

THE FALL OF THE *MIND* ARGUMENT AND SOME LESSONS ABOUT FREEDOM

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Libertarians believe that freedom exists but is incompatible with determinism, and so are committed to the compatibility of freedom and *indeterminism*. Perhaps the most pressing objection to libertarianism is the so-called *Mind* argument for the incompatibility of freedom and *indeterminism*. This paper presents a new criticism of the *Mind* argument that is at once decisive and instructive. After some preliminaries, we introduce a plausible principle (γ) that places a requirement on one's having a choice about an event whose causal history includes only other *events*. We then argue for these three claims:

- The *Mind* argument presupposes that γ is true, a crucial point neglected by previous studies of the *Mind* argument.
- If γ is true, then (i) the *Mind* argument fails and (ii) the sole beneficiaries of this failure are *nonreductive* libertarians, libertarians who hold that *agents themselves* can contribute causally to events.
- If γ is false, then (a) the *Mind* argument fails and (b) the sole beneficiaries of this failure are *reductive* libertarians, libertarians who hold that—speaking strictly and literally—only *events* can contribute causally to events.

In short, we will argue that, depending on γ 's truth-value, the *Mind* argument fails in such a way that one or the other of the two main species of libertarianism is the best approach to the metaphysics of freedom.

While our arguments for the three claims listed above constitute the heart of our project, we have another important goal in the sequel: We aim to build a case for the truth of γ , and so for nonreductive libertarianism. We make this case by emphasizing γ 's *prima facie* plausibility, and by defending it from the best objections that have been brought to our attention. We thus hope that our argument from γ to nonreductive libertarianism, coupled with our defense of the former, will strike many as a strong case for the latter.

Some terminology and assumptions: Reductivism is the view that only *events* can contribute causally—or, be causally relevant—to an event. Nonreductivism, on the other hand, is the view that *agents themselves*—in addition to “agent-involving” events—can contribute causally to events, can themselves figure in an event's causal history. Nonreductive libertarianism is the conjunction of nonreductivism and libertarianism,¹ while reductive libertarianism combines libertarianism with reductivism.² Reductive

¹ Proponents of this view include Roderick Chisholm, “Human Freedom and the Self,” reprinted in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Timothy O'Connor, *Persons and Causes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Richard Taylor, *Action and Purpose* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966).

² Proponents of this view include Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1981); Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (New York:

compatibilism, naturally enough, is the conjunction of reductivism and compatibilism (i.e., the view that freedom is compatible with determinism),³ and nonreductive compatibilism combines compatibilism with nonreductivism.⁴ These are the four main views of those who think that metaphysical freedom exists.⁵

For the sake of readability, we use the term ‘event’ quite broadly so that it applies to *any* nonsubstance plausibly thought capable of standing in the *causal contribution* relation. On our usage, then, ‘event’ applies not only to *changes*, but also to *processes*, *states*, and so on.⁶

Finally, we assume throughout this paper that some human agents are free. More fully, we assume that some human agent is such that there is an *earliest* or *first* event about which he had a choice.⁷ This assumption—the Freedom Assumption—can be put more precisely as follows:

Some human agent, *S*, is such that there is an event, *e*, such that *S* had a choice about *e* but did not have a choice about any event prior to *e*.⁸

Oxford University Press, 1996); and Laura Ekstrom, *Free Will: A Philosophical Study* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000).

³ Proponents of this view include Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”; and Gary Watson, “Free Agency”. Both of these papers are reprinted in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

⁴ Though certainly the least popular of the four views countenanced here, nonreductive compatibilism is not an empty niche. See, e.g., Ned Markosian’s “A Compatibilist Version of the Theory of Agent Causation” (*Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 80 [1999]: 257-77) and “Agent Causation as the Solution to All the Compatibilist’s Problems” (unpublished).

⁵ For prominent arguments against the existence of freedom, see (e.g.) Richard Double’s *The Non-Reality of Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) and *Metaphilosophy and Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Derk Pereboom’s *Living without Free Will* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Saul Smilansky’s *Free Will and Illusion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000).

⁶ We thank an anonymous referee for helpful comments that led us to clarify what we here mean by ‘event’.

Incidentally, this broad use of ‘event’ is by no means idiosyncratic. Our usage is, e.g., consonant with David Lewis’s use of ‘event’ in his “Events” (contained in volume II of Lewis’s *Philosophical Papers* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1986]).

⁷ See van Inwagen (1983, pp. 67-8 and note 31, pp. 233-4) for the relevant understanding of “having a choice about” an event—or, more generally, a true proposition. Roughly, to have a choice about a truth, *p*, is to have it within one’s power to ensure that *p* is false, to be able to act in such a way that *p* would be false were one to so act. Cf. Alicia Finch and Ted Warfield, “The Mind Argument and Libertarianism,” *Mind* 127 (July 1998): 516.

⁸ Notably, all the arguments in which we use the Freedom Assumption would “go through” on a variety of slightly weaker assumptions—e.g., the assumption that someone is such that there’s a set of events, *E*, such that she had a choice about each of *E*’s members but not about any prior events. We employ the Freedom Assumption mainly for the sake of simplicity and readability.

One reader worried that the Freedom Assumption might conflict with the plausible view that human beings gradually acquire capacities required to have a choice about events. But this worry is a wholly general one stemming from the perplexing philosophical problem of vagueness, not from the Freedom Assumption *per se*. We are confident that any particular theory of

We take it that most parties to the current debate about the metaphysics of freedom accept this assumption, and so we reckon it quite uncontroversial (not to mention eminently plausible regardless of the contingent fact that it's widely accepted).

