the properties from which we drew this conclusion, have no reality, as [Priestley] thinks he has proved; if it have the powers of attraction and repulsion, and require only a certain configuration to make it think rationally, it will be impossible to show any good reason why the same configuration may not make it act rationally and freely. If its reproach of solidity, inertness, and sluggishness be wiped off; and if it be raised in our esteem to a nearer approach to the nature of what we call spiritual and immaterial beings, why should it still be nothing but a mechanical being?³⁵

Reid does not put this forward as a genuine possibility. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that he thought the arguments for the immateriality of

³⁰ See, e.g., Clarke (1738), vol. ii, p. 563.

³¹ British Museum MS 4979, fol. 61; quoted in Mintz (1962), p. 127.

³² Priestley (1782), vol. ii, p. xvii.

³³ Priestley (1779), p. 13.

³⁴ Priestley (1780b), p. 40.

³⁵ Reid (1788, 1969), pp. 356–7 (iv.xi). For an identical argument, see Stewart (1828), vol. ii, pp. 479–80. Priestley's opponent Lawrence Butterworth makes the same point: 'But were we to allow that man is *material*, and that his soul is no more than a property: yet it does not follow from thence, that he is incapable of acting of himself (Butterworth (1792), p. 352).

the mind to be perfectly conclusive.³⁶ The remarkable thing is the fact that Reid, *qua* libertarian, does not believe it to be important whether the mind can be proven to be immaterial. Priestley and Reid differ about as deeply as is possible for two parties debating the free will question to differ, but they agree that theories about the essence of mind can be put to one side while the question is discussed. Because the philosophers to be discussed themselves regard it as irrelevant, the eighteenth-century debate about the possibility of thinking matter will not be brought to bear upon this study's account of the period's treatments of the relation between motives and volitions.

Summary of the Narrative

Eighteenth-century British philosophy may begin with Locke, but it was a source of frustration to many of the period's writers on the will that Locke himself failed to give a straight answer to the question of whether the will is left at liberty by the influence of motives. In the *Essay*'s chapter 'Of Power' Locke commits himself to neither the libertarian nor the necessitarian answer to this question. In Chapter 1 I suggest that Locke's project in 'Of Power' is to define freedom in such a way that it involves neither the indifference of the will nor the determination of choice by the understanding. Locke seems to have come to feel that in the first edition of the *Essay* he had recoiled too far from the liberty of indifference towards a doctrine of psychological determinism. His original position is that it is incoherent to attribute freedom to the will; he later introduces a 'power of suspension'; and in the fifth and final edition he allows that there is, after all, 'a case wherein a Man is at Liberty of *willing*'. What persuades Locke to change his view is in large part renewed attention to the experience of choice, and especially to the phenomenon of weakness of will. This devotion to accurate analysis of volition left Locke's contemporaries confused, and in the last part of Chapter 1 I give a representative sample of eighteenth-century criticism of the chapter 'Of Power'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in light of this apparently widespread dissatisfaction, Locke's own contribution to the question of liberty and necessity does not play an important role in the eighteenth-century debate charted in this study. This should not be thought a reason to question the

³⁶ See Reid (1995), pp. 217–31; and also the first of the 'Three Lectures on the Nature and the Duration of the Soul' included in Reid (1785, 2002), pp. 617–18, 619.

importance of Locke to those who came after him. Locke's influence lay in his method, his style of philosophizing, rather than in his substantive philosophical doctrines.

