

Of One's Own Free Will

DENNIS W. STAMPE

The University of Wisconsin-Madison
and

MARTHA I. GIBSON

Georgia State University

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Looking down the barrel of a gun, you are not merely willing to surrender your wallet, you may do it quite *willingly*, offering the gunman your watch for good measure. This is not to say that you gave him your wallet of your own free will. That requires more than willingness to comply. Nor is it enough that what you did was the rational thing to do. Even then, you did not do it of your own free will. What more is required?

Locke describes a man who finds himself in a room with someone he has longed to see, and quite *willingly* stays there in his company. But, unknown to him, the door is locked, so he is not free to leave in any case; he could not do otherwise than stay.¹ So one may act willingly and in accordance with one's will or preference though one is not free to, and could not, do otherwise. There are external barriers, like locked doors, to one's doing what one would do, to one's doing one's own will. But such barriers do not enclose one's will, and what they restrict is not the capacity of the will itself—the capacity that might be called the freedom of the will. But are there no internal barriers to one's doing one's own will, that do constrain this freedom of one's will? Are there no internal impediments for the will, no factors that delimit its own capacities, as distinguished from our consequent capacity to do what we will?

To focus upon such internal factors, and upon the will and its own freedom, let us imagine the door of Locke's room *unlocked* but the person within to suffer from agoraphobia. This person *never* goes out, never would, no matter what inducements might be offered. She too has a chance to meet a treasured old friend, but this would require her to venture out into the town. Now, she could go out, if she could bring herself to do so, but she can-

¹ *Essay*, II, xxi, §10. (The inference Locke draws from this is that "[T]here may be will, there may be volition, where there is no liberty," loc. cit., §8.)

not bring herself to do so. Her fears make it impossible for her to make the decision to go out, no matter how badly she might want to see her old friend. Are we to say that it is of her own free will that she lets the opportunity pass by? Or that she stays in, day after day, of her own free will? Presumably not. It is not of her own free will that she spends her life in the confines of her room.

We want a clear view of what that inner capacity or character of the will might be. Our concept of this “freedom”, however, seems to work beneath the linguistic surface, and access to it through the medium of ordinary language is only indirect. We never say such a thing as that this person’s “will is free”, whereas that person’s is not free: “free will” is a mere fixed phrase. Our best access from linguistic intuition to the freedom of the will is perhaps through the adverbial phrase “of one’s own free will” and its variants. While the semantic structure of this phrase is anything but straightforward, one does have fairly robust intuitions about when it does and when it does not apply.²

The predicate “done of one’s own free will” presumably characterizes the causal origin of an action (much as does “done of a guilty conscience”). Now “the will” refers to the intention-forming powers of the mind, or traditionally, “the power of choice”. So if an action is done of the agent’s own free will, (1) it is presumably done *because of*, as the result of, a “choice” or “decision,” in a minimal sense of those words,³ that the agent made. And (2) we may construe the adjective “free” as referring to a certain state or

² Gary Watson (“Free Action and Free Will”, *Mind*, Vol. XCVI, April 1987, p. 161) thinks it doubtful whether analyzing such “ordinary locutions” as this will be of any use. He says “We speak of ‘acting of one’s own free will’ in connection with coercion”, as when a draftee shows up for induction only to avoid jail, where it “is not that the person has no options, but that certain options are made prohibitively expensive. But we do not speak of restrictions on free will when such costs are consequences of natural, rather than human, forces. It is doubtful that the source of the cost should matter to the question of free will.” But if traveling the shorter route is made prohibitively difficult by a natural force—a flood that has washed out a bridge—so that I have to take a much longer route to my destination, I am not taking that longer route of my own free will. The *source* of the prohibitive cost has nothing to do with it. Even if this is doubted, it should not matter. For any implication that the source of the cost is some human machination can simply be peeled away as irrelevant to our purpose. What matters is that there is a single mental condition, regarding one’s decision-making capacities, which condition one might be in as a result of forces of various kinds; and even if by some convention of language the condition were ascribed by the phrase “of one’s own free will” only when the forces in question were human, the identity of that condition would still be accessible through the analysis of the phrase.

³ We shall use the word “decision” and “choice” to mean just a mental event or act of mind in which the agent came to have the intention to do something A, where that event or act is one of such a kind that the agent’s reasons for doing A *might* have been the cause of that intention. Thus if an intention could be installed in one’s mind by brain surgery, producing a mental act in which one comes to have that intention, that act will not be a decision. On the other hand, a decision need not be an act of deliberation, and it need not be conscious.

condition—“freedom”—that one’s will must have been in, if the act was done of one’s own free will. Thus, as a first shot, we may try saying that

S does A of his own free will, *if and only if* S does A

(1) because S decided to do A, *and*

(2) in so deciding (and in carrying out that intention) S’s will was *free*.