A brief overview of the paper: In §I, we introduce γ , and provide some support for it. We then explain the two strongest versions of the *Mind* argument, those developed by Peter van Inwagen and Dana Nelkin. Here, we uncover a crucial fact overlooked by previous discussions of these arguments—viz., both presuppose that γ is true. Now, while van Inwagen's *Mind* argument is generally recognized to fail, Nelkin's more recent version has not yet faced decisive criticism. In §§II-III, we develop our decisive and instructive objection to Nelkin's *Mind* argument. Finally, in §IV we defend γ against the best objections that have been brought to our attention, thus bolstering a γ -based case for nonreductive libertarianism.

I. γ AND THE *MIND* ARGUMENT EXPLAINED

We begin with an example to introduce, and generate *prima facie* support for, γ . The example also serves to illustrate the familiar concept of *causal contribution*, which (following others) we leave unanalyzed.

A rock flies toward a window. A bystander, Jack, freely refrains from stopping the rock's flight. The rock then shatters the window. The window's shattering has a causal history: numerous events contributed causally to the window's shattering. Such events include the rock's traveling toward the window on a certain trajectory, and at a certain velocity; Jack's freely refraining from stopping the rock; and, of course, the rock's striking the window. Let it be that—speaking strictly and literally—only *events* were causally relevant to the shattering: by stipulation, no *non-events* contributed causally to the shattering. Now, suppose that another person, Jill, did not have a choice about *any* of the events in the shattering's causal history. Our intuitive reaction to that last piece of information—one we invite readers to share—is that Jill *also* lacked a choice about the shattering itself. “In virtue of *what*,” we want to ask, “could Jill have had a choice about the shattering, seeing as how she did not have a choice about *anything* causally relevant to it?” We are now ready to meet γ :

(γ) Suppose an event, e , has only *events* in its causal history. Then an agent, S , has a choice about e only if there is an event in e 's causal history about which S has a choice (contrapositively: Then if S did not have a choice about anything in e 's causal history, then S did not have a choice about e).

We note two important facts about γ . First, γ nicely explains our intuition, concerning the Jack & Jill Example, that Jill did not have a choice about the window's shattering. By stipulation, Jill did not have a choice about anything in the shattering's causal history,

vagueness will allow for a plausible interpretation of the Freedom Assumption. A quick illustration of this point: Supervaluationists would say (roughly) that the Freedom Assumption is super-true (and so true *simpliciter*) because it is true on every admissible precisification of its vague terms; every admissible precisification of the Freedom Assumption locates, so to speak, a sharp cut-off for when a human being is able to have a choice about an event.

which comprised only *events*. Then γ entails that Jill did not have a choice about the shattering, thus predicting and nicely explaining the aforementioned intuition. We submit that reflection on the Jack & Jill Example generates (at least) a fair amount of *prima facie* support for γ .

The second important—and heretofore unnoticed—fact about γ is that it is presupposed by the best versions of the *Mind* argument. We'll bring out this fact by explaining two versions of the *Mind* argument.⁹ We start with Peter van Inwagen's version, then shift to a more recent formulation due to Dana Nelkin. (For aforementioned reasons, we'll focus mainly on Nelkin's version in subsequent sections, though everything we say there applies *mutatis mutandis* to van Inwagen's version of the *Mind* argument.)

We begin with the point that all recent presentations of the *Mind* argument share the following initial stage:¹⁰ Consider a world in which agents' actions are indeterministic causal consequences of prior mental states (e.g., beliefs, desires, intentions, and so on). Suppose an inhabitant of this world, *S*, acts on some occasion. Let 'R' stand for the action performed by *S*, and let 'DB' stand for the mental state(s) causally relevant to R, and suppose R is an indeterministic causal consequence of DB. According to the *Mind* argument's proponent, these suppositions make it plausible that (i) no one, including *S*, had a choice about the fact that R followed DB. Further, the proponent of the argument maintains that (ii) no one, including *S*, had a choice about the fact that DB occurred. And here is the standard justification offered for (ii), which was originally presented by van Inwagen and is simply echoed by every other recent presentation of the *Mind* argument:¹¹

While we may sometimes have a choice about the inner states that precede our acts, very often we don't. For example, it is unlikely that [*S*] had any choice about whether DB occurred; *and even if he did, this could only be because he had a choice about some earlier states of affairs of which DB was a consequence* [our emphasis]; if so, the questions we are asking about DB could be asked about those earlier states of affairs. If someone maintained that *those* states of affairs, too, were states of affairs about which [*S*] had a choice, we could point out that they resulted from still earlier states of affairs, and this process could, in principle, be carried on till we reached [*S*'s] 'initial state' about which he certainly had no choice. So let us assume at the outset that [*S*] had no choice about whether DB

⁹ We should note that the label 'the *Mind* argument' is somewhat misleading. There are really different kinds—and different versions of these respective kinds—of *Mind* arguments. Van Inwagen (1983, pp. 126-150), for example, distinguishes three strands of the *Mind* argument. In what follows, we discuss what van Inwagen calls 'the third strand'. The distinctions among these strands noted, we will for stylistic reasons continue to speak of "the" *Mind* argument. For the record, we believe our arguments apply *mutatis mutandis* to the other two strands of the *Mind* argument distinguished by van Inwagen.