Locke's method, however, did not take hold immediately. The principal protagonists of Chapter 2, Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins, in effect resume the debate between Bramhall and Hobbes. But before I introduce Clarke and Collins, I describe the unusual definition of freedom presented by William King in *De Origine Mali*. King is a defender of the liberty of indifference: he believes that freedom is most purely realized in the exercise of a capacity to choose to act in a certain way regardless of the recommendations of the understanding. Clarke, like Locke, believes that to define freedom in this way is a serious mistake; and, following Bramhall, he seeks to negotiate a middle way between the indifference of the will, on the one hand, and the literal determination of the will by motives, on the other. The notion of 'moral necessity', as distinct from 'literal' or 'physical' necessity, is at the heart of Clarke's theory of freedom. It allows him to connect free choice with rationality (and goodness) without conceding that, at any one time, the influence of the understanding makes only one choice possible. Clarke also argues that a motive is not the kind of thing that can be a cause, and also that an action cannot, on pain of contradiction, be caused by something exterior to the agent. Clarke had a significant influence on all later libertarians. Collins's necessitarianism is identical to Hobbes's. Like Hobbes, he argues that libertarianism is defeated by a correct analysis of the concept of cause. But he also presents an extended analysis of what experience tells us about the operations of perception, judgment, choice, and action.

Clarke and Collins rely a good deal on *a priori* metaphysical argumentation of the kind that the characteristically eighteenth-century philosopher regards with suspicion. The first to approach the question of the nature of the influence of motives wholly in the spirit of Lockean experimentalism is Hume. Hume describes himself as a reconciler, and in Chapter 3 I give an interpretation of his 'reconciling project' that rests on the assumption that Hume is serious in wanting to show there to be underlying agreement between libertarians and necessitarians. Unlike Hobbes and Collins, Hume is not primarily concerned with showing it to be *impossible* that we might choose and act otherwise than we do. I suggest that the key to understanding Hume's strategy is the distinction between 'moral' and 'physical' necessity that libertarians such as Bramhall and Clarke attach so much importance to. What Hume does is show that all the doctrine of necessity amounts to, when

properly understood, is something that the libertarian already concedes: that there is certain motives are regularly followed by certain actions, such that human action is largely uniform and so predictable. We cannot settle the metaphysical disputes that have traditionally divided libertarians and necessitarians, and so should give up on them, and focus upon experience; and when we do focus upon the experience of action, libertarians and necessitarians turn out to be in agreement.

There is, however, one important aspect of the experience of action that Hume has explained away in order to get the result that he wants. This is the first-person perspective, the agent's sense of not being determined by motives at the time of choice and action, and of having been able to have acted differently in retrospect. In Chapter 4 I describe the attempt made by another necessitarian, Lord Kames, to accommodate the agent's own perspective. There is a natural belief in necessity, he claims: Hume is correct about that. But there is in addition just as natural a belief that our choices and actions are not determined before they are made. Both practical, prudential reasoning and the operations of conscience depend on our believing the will to be free. Kames writes that 'man could not have been man, had he not been furnished with a feeling of contingency'. In order to resolve the paradox of directly contradictory natural beliefs, Kames hypothesizes that, though 'deceitful', the sense of freedom is an essential part of the fabric of the mind, given us by God in order that we be properly active and moral beings. God has to deceive us into thinking that we are free to ensure that we do not slip into sloth and fatalism. We should, therefore, be grateful that it is only in philosophical and reflective moments that we see through the deception. The idea that God might have to deceive us in order to realize his purposes was too much for Kames's contemporaries to take. Having given a brief account of the controversy generated by the hypothesis of a deceitful sense of freedom, I chart the alterations Kames makes to his view in later editions of his *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*.

In a pamphlet written in defence of Kames, Jonathan Edwards is invoked as proof of the fact that it is possible to be both a Christian and an opponent of the freedom of the will. Edwards's case for necessitarianism is the subject of Chapter 5. Edwards claimed not to have read Hobbes before he wrote his *Careful and Strict Inquiry into . . . Freedom of Will*, but he takes up the dilemma Hobbes had constructed for the libertarian, and gives it added sharpness. Either the believer in the liberty of the will in fact contradicts himself, by allowing the influence of motives on choice; or he is saying that free choices

are undetermined and purely arbitrary. So Edwards argues. He attacks the libertarian picture of self-determination with great dialectical ingenuity. Hobbes and Locke had both dismissed the notion of the freedom of the will as involving an infinite regress of volitions; Edwards develops this line of argument, and shows that the notion, as he puts it, 'destroys itself'. Unlike Hobbes, however, Edwards finds use for the distinction between moral and physical necessity. The distinction is central to his claim that necessity as he understands it does not rule out human freedom and moral responsibility. Behind Edwards's necessitarianism is a view that he regards as a matter of everyday experience: that every event in nature, and every event in the minds of men, is directly the result of divine activity. I explore this aspect of Edwards's thought at the end of the chapter. The *Inquiry* was for the most part ignored by later opponents of the doctrine of necessity in Britain, and where it was not ignored, it was not taken very seriously. This is unfortunate, for it has a claim to being the eighteenth century's most powerful attack on the notion of the freedom of the will.