This condition of “being free” is to be a condition internal to the will itself, and distinguished from other conditions of the agent that also bear on one’s practical capabilities, such as one’s “physical” and “intellectual” condition. If the will is the capacity to choose or decide, if being free is a condition we pre-eminently value in the will, and rationality is what we value in decision-making, an obvious hypothesis is this:

the “freedom” of the will is that condition of the will that makes it possible for an agent to make the rational decision about what to do.

This hypothesis would explain why we are inclined to deny that the agoraphobic stays in of her own free will. For she is, in this matter, *incapable of making the rational decision*—that is, of deciding to do what is, even in her own estimation, the rational thing to do. So even if (1) she stays in because she’s decided to do so, it’s *not* the case (2) that in so deciding her will was free.

While the exact referent of “the will” remains to be determined, we shall want to distinguish that condition of the *will* that underwrites the capacity to make the rational decision from other mental conditions from which that capacity also arises—including more purely intellectual powers. For instance, a person might accept one job offer rather than another of his own free will, even though he did not have the intellectual wherewithal to calculate the complex financial pros and cons in the way that would have been required to decide the matter rationally. Secondly, we shall not want to operate with a notion of “rational decision” that would require such decisions to be based on beliefs that were in fact true or desires that were well-founded. One may do something of his own free will even though, since he doesn’t or couldn’t know certain relevant facts, he is unable to do what would actually be best in the light of those facts. Such inability to do what would be best does not reflect on the internal condition—the freedom—of one’s will, unless the evidence that it would be best is actually in one’s possession. So what will be relevant, here, is a notion of “internal” or so-called “subjective” rationality: the rational action being what would be best “relative to” the desires of some agent and the evidence he or she actually possesses. (Thus, to be able to make “the rational decision” is, on one standard view of rationality, to be able to make that decision the implementa-

tion of which would tend to maximize the satisfaction of one's desires, if one's relevant beliefs *were* true.)

Let us examine this suggestion that it is *necessary*, if you are to do something of your own free will, that your will be free in the sense defined, *i.e.*, that you be in a condition that makes it possible for you to make the rational decision about what to do. We shall want this to mean more than just that you can make the rational decision in the particular situation in which you happen to find yourself. For the man who gives the gunman his money is capable of making the rational decision in *that* situation, but that (evidently) does not entail that he does what he does of his own free will. And if our agoraphobic calmly weighs the risks of suffering a "panic attack" against the pleasures of the reunion and decides, rationally, that all things considered it's better to stay home, we are still not content to say she'll be staying home of her own free will. The reason we are not is that we suspect she would decide to stay home, even if it *weren't* the rational thing to do, *i.e.* in her *own* estimation of the psychological risks, and even *given* her fears. That is, *were* she to think the pleasures would outweigh the distress the outing would cost her—so that staying home would not be (subjectively) rational, and going out would be—we suspect she'd be unable to make what would then be the rational decision.

Similarly, we know that the rational thing to do is to obey a man with a gun. But we suspect that the threat would be so frightening that *if* the rational thing to do were instead to defy him, we could not bring ourselves to do so—that is, that we would be *incapable* of making the rational decision about what to do, if that's what the rational decision would be. Suppose, for instance, that statistical studies had shown conclusively that you will usually fare better by defying an armed robber than by complying with his demands. Even so, when someone has a gun pointed at your head, it might be impossible for you to decide to defy him, even if you knew perfectly well that that was the right thing to do. And this, we suggest, is why we doubt whether one's will is *free* in deciding to do just as the gunman says: even though that is, in point of actual fact, the only rational thing to do, you are not handing over your money to him of your own free will.

For one's will to be "free in the making of a decision", it is not enough just that one can make the rational decision in the predicament in question, given the particular circumstances that prevail in the actual case. One must be able, moreover, to make the rational decision even if the circumstances were relevantly different from the way they actually are—*e.g.* just different enough that the rational decision would be something other than the one that is rational in the actual case. We suspect that the victim of the holdup or the phobia who can make the rational decision in the circumstances that prevail might be unable to do so were the circumstances such that an alterna-

tive decision would be the rational one to make. Were it rational to defy the gunman or for the agoraphobic to venture out, he or she might even then be unable to decide on that course of action. It is with reference to this fact that we suppose that these people are not doing what they do of their own free wills. This suggests that the hypothesis be understood as follows:

the freedom of the will is that condition of the will that makes it possible for one to make whatever decision might be rational for one to make *whatever the circumstances may be*.