¹⁰ See, e.g., van Inwagen (1983); Finch and Warfield (1998); Dana Nelkin, "The Consequence Argument and the *Mind* Argument," *Analysis* 61 (April 2001): 107-115; and Randolph Clarke, *Libertarian Accounts of Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹¹ See, e.g., Finch and Warfield (1998), Nelkin (2001), and Clarke (2003).

occurred, for we should sooner or later have to make an assumption that would have the same philosophical consequences.¹²

Consider the sentence we emphasized with italics. The claim there is that *S* could have had a choice about DB—a state whose causal history should be understood to comprise only other *events*—only if *S* had a choice about some event causally relevant to DB. Pretty clearly, this claim is just a less regimented statement of γ . If asked for a more formal rendering of the thought expressed by the claim in question, to what—besides γ —could the *Mind* argument’s proponent possibly appeal? By our lights, γ is a suitably regimented and generalized statement of the italicized claim in question, which again is a key part of the standard justification for (ii). Hence, the *Mind* argument presupposes γ .

(Incidentally, we think the fact that the *Mind* argument presupposes γ also contributes to its *prima facie* plausibility. If γ failed to be initially plausible—or at least if it were initially *implausible*—it stands to reason that at least some of the aforementioned philosophers who have discussed the *Mind* argument would have noticed γ ’s role and considered it a potential weakness of the argument.)

We now focus briefly on van Inwagen’s particular formulation of the *Mind* argument. Following van Inwagen, let ‘*Np*’ stand for ‘*p* and no one has, or ever had, any choice about whether *p*’.¹³ Van Inwagen’s version of the *Mind* argument can then be put like this:

- (1) N(DB)
- (2) N(DB \rightarrow R)
- Therefore,
- (3) N(R)

At this juncture, the following question naturally arises: what licenses the inference from (1) and (2) to (3)? The answer, according to van Inwagen (1983), is the (by now notorious) inference rule, Beta:

Beta: $\{Np \ \& \ N(p \rightarrow q)\}$ implies Nq .

As it turns out, Beta underwrites not only van Inwagen’s formalized version of the *Mind* argument, but also his formalized version of the Consequence argument for the incompatibility of freedom and determinism.¹⁴ Alas, their mutual dependence on Beta undermines van Inwagen’s *Mind* and Consequence arguments. For, when combined with certain obvious truths, Beta entails the following inference principle, which is vulnerable to clear counterexamples:

¹² Van Inwagen (1983, p.146).

¹³ See footnote 5 for the relevant understanding of “having a choice about” a truth, *p*.

¹⁴ See Chapter 3 of van Inwagen (1983).

Agglomeration: $(Np \ \& \ Nq)$ implies $N(p \ \& \ q)$.¹⁵

Thus, were van Inwagen's the strongest version of the *Mind* argument, that argument would not pose much of a threat to libertarianism.

But van Inwagen's is *not* the most promising version of the *Mind* argument. For there is a more recent version due to Dana Nelkin (2001, pp. 112-114) that depends not on the discredited Beta, but only on the following logically weaker principle (note that '□' here means 'it is broadly logically necessary that'):

Beta 2: $\{Np \ \& \ \square(p \rightarrow q)\}$ implies Nq .¹⁶

(Essentially, Beta 2 says that one has no choice about the broadly logical consequences of truths one has no choice about.) Moreover, Nelkin's premises are as plausible as those in van Inwagen's earlier *Mind* argument; here is her version of the argument:

(1*) $N\{DB \ \& \ (DB \rightarrow R)\}$
(2*) $\square\{(DB \ \& \ (DB \rightarrow R)) \rightarrow R\}$
Therefore,
(3*) $N(R)$

(2*) is a tautology, and (3*) follows from (1*) and (2*) by Beta 2. Pretty clearly, (1*) is this argument's weakest link; rejecting it seems to be the only *prima facie* viable escape route for libertarians. As even prominent libertarians concede, though, each of $N(DB)$ and $N(DB \rightarrow R)$ is quite plausible,¹⁷ and the conjunction of these claims seems to constitute a good reason for believing $N\{DB \ \& \ (DB \rightarrow R)\}$. Nelkin puts the point thus:

We have no choice about either DB or $(DB \rightarrow R)$. Further, we cannot think of anything one could do to ensure the falsity of the conjunction of DB and $(DB \rightarrow R)$ itself, while lacking the ability to falsify the first conjunct and the ability to falsify the second conjunct. (2001, p. 113)

Granted, an important upshot of the recent literature is that the general inference principle one may be tempted to appeal to in inferring (1*) from $N(DB)$ and $N(DB \rightarrow R)$ —viz., Agglomeration—is invalid. However, the fact that Agglomeration is invalid does not entail that it is possible for (1*) to be false while $N(DB)$ and $N(DB \rightarrow R)$ are true. We're

¹⁵ See, e.g., McKay and Johnson (1996). Briefly, here is a representative counterexample to Agglomeration. Suppose you freely refrain from tossing a fair coin. Let $p =$ *the coin does not land heads*, and let $q =$ *the coin does not land tails*. We may safely assume that both $N(p)$ and $N(q)$ are true (no one had it within his power to ensure the falsity of p , and the same goes for q). $N(p \ \& \ q)$, though, is false: you, for one, had it within your power to ensure the falsity of $(p \ \& \ q)$.