A reason why Edwards was for the most part ignored by British believers in the freedom of the will is perhaps to be found in Chapter 6. Here I introduce a line of thought according to which the introspective evidence of the freedom of the will, and of the falsity of necessitarianism, is so plain and strong that arguments which purport to identify contradictions and confusions in statements of the libertarian position can safely be disregarded. Johnson's dictum that 'All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience for it' sums up this view very well. Others who adopt much the same approach to the question include Butler, Berkeley, and Richard Price. The liberty of the will, these men believe, is not only evident in experience, but is also the foundation of morality and religion. It is inconceivable, therefore, that there could be good reasons to doubt it. In Scotland this view manifests itself in the writings of two, at least, of the philosophers of common sense. I give a brief sketch of James Oswald's treatment of the will, but devote most of the chapter to the discussion of liberty and necessity found in James Beattie's *Essay on Truth*. According to Beattie, necessitarianism is a form of 'modern scepticism'. In other words, necessitarianism is meant to corrode and destroy the ordinary beliefs—particularly, again, the moral and religious beliefs—of ordinary people. It is, I suggest, Beattie's sense of the dangerousness of necessitarianism, and of the importance of belief in liberty, that explains the extraordinary violence of his attack on proponents of the doctrine of necessity—and on Hume in particular. Beattie is generally

dismissed today as, in Hume's words, a 'bigotted silly Fellow', but in his own day he was enormously popular. What explains this is that many, if not most, of Beattie's contemporaries shared his sense of the importance of belief in liberty, and of the needlessness of engaging seriously with the arguments of necessitarians.

The success of the *Essay on Truth* prompted a broadside attack on the philosophy of common sense, not from a proponent of the scepticism Beattie denounces, but instead from Joseph Priestley, a philosopher peculiarly insensitive to the force of sceptical arguments of any kind. In his *Examination of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald*, Priestley charges the Scots with reinstating innate ideas with their talk of principles of common sense, and with generally abandoning the model of a science of the mind as laid out in Locke's *Essay*. What was essential to the Lockean project, according to Priestley, was the tracing of ideas to their source in sensation; and in David Hartley's *Observations on Man* showed how this was to be done. The association of ideas, in other words, was the central concept of any properly scientific account of the mind. In Chapter 7 I describe the necessitarian arguments of Hartley and Priestley, and try to determine what role associationalism plays in those arguments. I also examine the theory of the will developed by another Hartleyan philosopher, Abraham Tucker, in his enormous *The Light of Nature Pursued*. Tucker is principally concerned to show that freedom and providence are not in fact at odds with each other. It is in this connection that he differs most markedly from Hartley and Priestley, for both Hartley and Priestley believe that the doctrine of necessity entails that God is directly responsible for every human action. What, then, to do about the apparent prevalence of evil in the world? It is in providing an answer to this question that the association of ideas shows itself to be central to the solutions Hartley and Priestley give to the free will problem. Our current ideas about the nature of evil are the product of an inadequate understanding of the divine plan. In time, human beings will overcome their present ways of thinking, and associate all that happens with God's providential plan.