We began with the fact that the robbed man does *not* hand over his money of his own free will, even though he does do the only rational thing in the situation. The first virtue of the hypothesis is that it provides a partial account of this. For while this action results from a perfectly rational choice the agent makes, his will is presumably not free in the making of it, under the proposed definition of that condition. (Again, he may be so frightened that he could not make the rational decision in *another* relevant case, thus *whatever* the relevant facts might happen to be.) If his fear *has* jeopardized his capacity to do the rational thing, whatever it might be—if it has made it possible that he might not be able to make the rational decision—then even though he makes the rational decision, in fact, in deciding to hand over his money, he did not give up the money of his own free will.⁴ For the will's capacity to guarantee the possibility of one's making the rational decision *whatever* it might be, is gone.

This conception of the freedom of the will makes it a condition comparable to that of a free-working mechanism: like a weathervane, which is not stuck in one position, but rather can point the direction of the wind, whatever direction the wind may blow. The pointer that is stuck and immovable may *happen* to point the direction that the wind is blowing, as the compulsive handwasher may on occasion do the rational thing in deciding to wash his hands a second time. But he will not be doing so of his own free will, on the present conception, if he is stuck on that option, so that he would have decided to wash his hands again in any case, even if it were irrational to do so. His doing what is reasonable cannot be attributed to any inner freedom; as the weathervane's pointing the right direction can't be attributed to any virtue in the way it's working, if it's stuck so it would point that direction in any case. If the man stops to wash his hands of his own free will, it would have to have been possible for him to have decided not to do so, had the occa-

⁴ It can be true that a person does not comply of his own free will, even if he complied quite willingly, even happily. He might pity the desperate man and want to help him out and thus quite happily hand over the money, and rationally. Even so, he does not do so of his own free will, if the presence of the threat cancelled the guarantee that he could make the rational decision, whatever it might have been.

sion been one in which it was unreasonable for him to stop and wash his hands.

The conception of the will's being free that has emerged so far is this:

one has a will that is free *if and only if* one's will is in a condition which is such as to insure that one could make the rational decision in all possible situations.

This makes "being free" a *state* of the will, which, possibly, the will might be in at one time and not at another.⁵ A person might presently enjoy a free will, and do what she does of her own free will, even though at a *later* time she might be afflicted with some phobia or compulsion which would impair her rational capacities. "One did it of one's own free will" implies a description of the state of one's will *when* one decided to do the act referred to, not, of course, at some other time.

The will is free, it appears, only if it is *guaranteed*⁶ that one can make the rational decision, where this requires that it is possible to do so in all possible situations. This doesn't refer just to all the situations that are possible *given* the actual state of affairs. For consider an agoraphobic, well provided for at home, who happens to live in so genuinely dangerous an environment that no situation could possibly come up in which it would be rational to decide to go out. (Troops of homicidal maniacs patrol the streets day and night.) This would scarcely mean that her will was free, for it is an accident of her environment that she has the capacity to do whatever might be rational; it is not something attributable to her will: or if it is, it is attributable to an *incapacity* of it—its being as it were stuck in position—not to anything that could be considered a kind of freedom. In other words, it is not her will, but the world she inhabits that guarantees that her every decision on this issue is bound to be the rational one, given that she is not capable of deciding to go out. The guarantee in question must arise from the capacity of the agent's will. Suppose there were an angel who stood by ready to do whatever it might take to enable you to make the rational decision were you otherwise not about to do so. It would then be guaranteed, all right, that you could make the rational decision, whatever it might be, but it would not follow that the things you did, owing to those decisions, were done of your own free will. For this guarantee must be credited not to your will, but to the angel's.

⁵ Thus the proposed definition does not require that whatever state the agent's will might be in, he or she can make the rational decision. That stronger condition is not necessary for the will to be free, but only for it to be impossible for one's will ever to be unfree.

⁶ This notion of insuring or guaranteeing is a concept of necessity. X guarantees the possibility of Y if and only if X makes it impossible for Y to be impossible.

If freedom is a condition of the will that *guarantees* the possibility of one's making the rational decision, then the factors that impair the freedom of the will, or delimit its freedom—if any such factors exist⁷—are factors that *abrogate* that guarantee.⁸ These factors would presumably include emotions that disrupt and confuse deliberation. The fear that the gunman will do what he threatens may be such a factor, as may obsessions and any emotional state that has such an effect that what ought to be a decisive reason to do something might fail to be effective.⁹

⁷ It has been suggested by Rogers Albritton that there are no such factors, and that the freedom of the will is inviolable. ("Freedom of will and freedom of action," Presidential Address, delivered to the Pacific Division Meeting of the APA, March 22, 1985; in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 1985.) It is a virtue of the present conception of the freedom of the will that it is hospitable, *prima facie*, to such broadly Cartesian intuitions, which are evoked by Albritton with great power. On such a view, the guarantee in question is somehow written into the metaphysical nature of the will in such a way as to be inviolable: *e.g.*, the power of making the rational decision does not *arise from* any accidental disposition of the will; rather, the will and that power are one and the same thing. But the present conception will also embrace quite opposite views about the relation of the will and its freedom.