¹⁶ So far as we know, what we call Beta 2 was introduced by David Widerker in his (1987). In their (1998), Finch and Warfield defend an improved version of the Consequence argument dependent on Beta 2 (which we discuss below), and go on to argue that Beta 2 cannot also be used to revitalize the *Mind* argument. As we are about to see, Nelkin (2001) shows the latter claim to be mistaken.

¹⁷ See, e.g., van Inwagen (1983, pp.146, 149-150); and Finch and Warfield (1998, p.518).

in agreement with Nelkin here: Anyone who accepts $N(DB)$ and $N(DB \rightarrow R)$ should also accept (1*).

Though we concur with Nelkin's reasoning quoted above, we think she has overlooked an even stronger case for (1*). First, note the obvious point that a devotee of the *Mind* argument accepts that (i) no one had a choice about the proposition that *DB caused R*. Note also that (ii) the proposition that *DB caused R* entails the proposition expressed by ' $\{DB \ \& \ (DB \rightarrow R)\}$ '. (Any possible world in which *DB caused R* is also a world in which the proposition expressed by ' $\{DB \ \& \ (DB \rightarrow R)\}$ ' is true.) And from (i), (ii) and Beta 2, it follows that no one had a choice about the proposition expressed by ' $\{DB \ \& \ (DB \rightarrow R)\}$ ', i.e., it follows that (1*) is true. At no point in this argument is there the faintest trace of an appeal to Agglomeration.

So, Nelkin's improved version of the *Mind* argument constitutes a serious challenge to libertarianism. We now turn in §§II-III to the heart of our project, our decisive and instructive objection to this improved version of the *Mind* argument.¹⁸

II. WHAT IF γ IS TRUE?

Here, we argue that γ entails nonreductivism—the view that *agents themselves* (in addition to “agent-involving” events) can be causal contributors—and that this spells trouble for the *Mind* argument. Moreover, the indicated trouble does not also plague the strongest argument for incompatibilism about freedom and determinism.

To begin, recall γ :

(γ) Suppose an event, *e*, has only *events* in its causal history. Then an agent, *S*, has a choice about *e* only if there is an event in *e*'s causal history about which *S* has a choice.

Assume γ for conditional proof. Suppose also, and for *reductio*, that reductivism is true, that—speaking strictly and literally—only *events* can be causal contributors. According to the Freedom Assumption, some human agent, *S*, is such that there is an event, *e*, such that *S* had a choice about *e* but did not have a choice about any event prior to *e*. It follows both that *S* had a choice about *e*, and that *e* had a causal history, *H*.¹⁹ But, by reductivism, *H* comprises only other *events*. And by γ , there is a member of *H*—an event causally relevant to *e*—about which *S* had a choice. This, however, contradicts our assumption

¹⁸ Henceforth, unless we say otherwise, the reader should understand us to be concerned only with Nelkin's improved version of the *Mind* argument.

¹⁹ Presumably, an agent has a choice about an event only if that event has a causal history, is such that something contributed causally to its occurrence. It is crucial to note that this is *not* tantamount to the claim that one has a choice only about *causally produced* events: an event that was not *causally produced* may nevertheless be such that something *contributed causally* to its occurrence. Thus, our assumption here is perfectly consistent with all the main approaches to the metaphysics of human agency, including views labeled ‘noncausalist’. For noncausalists typically countenance events that contribute causally to ones about which an agent has a choice. Proponents of noncausalism include Carl Ginet, *On Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Stewart Goetz, “Libertarian Choice,” *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (1997): pp.195-211.

that *e* is the *earliest* or *first* event about which *S* had a choice; reductivism has thus landed us in contradiction. Hence, if γ is true, then reductivism is false and *agents themselves* can contribute causally—or, be causally relevant—to events. Hence, γ entails nonreductivism.

We can now see why γ 's truth spells trouble for the *Mind* argument. It does so because the *Mind* argument presupposes reductivism. To see this, recall that the *Mind* argument's sample indeterministically caused action, *R*, has only *events* in its causal history (most prominently, *S*'s prior mental state, *DB*). Of course, the *Mind* argument's conclusion—viz., incompatibilism about freedom and indeterminism—is a generalization covering *every* indeterministically caused action. Assuming that the *Mind* argument is valid, then, something prior to its conclusion must rule out the possibility of an indeterministically caused action having a causal history different in kind from *R*'s, a causal history in which some *non-events* figure. Put differently, given that the *Mind* argument is valid, something prior to its conclusion must entail that only *events* can contribute causally to actions. In sum, then, either the *Mind* argument is invalid or it presupposes reductivism. So, assuming (as we should) that the *Mind* argument is valid, one of its key presuppositions is false if γ is true. Accordingly, if γ is true, the *Mind* argument fails.

As we've seen, γ entails nonreductivism. We now argue that this benefits only nonreductive *libertarians*. Why think *that*? For the simple reason that, unlike the *Mind* argument, (what we deem) the best argument for incompatibilism about freedom and determinism *does not* presuppose reductivism. The argument we have in mind here is the recent version of the Consequence argument due to Alicia Finch and Ted Warfield (1998), inspired of course by van Inwagen's (1983) version of the Consequence argument. Like Nelkin's *Mind* argument, Finch and Warfield's Consequence argument depends not on Beta, but only on Beta 2. This improved version of the Consequence argument runs as follows (see Finch and Warfield 1998, pp.521-22). Let *F* be any truth, *P* a proposition describing the complete state of the world at some time in the remote past, and *L* a conjunction of the laws of nature. Assume determinism for conditional proof. Then:

$$(1^{**}) \square \{(P \ \& \ L) \rightarrow F\}$$

Moreover, it is quite plausible that no one has a choice about the conjunction of *P* and *L* (what Finch and Warfield call the "broad past"):

$$(2^{**}) N(P \ \& \ L)$$

By Beta 2, (1^{**}) and (2^{**}) entail that no one has a choice about any fact:

$$(3^{**}) N(F).$$

And from here, we can quickly generalize to the conclusion that if determinism is true, then no one is free.