Like Priestley, if not more so, Thomas Reid is self-conscious in his presentation of himself as an 'experimental' reasoner. He believes that it is Hartleyan associationalism, and not the philosophy of common sense, that is at odds with the spirit of inductive inquiry into the operations of the mind. In Chapter 8 my intention is to supplement recent discussions of Reid's theory of action with an account of its place in Reid's reply to scepticism. Reid's account of freedom rests on a detailed analysis of the capacities that

power over the will affords us: the capacities of mental attention, deliberation, and the making of resolutions. The centrality of belief in the freedom of the will to the practical life establishes it as a *natural* belief, a belief not the result of education or any other form of inculcation: as, in other words, a principle of common sense. The necessitarian can, of course, accept that the belief is natural, and argue that it is nevertheless false. Reid's response to the necessitarian is not, in the manner of Beattie, to point out the dangerous consequences of giving the belief up, and to attack the character of those who would have us do so. Nor is it to provide a direct argument for the belief's truth. It is, rather, to examine all the arguments which purport to demonstrate the truth of necessitarianism, and to show them to be wanting. Reid gives particular attention to arguments for necessity from the observable fact of the influence of motives on choice. He wants to show that there is nothing 'scientific', as we would say now, about belief in necessitarianism. According to Reid, the empirical evidence, properly understood, speaks rather for the liberty of the will.

The clash between Priestley and Reid over the freedom of the will is in a sense the climax of the free will debate in eighteenth-century British philosophy. For the next forty years, at least, necessitarians tended explicitly to align themselves with Priestley, and libertarians with Reid. In Chapter 9 I give a brief account of necessitarianism after Priestley, but focus upon the libertarian arguments of James Gregory and Dugald Stewart. Both Gregory and Stewart were personal friends of Reid's, and were significantly influenced in their approach to the free will problem by the *Essays on the Active Powers*. Nevertheless, they differed from Reid in interesting ways. Gregory thinks he can prove once and for all that the influence of motives upon human actions is not, as the necessitarian characteristically claims, the same as the influence of 'physical' causes upon their effects. His strategy is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the necessitarian view. Stewart, in contrast with both Gregory and Reid, appears not to think that the arguments of the necessitarian merit serious examination. He betrays something of Beattie's impatience with the idea that there is a substantive issue to be discussed in connection with the operations of the will. His principal discussion of liberty and necessity is to be found in an Appendix to *The Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man*. Stewart states that the *only* question which can be 'philosophically stated' on the subject of the will is whether or not 'the evidence of consciousness' is in favour of the scheme of free will or of the scheme of necessity. Stewart could not be regarded as a philosopher unaware of the explanatory scope of science, and

of the science of the mind in particular. We see, therefore, that at the end of the 'long' eighteenth century described in this book, it is not by any means obvious to all that there is a problem combining belief in the freedom of the will with a serious concern with the development of a science of the human mind. In a brief Postscript I show that an 'experimental' debate between libertarians and necessitarians continues throughout the nineteenth century, and suggest that it is only in the early twentieth century that the terms of the free will debate change significantly.

The Lockean turn of eighteenth-century British philosophy thus failed to produce consensus as to the nature of the influence of motives upon the will. Libertarians and necessitarians were just as far apart at the end of the century as Bramhall and Hobbes had been 150 years earlier. One reason for this is that underlying general consensus as to the importance of experience to philosophy was profound disagreement about what exactly it meant, in Hume's phrase, 'to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects'. On one side of this question were associationists like Hume, Hartley, Tucker, and Priestley; on the other were 'faculty psychologists' such as Kames, Beattie, Reid, and Stewart. It is not quite true to say that every associationist was a necessitarian, and every faculty psychologist was a libertarian. Nor is it true to say that every necessitarian was an associationist, and every libertarian a faculty psychologist. Nevertheless, it does seem to be true that, in the eighteenth century, and perhaps in the nineteenth century as well, one's stance with regard to the will and its freedom was to a significant extent shaped by one's understanding of what an empirical science of the mind should look like. Associationists tended to be necessitarians because the determination of choice by motives fits with the picture of the mind as a repetition-driven machine. Faculty psychologists tended to be libertarians because the autonomy of the will, its independence from the understanding, follows naturally from a view of the mind as a set of distinct and mutually irreducible functions or processes. It is a striking fact that both schools claim Locke's paternity for their version of the application of experimentalism to the mind. Locke invented the game, but left the rules so vague that it was never clear how the result was to be determined.