⁸ And only certain factors do that. Would the machinations of Harry Frankfurt's "nefarious neurosurgeon" comprise such a "factor," were he to stand by, ready to interfere with an agent's exercising his capacity to make whatever decision might be rational? Or when he actually interferes? (Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 65, pp. 829–33.) It depends on how he does his work—on whether (1) he actually tampers with your will (with your decision-making mechanisms) or (2) whether he just nullifies your decisions once they are made, when they are not to his liking. Suppose that before the meddling doctor comes on the scene, your will is in such a condition that you could decide to do either alternative were it rational. Now, there are at least these two ways he can operate.

(1) He can alter the state of your will in such a way that the only thing you can decide to do is what he wants you to do—say, take a pill he offers you—so that even were it irrational for you to take the pill, you would choose to do so anyway. Suppose this is how he operates. *Before you make any decision about whether or not to take the pill*, he alters your will so that you will decide to take it even if it is irrational to do so. Now suppose that it is perfectly rational to take it, and, because it is, you choose to do, and do so—this all on your own hook. Still it is not of your own free will that you take it, according to the present account. For, *when you decided to take it*, the answer to the question "Could you have chosen whatever alternative were rational?" is No. (We hold the state of your will fixed, in considering alternative situations.)

(2) But the doctor might instead intervene without altering your decision-making powers. He might just nullify the decision you've already formed in case it is not the one he favors, and install in its place the intention he wants. Then, if you decide (as it happens) to do what he wants, and proceed to do it, you *may* do the act of your own free will. For your decision may be the product of a free-working will, which could frame whatever intention would be rational. (This does not entail that you'll do what you do of your own free will in the cases where he *has* nullified the decision that issued from your will and installed another intention in its place. For a condition of doing something of one's own free will is that one decided, that is, *formed* the intention *oneself* to do it. Here one did not do so.)

⁹ It is a mistake to suppose that the power of emotion is *essentially* detrimental to the capacity to make the rational decision, or to one's acting of one's own free will. It may be that it was only because one was so angry, or afraid, that one was able to make up one's

We may draw an analogy, at this point, between freedom and knowledge. The idea of the will's guaranteeing the possibility of deciding well, or rationally, what to do, is parallel to an idea involved in the concept of knowledge: that of the mind's cognitive power to guarantee the impossibility of a belief's being false. For to have knowledge is to be in a state in which one's belief is not merely true, as luck would have it, but in which instead it *could not* have been false: it is somehow guaranteed to be true. We value knowledge because we value not just truth in our judgments, but their being guaranteed to be true. (We'd rather be safe than lucky.) The present conception of freedom would explain its value in an analogous way: we want our decisions (and our actions) to be rational, but more than that, we want those decisions to have been framed in a condition which guarantees that they *will* be rational, whatever the circumstances might have been.¹⁰

Is this freedom a condition to which we could possibly attain? It's doubtful. For what has been described is an *absolute* or *perfect* freedom of the will: a state of the will such that in any possible situation whatever, one could make the rational choice. Very likely, no human being enjoys such total freedom of the will as that. Now one might be willing to accept that result. The trouble is that our definition of *acting* of one's own free will requires that the agent *have* a free will, but—as we have it so far—a person's will is free only if it is in effect perfectly free. If that were right, then probably no one would ever *do* anything of his own free will. That is not so easy to accept.

A conception more apt to have human application would require (as a condition of one's will being free at a given time) just that one be capable in all possible situations of making the rational decision *among the options before one at that time* (rather than among whatever options one *might* have, at other times). This restriction is already suggested by the weathervane model. Some obstruction might stop a weathervane from ever pointing any northeasterly direction, while it turns quite freely through all the other positions; when the wind comes from other directions, the weathervane's behavior can't be faulted. The agoraphobic, similarly, is unable ever to decide to go out, even when it's the only reasonable thing to do, but within a re-

mind to do the rational thing. Furthermore the capacity to do so *may* arise, as required, from the will; but there are complexities here that need separate exploration.

¹⁰ There is a parallel issue, in the theory of knowledge, regarding the source of the guarantee. To what extent must it be attributable to the cognitive powers, and to what extent may it be attributable to the character of the environment? There is a conservative position that no contingent features of the environment can be necessary, and various shades of liberalism (reliabilist views, *e.g.*) opposed to that. There is a parallel continuum of views on freedom: on the one extreme no state is counted as the will's being free if it did not make it possible for one to decide upon any option one without regard to any contingent fact about the world. At the opposite extreme, whether one's will is free might depend very heavily on happenstance features of one's environment.

stricted range of options her will may “operate” freely. When she decides to make tea rather than coffee, she may be doing what she does of her own free will (not, say, in obedience to doctor’s orders, or owing to a pathological fear of the coffeepot). Of course, a conceivable alternative to making tea would be going out for it. Had *that* been the more reasonable thing to do, she couldn’t have decided to do it. Her will is not, we might say, *perfectly free*, but to have done what she did of her own free will, it seems too much to require that it should be. It is enough that it is free within some *relevant* range of positions, free, as it were, to turn her to the most reasonable of the options among which she is actually deciding. What’s required is that she could have made *that* decision in the rational way, choosing whichever one of the options would have been better in the situation, whatever the facts of the situation might be; and a decision involving different options is, after all, often a different decision.