Two points should be emphasized here. First, many (including us!) find this version of the Consequence argument cogent. Second, as we noted above, this version of

the Consequence argument is perfectly consistent with γ and its entailing nonreductivism. This is because the Consequence argument does not presuppose reductivism; the argument is obviously and admirably *neutral* vis-à-vis the reductivism-nonreductivism debate. In short, then, if γ is true, then the *Mind* argument fails in such a way that the Consequence argument is undisturbed.

We are also now in a position to make a significant point about the relation between the Consequence and *Mind* arguments. Much recent work on these arguments assumes that *if* the arguments depend on a common Beta-style inference principle, then the arguments stand or fall together.²⁰ But this common thought is mistaken. As we've seen, the *Mind* argument is burdened by the assumption of reductivism,²¹ whereas the Consequence argument is neutral about the reductivism-nonreductivism debate. We speculate that widespread acceptance of reductivism explains previous failure to recognize that the *Mind* argument depends on stronger assumptions than does the Consequence argument.

This completes our argument from the supposition that γ is true. In the next section, we complete our critical evaluation of the *Mind* argument by arguing for the following claim: if γ is false, then (i) the standard justification for a certain premise of the *Mind* argument is undermined, and (moreover) there is good reason to think that the premise in question is false; (ii) *nonreductivism* is untenable; and (iii) the Consequence argument again remains intact.

III. WHAT IF γ IS FALSE?

Well, suppose γ is false. Then it is possible that an agent, *S*, has a choice about an event, *e*, the causal history of which includes only events, where *S* does not have a choice about any of the events in *e*'s causal history. We now argue that each of claims (i)-(iii) just listed follows from this supposition. To begin, recall (1*) of the *Mind* argument:

$$(1^*) N\{DB \ \& \ (DB \rightarrow R)\}$$

Obviously, one's having a choice about *either* *DB* *or* $(DB \rightarrow R)$ suffices for one's having a choice about $\{DB \ \& \ (DB \rightarrow R)\}$. Proponents of the *Mind* argument, then, should provide some reason to believe $N(DB)$. And as we pointed out in §I, the standard justification offered for $N(DB)$ involves an appeal to γ . Since we are presently supposing that γ is false, it immediately follows that the standard justification for $N(DB)$ is undermined, thus undermining the standard justification for (1*).

²⁰ See, e.g., Finch and Warfield (1998, pp. 519-520) and Nelkin (2001, p. 112).

²¹ We hasten to add that Finch and Warfield seem to display some awareness of this point when they say,

Introducing agent causation into the picture at this point in the discussion would *not* serve to show how $[N(DB \rightarrow R)]$ could be false. Rather, the successful introduction and defense of agent causation would show that the *Mind* argument is not relevant to human freedom. (1998, p. 519)

Someone might reply by reminding us of this remark of van Inwagen's quoted earlier in §I:

So let us assume at the outset that [*S*] had no choice about whether DB occurred, for we should sooner or later have to make an assumption that would have the same philosophical consequences.

One might go on to use this remark in an attempt to argue that γ is not an essential part of the justification of N(DB), and so, the standard justification of (1*) is not, *pace* our contention, undermined if γ is false.

This reply, though instructive, is ultimately mistaken. At *best*, it shows that γ need not be offered in direct support of the particular proposition that *S* had no choice about DB. The reply fails to show, however, that γ does not play a critical role in justifying van Inwagen's claim that it's philosophically harmless to assume *S* had no choice about DB. Clearly, γ does play such a role. To see this, we remind the reader of what precedes van Inwagen's remark about why it's acceptable to assume that *S* had no choice about DB:

For example, it is unlikely that [*S*] had any choice about whether DB occurred; *and even if he did, this could only be because he had a choice about some earlier states of affairs of which DB was a consequence* [our emphasis]; if so, the questions we are asking about DB could be asked about those earlier states of affairs. If someone maintained that *those* states of affairs, too, were states of affairs about which [*S*] had a choice, we could point out that they resulted from still earlier states of affairs, and this process could, in principle, be carried on till we reached [*S*'s] 'initial state' about which he certainly had no choice.

Observe that van Inwagen's reasoning to the "philosophical innocence" of assuming that *S* had no choice about DB employs the italicized claim, which (as we've said) is simply a less regimented statement of γ . In short, γ is what licenses van Inwagen's remark about the acceptability of assuming that *S* had no choice about DB. A proponent of the *Mind* argument, then, is entitled to assume that *S* had no choice about DB only if he antecedently assumes γ . Otherwise, there are no grounds for believing the claim that we could, in principle, "reason our way back" to mental states about which *S* plausibly lacked a choice.