This restriction helps, but still leaves it doubtful whether any of us will qualify as doing anything of our own free wills. For even if we consider only the possibilities among which one is actually deciding, there may be no one who does not harbor some at least latent psychological condition such that in *some conceivable* circumstance it would impair one’s rational capacities. Of course, the situations we might actually confront might never flush these factors out in the open. Thus, someone is offered a good job in Chicago and another job in New York that it would be not be reasonable to accept. He takes the Chicago offer, and does so of his own free will. But suppose that as a schoolboy he was romantically so obsessed with a certain movie actress, that in the (otherwise similar) possible world in which he hears that the actress now lives in New York, this information might make it impossible for him to make the rational decision, given those same options and that same will. Now should this remote possibility make us change our judgment that in the actual case he made the decision of his own free will? It seems not. In the actual case, this old obsession is entirely inert. It plays no causal role. So it looks as if we should require, for the will’s being free as one makes a certain decision, just that there is no factor in or pertaining to one’s will (no dispositional conative state, perhaps) that is among the causes of one’s actual decision, such that that factor might in some possible situation make it impossible for one to make the rational decision. In the case considered, since the old obsession was not among the causes of the actual decision—since it was quiescent—then the agent may have acted of his own free will in going to Chicago. But if it had been one of his reasons for opting instead for New York, then even if his other reasons would by themselves have led him to the same decision, there is a possible situation in which he might be unable to make the rational decision between his options. And on the present conception of the will’s being free, this fact will mean that his

will was *not* in the required condition, and he did not take the New York job of his own free will. So:

One does something of one's own free will, *if and only if*

(1) one did it because one decided to do it, *and*

(2) in making (and carrying out) the decision to do it, one's will was "free" in the following sense:

one's will is *free* at a time *if and only if* one's will is such as to insure that one could make the rational decision among any options one actually has at that time, in any possible situation in which one's will is in that same state, where the "state" of an agent's "will" includes only those of one's dispositions to act (principally one's desires and intentions) which, in the actual situation, are among the causes of the decision.

The analysis is now in effect a *causal* one, in just this sense: an act is done of the agent's own free will only if the agent's will is in a certain state ("free") *and* the constituent elements of that state of the agent's will are (among) the causes of his decision. (This does not entail, however, that it is *because* his will is free that he makes the decision he does. That would be a distinct claim.)

This analysis might be further refined, but it will be good enough to be going on with. Readers who balked at some earlier judgments may be mollified by this last amendment. For instance, some will have questioned the judgment that the compulsive handwasher does not stop to wash his hands of his own free will, even when his decision to do so is perfectly rational (he's just cleaned a fish, say) if he could not have made the rational decision were that same situation such that it would be irrational to stop to wash his hands (he would be missing a vitally important phone call). We may now qualify that judgment: if, at the time of the act, his pathological disposition to handwashing is causally quiescent, he *may*, this time, be washing his hands of his own free will.

But are the conditions now required sufficient for one's having acted of one's own free will? It may seem that it is not enough that one can make whatever decision might be the more reasonable of the options among which one *actually* chooses. After all, the technique of the gunman is to delimit one's options, and a phobia may have the same effect, with the upshot, surely, of limiting the extent to which one can do what one does of one's own free will. Thus suppose our agoraphobic decides to make tea, rather than coffee, in part because the option of going out for coffee is excluded from consideration by the same phobia that would make it impossible for her to choose that option if it were among those she was considering. (Suppose she doesn't like her own coffee, that it was coffee she really wanted, and there's a good cof-

fee shop right across the street.) Now, intuitively, she's *not* acting of her own free will, when she makes that cup of tea, even though she can and does decide rationally among the options of making coffee and of making tea. Since our conceptions of our options (of what our choices *are*) are themselves partly subject to our wills and constrained by whatever may constrain our wills, we will not be acting of our own free will if there is any factor attributable to the will, which delimits either our ability to make the rational decision once our options are set, *or* which delimits the range of options among which we decide. If she will not even *consider* going out for coffee, *because* she could not come to that decision even if it were best, that goes to the freedom of her will. The last formulation of the analysis must be understood accordingly. The requirement is that "one could make the rational decision among any options one actually has," and those options are to include all the things one thinks one *could* do, relative to the relevant aim or goal—not just all the things one is *considering* doing, and not just all the things one thinks one could *decide* to do. If that aim is to get something to drink, then the agoraphobic's options include going across the street for coffee, unless she believes that she literally could not do that (couldn't even if she tried).