So, we stand by our claim that the acceptability of N(DB) relies upon the truth of γ . Accordingly, we stand by our claim that the falsity of γ undermines the standard justification for (1*). But there remains a more serious concern about (1*): given the falsity of γ , not only does (1*) fail to be well supported, but there is also good reason to believe that it is false. To begin to see this, recall that given γ 's falsity, the following is possible: there is an event, *e*, the causal history of which includes only events; there is an agent, *S*, who has a choice about *e*; but *S* didn't have a choice about any event in *e*'s causal history. For the sake of readability, we will call events like the one just described, 'non- γ events'. We now argue that, assuming there could be non- γ events, there is good reason to deny (1*).

For the sake of argument, let the proponent of the *Mind* argument choose DB in such a way that N(DB) is acceptable. Still, as we've just argued, one must rely on γ in so

choosing DB, in order to ensure that one can “reason one’s way back” to some of *S*’s mental states about which *S* plausibly lacked a choice. For the sake of concreteness, let us suppose there to be a mental state, ϕ , subsequent to DB but prior to R—e.g., *S*’s intending to R. Now, the proponent of the *Mind* argument thinks we can safely ignore ϕ —and any other intermediate mental event—because it is a consequence of DB and *S* could have had a choice about it only if he had a choice about his earlier state, DB. But again this reasoning presupposes γ , which we are presently supposing to be *false*. We cannot then safely ignore ϕ —at least not for the reason given by the proponent of the *Mind* argument. In other words, since we are supposing γ to be false, for all we know, ϕ could be a non- γ event.

More importantly, ϕ (again, *S*’s intending to R) looks to be as good a candidate as there could possibly be for being a non- γ event: *If* there could be such events, certainly ϕ could be one. But if *S* did have a choice about ϕ , then *S* would also have had a choice about *DB*’s causing *R*, thereby falsifying ‘ $N(DB \rightarrow R)$ ’ and (1*) as well. Moreover, it is very plausible to believe (especially on the supposition that R is an action of *S*’s) that there would be an event such as ϕ intermediate between DB and R. What follows is that given the falsity of γ , it is very plausible to think that there would be a non- γ event about which *S* had a choice such that *S*’s having a choice about that event renders (1*) false.²²

At this point, a proponent of the *Mind* argument might rightly point out that an event such as ϕ would need to be an *indeterministic* causal consequence of DB in order to be of use to a libertarian. We may then be invited to carefully reflect on the indeterministic causal connection between DB and ϕ , which amounts to reflecting on the proposition that ϕ could have failed to occur even if the laws of nature and the past just prior to ϕ (which would include DB) had been exactly the same. After reflecting on that proposition, we may then be invited to conclude that *S* could not have had a choice about ϕ . In reply, we record our failure to feel the force of this second invitation given the background supposition that γ is false. Perhaps we can bring out this failure of ours by considering our reactions to some other cognitive invitations.

First, suppose we are invited to imagine that we believe that an agent, *S*, had a choice about a non- γ event, say *e*. Second, suppose we are invited to imagine coming to learn that *e* was an *indeterministic* causal consequence of the events in *e*’s causal history—i.e., we are invited to imagine coming to learn that it’s possible for the laws of nature and *e*’s causal history to have been exactly as they were and yet for *e* to not occur. Third, suppose we are then invited to consider how this new piece of information (and it alone) bears on our belief that *S* had a choice about *e*. After careful reflection, we are inclined to say that this new piece of information (all by itself) has no bearing on the acceptability of our belief that *S* had a choice about *e*. We do not, for instance, see any reason for thinking that coming to learn that *e* was indeterministically caused would

²² Perhaps you think we’ve taken an unnecessarily circuitous route here. Perhaps you think that once we suppose γ to be false, we can immediately see without considering an event such as ϕ that *DB*’s causing *R* (and perhaps R itself) is an eminently plausible candidate for being a non- γ event. We are quite happy if you do think this since you will then agree with us about γ ’s falsity implying the falsity of (1*). However, we think our admittedly less direct route is more satisfying. It seems to us more dialectically appropriate and it offers an explanation for how *DB*’s causing *R* could manage to be a non- γ event.

provide us a reason for doubting our initial belief. After all, we already believe that *S* (somehow) had a choice about *e* without having a choice about anything that causally contributed to *e*. Why should merely learning that the causal contributors to *e*—each of which is an event *S* had no choice about—indeterministically contributed to *e*'s occurrence provide us a reason for doubting that *S* did in fact have a choice about *e*? Note well: we are not saying that there is *nothing* we could learn that would constitute a reason for doubting our initial belief. If we were to learn, for instance, that *e* was the result of nefarious manipulation or some form of coercion, we would have a reason for doubting that *S* had a choice about *e*. But supposing *e* to be indeterministically caused does not require supposing it to be caused in such deviant ways. We cannot, obviously, speak for the general reader. All we can do is report our own intuitions (as we have done) about the lately discussed suppositions, invite you to carefully consider them, and hope that you too will conclude that given the falsity of γ , the mere appeal to ϕ 's having been indeterministically caused does not constitute a good reason to think *S* could not have had a choice about ϕ .

So, the falsity of γ not only undermines the standard justification for (1*), but also provides good reason to deny it. The failure of the *Mind* argument is logically overdetermined by the supposition that γ is false. We now turn to the second advertised consequence of γ 's falsity: the untenability of nonreductivism.