The analysis requires only that one's will guarantee that one *can* make the rational decision in the relevant possible situations, not that one *does* do so. It is not that if your will is free you are *bound* to make the rational decision in *any* of them. That is as it should be. Something's being done of the agent's own free will does not entail that it was rational to do it. It is possible for a person to kick over the traces and do something unreasonable, something impulsive and wild, quite of her own free will—so long, that is, as she has not lost control; *i.e.*, so long as she *could* have made the rational decision. So this is a welcome result. The present conception, then, connects freedom significantly with rationality, but the connection is sufficiently loose that one's actually making the rational decision to do a thing is not necessary, for the act to be done of one's own free will. And neither (as the hold-up case shows) is it sufficient. This too was a welcome result: we need not flout intuition by saying that the man robbed at gunpoint acted of his own free will, just because he made the rational choice in the circumstances.

It might be thought that irrationality is a sign of unfreedom, but it isn't necessarily. It isn't, unless it indicates that the agent might be *incapable* of making the rational decision. For instance, if you were moved to defy the gunman by anger or indignation, or by a rush of bravado, so that you would have defied him even if it were madness to do so, then it is not of your own free will that you defy him. One may be in the grip of these emotions quite as firmly as the coward is in the grip of fear, and they too may make it quite uncertain whether you can do the rational thing. But suppose that no such

emotion moves you, but still, you simply and flatly refuse to obey. Here, intuitively, is the freedom of the will in action: a veritable display of it.

There is a curious asymmetry here. It seems that if you *comply*, you did not do what you did of your own free will, but if you *refuse*, you are somehow demonstrating the freedom of your will. Whether you act of your own free will seems, very oddly, to depend, here, on what the decision *is*. But it cannot be right to say that the issue of freedom turns on *what* one decides to do—on the *content* of one's decision, as distinct from the conditions under which one makes it.

The account under discussion makes sense of this asymmetry. Defiance in the face of fear may demonstrate free will, because it may be *evidence* that whatever fear one may feel, it has not abrogated one's capacity to make whatever decision might be rational. For if there were *any* decision that fear of the gunman might prevent one from making, even if it were rational, it would presumably be this one—the decision to defy him. To refuse the gunman is to do what the threat would make one *afraid* to do, and normally, so afraid that one could not do it. Whether the decision to defy the gunman is in fact rational or not, the agent's defiance is reason to think his will is free, just to the extent that it is reason to think he is in a state of mind which makes it possible for him to make whatever decision might be rational.

But what about the case where the rational decision is to comply, and the victim decides to do that *because* it's the rational thing to do?¹¹ The analysis suggested says that he does not comply of his own free will, if his will does not insure the capacity to make whatever decision might be rational. The fact that he complies cannot indicate either that he is capable of making *whatever* decision might be rational, or that he is incapable of doing so. In particular, it doesn't indicate that he might have what it takes to defy the man, if that were the rational thing to do. So the fact that he complies leaves us safe in our initial suspicion that he might be incapable of making the rational decision, in certain circumstances, and thus that his will is not free. For he has decided to act in the same way he would have if the decision had been the result of plain fear instead of rational deliberation. Even if reason was the cause of the decision, it was not the *only* thing, given the situation, that might have caused it. And his compliant behavior is consistent with that supposition. That is perhaps the fuller sense in which it was "determined," inevitable, that he would do it, in the way that intuitively implies that the agent did not act of his own free will.

Defiance is evidence, not proof, that the freedom of the agent's will is unimpaired, whereas compliance supports the supposition that the victim will not be acting of his own free will. These inferences depend on ancillary assumptions about an agent's psychology. The inference that the defiant

¹¹ And not for example as a kind of unthinking reflex.

man's will is free depends on the assumption that he is not, for instance, pathologically counter-suggestible. If he were, and he is defying the gunman because he is moved by fear in this abnormal way, then his defiant response would not demonstrate the freedom of his will. Then again, he *might* be overcoming his counter-suggestible tendencies, and doing the rational thing (which *might* be to defy the man) only because that is the rational thing to do. Such complications fall into place on the present account. This shows that whether one does or does not act of one's own free will does not depend on the actual content of the decision. It does depend on the psychological conditions under which the decision was made, as one would have thought.