We grant the fairly widespread view that an *agent's* being nonderivatively causally relevant to an event is somewhat mysterious, obscure or opaque in a way that an *event's* being so causally relevant is not. We are thus willing to grant that nonreductivism should be embraced only if there are *good reasons* to do so. Earlier, we argued that if γ is true, then there is indeed good reason to accept nonreductivism. We are now, however, supposing that γ is false, that it is possible for there to be non- γ events. It follows from this supposition that an agent can have a choice about an event even though that agent *does not* make a non-derivative causal contribution to the event. (Remember that non- γ events have only events as causal contributors.) Given the falsity of γ , then, having a choice about an event does not require non-derivative agent causal contribution. But again, nonreductivism should not be accepted in the absence of good reasons to do so. And outside of nonreductivism being required for our having a choice about an event—and why that's so—we can think of no good reason to accept it. For this reason, we conclude that if γ is false, then nonreductivism is untenable.

Now for the third and final consequence of the falsity of γ : the Consequence argument retains its probative force. To begin to see this, note that the falsity of γ provides no reason to doubt the Consequence argument's main premise, (2**)—N(P&L). There is no reason to doubt the independently plausible claim that no one has a choice about distant past events such as the Big Bang *simply because* γ is false. Likewise, the falsity of γ provides no reason to doubt the independently plausible claim that no one has a choice about the laws of nature.²³ Finally, γ 's falsity provides no reason to doubt the

²³ Recall our earlier discussion of newly acquired information that would constitute a reason to doubt our belief that *S* had a choice about *e*. We argued there that merely coming to learn that *e* was indeterministically caused would not constitute such a reason. However, we also pointed out that there may very well be some information we could acquire that would constitute a reason to doubt our belief—we considered there the possibility of coming to learn that *e* was the

validity of the highly plausible Beta 2. Informally, Beta 2 says, “one has no choice about the logical consequences of those truths one has no choice about.”²⁴ But it is consistent with this that one can have a choice about an event whose causal history is exhausted by events none of which one has a choice about, which is what γ informally says. We can see this point a little more formally by considering the following simplified example. Suppose e is an event and that the only causal contributors to e are the events d and f . Where x is an event, let ‘ Ox ’ abbreviate ‘ x occurs’. Consider the following argument:

A: $N(Od \ \& \ Of)$; $\square \{(Od \ \& \ Of) \rightarrow Oe\}$; Therefore, $N(Oe)$

Suppose we believe that A is valid on the grounds that Beta 2 is a valid inference rule. We could also consistently believe that an agent has a choice about e even though that agent has no choice about d and no choice about f , which of course implies that γ is false. The falsity of γ , then, does not call Beta 2 into question. So, even if γ were false, the Consequence argument would remain unscathed.

This section’s argument and our case against Nelkin’s improved *Mind* argument are now complete. Far from being detrimental to libertarianism, reflection on the *Mind* argument actually serves to advance the libertarian front.

We conclude by turning to our somewhat more tentative aim of strengthening the γ -based case for nonreductive libertarianism.

IV. DEFENDING γ

Let us begin by noting that the arguments of §§II-III provide a novel entry point into the debate between reductive and non-reductive libertarians. For if the arguments of those sections are sound, then the intramural dispute between nonreductive and reductive libertarians turns on γ ’s truth-value. In particular, a counterexample to γ will serve to establish reductive libertarianism. Obviously, the inability to provide a clear counterexample to γ does not *prove* that it is true; however, the lack of clear counterexamples should increase its initial plausibility, thereby strengthening the case for nonreductive libertarianism. The balance of this paper is devoted to defending γ against some alleged counterexamples.

*First Example:*²⁵

Suppose at t_1 , Ridley freely remains seated. At t_2 , a baseball is shot toward a bottle, where this is a random occurrence, a matter of “ground-level chance.” Suppose also that if Ridley had at t_1 stood, the indicated baseball would not have been shot toward

result of nefarious manipulation. We also think coming to learn that the distant past and the laws of nature entailed e would provide us good reason to doubt. For that new piece of information would entail the truth of ‘ $\square((P \ \& \ L) \rightarrow e \text{ occurs})$ ’; $N(P \ \& \ L)$ is antecedently highly plausible; Beta 2 seems to us nearly unquestionable; and we would be in a position to validly infer that S did not have a choice about e from the conjunction of these claims.

²⁴ Finch and Warfield (1998, p.522).

²⁵ Thanks to John Hawthorne and Hud Hudson for discussion of this kind of putative counterexample to γ .

the bottle at t_2 . (Suppose Ridley's friend Brown would have pressed a button thus disarming the device that randomly shoots baseballs if Ridley had stood.) Finally, suppose the baseball shatters the bottle at t_3 .

Now, Ridley has no choice about any event in the causal history of the bottle's shattering since the baseball's being shot toward the bottle at t_2 is a random occurrence. Moreover, there is an unrealized chain of events the realization of which would have prevented the bottle shattering, viz., that chain of events that would have resulted if Ridley had refrained from sitting at t_1 . Furthermore, Ridley was able to initiate that chain of events since he was free to stand at t_1 . And so, Ridley had a choice about the shattering of the bottle at t_3 in spite of the fact that he had no choice about any event in the causal history of the shattering. Hence, γ is false.

Reply:

A crucial claim in the example is that Ridley had a choice about the shattering *because* he was able to initiate a chain of events that would have prevented the bottle from shattering. But Ridley's being able to initiate a sequence of events that would have prevented the shattering implies that he was also able to initiate a sequence of events that would have prevented the baseball from being shot toward the bottle. The baseball's having been shot toward the bottle, however, was clearly causally relevant to the shattering. It follows that Ridley did have a choice about something in the causal history of the bottle shattering and so, the alleged counterexample fails.

One might try to get around this reply by modifying the first example in such a way that Ridley didn't have a choice about events prior to the shattering. Someone might suggest a modification along the following lines.

Second Example:

Suppose a baseball is shot toward a bottle as described in the first example. Also suppose Ridley was stationed too far from the chain of events to intervene by, say, snatching the baseball mid-trajectory or grabbing the bottle before it was shattered. But suppose Ridley was within reach of a button the depression of which would have prevented the shattering in the following peculiar but perfectly coherent way: If the button had been depressed *just as* the baseball struck the bottle, then the bottle would have been instantaneously endowed with the power to resist the force of the strike; the bottle would have "stiffened up" so to speak and wouldn't have shattered when struck. Depressing the button at any other time, however, would have done nothing to protect the bottle. In fact, Ridley doesn't press the button; having undergone relevant training, though, he was able to depress it at just the right time.

Ridley had no choice about any event in the causal history of the bottle's shattering. For, as is stipulated, he wasn't able to grab the baseball and he wasn't able to grab the bottle, and the like. So, he wasn't able to initiate a chain of events that would have prevented the baseball from being shot toward the bottle. ("But he can depress the button," you say. Yes, but having depressed the button before or after the baseball struck the bottle would have done nothing to protect the bottle.) Now, there's an unrealized chain of events that the bottle would have survived, viz., that chain of events that would have resulted if Ridley had depressed the button at just the right time. Furthermore, by hypothesis, Ridley was able to so depress the button and initiate this chain of events. So,

Ridley had a choice about the bottle's shattering in spite of the fact that he had no choice about any event in the causal history of the shattering. Hence, γ is false.

Reply:

The proponent of the second example is thinking along these lines: Ridley was able to do something about the shattering *only* at the moment at which the baseball struck the bottle; but by then, every event in the causal history of the shattering had occurred and he had no choice about any of those events.

We think the objector overlooks a pertinent event about which Ridley clearly had a choice. In the example, Ridley was able (by virtue of being able to depress the button at just the right time) to prevent the shattering of the bottle. Ridley, though, refrains from taking this action. It follows that Ridley *freely* refrains from depressing the button, that Ridley had a choice about refraining from depressing the button. Clearly, though, Ridley's refraining from depressing the button contributes causally to the shattering. Hence, Ridley did have a choice about something causally relevant to the shattering. The alleged counterexample fails.

Our suspicion is that other similar modifications of the first example will suffer from the same flaw as does the second example. In conversation, some have attempted to disabuse us of this suspicion with the following sort of example; it will be the final alleged counterexample we consider.

*Third Example.*²⁶

Suppose Ridley's decision to freely remain seated was causally overdetermined by both *Ridley* and some combination of his beliefs and desires. More precisely, suppose the causal history of Ridley's decision can be partitioned into two distinct non-overlapping but individually causally sufficient sub-histories. One of these causal sub-histories, call it 'the event-causal history', includes only events; it includes for instance, Ridley's beliefs, desires, and presumably other events, as well. The other causal sub-history includes non-derivatively Ridley himself, i.e., it includes Ridley himself as a non-derivative causal contributor. Plausibly, Ridley had a choice about his decision to remain seated since *he* non-derivatively causally contributed to that decision. However, (we can safely stipulate) that Ridley had no choice about any of the events in the event-causal history of his decision. (Perhaps Ridley's beliefs and desires are items in his initial complement of mental states, etc.) So, Ridley had a choice about his decision to remain seated *even though* he had no choice about any *event* in the causal history of that decision. Hence, γ is false.

Reply:

The first thing to note about this alleged counterexample is that it is obviously of no use to someone attempting to resist nonreductive libertarianism. This is because, as the case is described, Ridley strictly and literally figures in the causal history of his decision. Also, for this reason, the above case is not a counterexample to γ . For recall that γ is restricted to events the causal histories of which include *only other events*.

²⁶ This objection was inspired by conversation with Jeff Green.

We can think of no other putative counterexamples that differ significantly from those considered above.²⁷ This could of course be a failure of imagination on our part. At any rate, we leave it as a challenge for the interested reader to construct her own potential counterexample that cannot be handled as we've handled those discussed above.

In light of the results of this section, it seems to us that the *prima facie* case for γ has strengthened. Accordingly, it seems to us that the main argument of §II constitutes a *prima facie* strong case for nonreductive libertarianism. We hasten to remind the reader, however, that regardless of γ 's truth-value—and so regardless of how the dispute between reductive and nonreductive libertarians is to be adjudicated—the *Mind* argument (in its strongest form) fails, and does so in a way that has interesting ramifications for the metaphysics of freedom.²⁸

²⁷ Each alleged counterexample we have received in conversation with others is saliently similar to one of the above cases. Indeed, these cases are based on our best understanding of those alleged counterexamples.

²⁸ We are grateful to the following people for comments on and/or discussion of our paper: John Bishop, Thad Botham, Randolph Clarke, Chris Green, Jeff Green, John Hawthorne, Hud Hudson, Eddy Nahmias, Dana Nelkin, Michael Rea, Daniel Speak, Kevin Timpe, Neil Tognazzini, Peter van Inwagen, Ted Warfield, and some anonymous referees.