—§2—

If we accepted the view developed above, we would seem to be committed to something rather hard to accept. Consider the man who complies with the gunman's demand because it is the rational thing to do, and who is in such a state that he *is* fully capable of having decided to do otherwise had it been rational to do otherwise. We would have to say that such a man hands over his cash of his own free will. But is that right? It might be granted that the difference is now clear enough between him and the man who does the same thing but whose capacity to make the rational decision is jeopardized by fear. But after all that is said and done, the fact remains (so it seems) that a man who hands over his hard-earned cash at gunpoint surely does *not* do so of his own free will, even if his rational capacities are quite untouched by the threat. And we cannot rest content with a philosophical view that implies, quite flatly, that he *does* do it of his own free will, and in no sense does he not do so. Consider, to vary the example, the case of so-called "freedom of choice" plans for "desegregating" the schools. Some American school boards, when ordered by the courts to prepare plans for desegregating public schools, proposed what were called "freedom of choice" plans: parents would simply enroll their children in whatever school they chose. In some such districts, however, it was well understood that black people who chose to enroll their children in the previously white school might soon find themselves unemployed. But at least they would now have a choice; so they said. Or compare the case of an unresisting woman raped at knifepoint. Or Sophie's choice.¹²

One denies that these people did what they did of their own free wills because in some sense or other they "had no choice."¹³ We will attempt to vindicate the claim that such a person "has no choice." That claim needs vindica-

¹² In William Styron's novel of that name; the case is described below.

¹³ This doesn't mean, as one might think, just that the wiser choice was so obvious that no deliberation was needed. For even if it was not at all obvious, one may in the sense in question "have no choice": "I've worked all night figuring the pros and cons, and I've concluded that we have no choice but to comply".

tion, for it is often clear even when we say this, that there *was* a choice to be made, *e.g.*, whether to comply or resist. Nonetheless, one wants to deny, in some sense, that the person does what she does of her own free will, and we may do this by denying that she had any choice in the matter. A satisfactory theory will make sense of this.¹⁴ Let us begin with a simple case—a cartoon—before attempting the serious ones.

On your way East, you are detained in Transylvania and brought before Dracula himself. In a liberal mood, he gives you a choice: “Would you prefer to be impaled on a stake or instead to jump into the snake pit?” “I’ll jump in the snake pit, please,” you reply, (let’s say) in unshaken rationality. Now, is it of your own free will that instead of proceeding unmolested on your journey, you will jump into the snake pit? Hardly. But, won’t it be of your own free will that you jump into the snake pit, rather than getting impaled? Yes. Are we being inconsistent, when we first deny, and then affirm, that you do what you do of your own free will? Why do we waffle?¹⁵

It must be because we are not considering a single proposition. Sentences like “You did what you did of your own free will” must be ambiguous or in some other way indeterminate in meaning. But how, exactly? It is not that the phrase “of your own free will” has two distinct meanings. It is not that in one sense of those words you jumped in the snake pit of your own free will but in another sense you did not do so. Perhaps the phrase “what you did” sometimes refers to one of one’s acts, and other times refers to another. That might sometimes explain our vacillation. But not always. For sometimes there are not two distinct acts at issue. Your jumping in the snake pit instead of proceeding unmolested on your journey is not a distinct act from your jumping into the snake pit instead of getting impaled on a stake. There are two distinct things you do *not* do, here mentioned, but what you *do* do is the same thing and the same act. (Notice for future reference that whether

¹⁴ One can try to make sense of it by denying that it is literally true that “the agent had no choice.” One might argue that this statement (which itself is false) functions to deny some merely contextual, non-logical implication, or *suggestio falsi*, that would be carried by the (true) statement that the agent did have a choice, or acted of her own free will. Thus to affirm that the victim did it of her own free will may imply that she bears a sort of responsibility for the act or outcome which she does not bear.

This account is inadequate. To deny that someone who is coerced into doing something does it of his own free will, is not merely to deny that the victim bears moral responsibility. The robbed man may bear no such responsibility for his loss. But that is not why one denies that he gave the robber his cash of his own free will. For even if he had so inexcusably and willfully exposed himself to the danger that he *did* bear full responsibility for the loss of money and his children’s consequently going hungry, he still does not hand over the money of his own free will. (Even if the robber were a creation of his own, like Frankenstein’s, programmed for crime, he does not hand over his money to him of his own free will.)

¹⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110.

we think you did it of your own free will turns on the differing references to what you did *not* do.)

The “ambiguity” that confuses the matter concerns not different acts, but differing characterizations of a single act. For if we characterize it as “jumping in the snake pit instead of proceeding unmolested,” we are inclined to say you did not do “what you did” of your own free will; but if we characterize it as “jumping into the snake pit instead of getting impaled on a stake,” we are inclined to say you did do it of your own free will. We must not just say that whether you did or didn’t act of your own free will depends on which of these descriptions the act “falls under”: it falls under both of them, since it has both the characteristic the one description imputes to it, and the characteristic the other one does as well. The question is rather, what characteristics of the act are being *referred* to, when we say, or deny that you did it of your own free will: and then, *are* they to be explained in the indicated way?

The sentence “S did it of his own free will” serves to give an explanation why S did a certain act, but what the meaning of the sentence leaves indefinite is exactly what the *explanandum* is supposed to be: whether what is being explained is why S did something having one characteristic (having F and not G), or why S did something having another characteristic (F and not H). That is why there is no unique answer to the question, “Did S do it of his own free will?”: for what explains both one’s doing something that was F *and not* G need not also explain one’s doing something that was F *and not* H. The question “Why did you walk to work?” is indefinite in much the same way. The dead battery that will explain your walking to work instead of driving will not explain your walking to work instead of cycling. If it is asked whether you walked of your own free will, the answer may depend on which *negative* characteristic of the act is in question: not driving or not cycling. Which characteristic *is* in question is often determined only by the pragmatic context of the utterance of the sentence. So an analysis of the predicate *done of the agent’s own free will* cannot be given of “the” proposition expressed by that sentence, since there is no such unique proposition. An analysis can be given only of some determinate proposition that may be expressed by the sentence in which that predicate occurs. It will be clearer, then, if we express the proposition to be analysed in a form which makes its explanatory claim explicit, as well as the the state of affairs that is being explained:

The sentence “S did A of his or her own free will” expresses some proposition of the form, *it is of S’s own free will that A had the characteristic F and did not have the characteristic G*, where F and G may be determined either by the description of the act or by the context.

To resolve the ambiguity of the sentence, both a positive and a negative characteristic must be assigned. Otherwise, as we have seen, there will be no single *explanandum* picked out.

If the fact to be explained is clear, the question is, what is the proposed explanation of it? It is clear enough that the predicate “of one’s own free will” characterizes the explanation of an action in terms of the choices that result in one’s doing it, and the condition under which those choices were made. The issue whether a deliberate act was or was not done of the agent’s own free will is the issue whether the agent’s will was free in the making of the choice that explains (in a relevant way) the character of the action. It is evidently required, if the act is to be explained in the relevant way by the agent’s choice, first, that it be explained *by virtue of the content* of the choice, and second, that both the positive and the negative characteristic of the act be explained by the agent’s choices.

The first point, more fully, is this. If you decide to open the window, and doing so is letting in flies, it does not follow that you meant to let in the flies (still less that you did so of your own free will). Now while that decision—the event of making it, one might say—does *explain* why you let in flies, it does not explain it in virtue of the “propositional content” of the decision. We may think of a decision as a mental event that would determine which of certain *propositions* are to be true, or which *representation* of the way things might be is to come to be true. That set of propositions (representing one’s options) determines the identity of the decision, and the one decided upon comprises its content (what one decides to do). The proposition *I’ll open the window* is distinct from the proposition *I’ll let in some flies*, and the decision that has the first as its content is distinct from the one that has the other for its content. Further, the decision to open the window rather than the door is distinct from the decision to open the window rather than suffocate, and the former explains one’s opening the window instead of the door in a way in which it does not explain one’s opening the window instead of suffocating. When we speak, here, of the explanation of an action by a decision we mean always to refer to the explanation of it by the content of the decision, that is, to its *semantic* explanation.¹⁶

Now if there are distinct choices that might explain a single act, then the predicate “done of one’s own free will” may apply to the act in respect of one of these choices, but not in respect of the other. And two distinct characterizations of the single act may refer to distinct choices that *might* explain

¹⁶ It is an axiom of common-sense psychology that an intentional action may be explained by reference specifically to the content of decisions (and the contents of the beliefs and the desires that explain decisions). Philosophy has yet to achieve a satisfactory understanding of the efficacy of content, but we cannot be drawn into that issue here. We must take the concept for granted. If, in the end, it can’t be made sense of, then freedom of the will surely can’t be either.

it. This is the surely the right view of the confusion. The two descriptions, even where they describe a single act, do double duty, also describing two different conceivable *choices*: the choice whether to jump in the snake pit rather than proceed on your way, and the choice whether to jump in the snake pit rather than be impaled on a stake. The choice that explains (a) one's jumping in the snake pit instead of being impaled, will hardly explain (b) one's jumping in the snake pit instead of proceeding merrily on one's way. Indeed, no *choice* one made will explain one's not proceeding on one's way.¹⁷

In fact, you will not have made any such choice as between the options (a), even though you did choose between those of (b): and making one of these choices is not the same thing, obviously, as making the other. If you didn't have any such choice as (b), between the snake pit and proceeding on your way, then your making that choice cannot explain your jumping into the snake pit rather than proceeding on your way.¹⁸ The predicate "done of one's own free will" characterizes the choice which explains the action and here *no* choice one made will explain one's jumping into the snake pit rather than proceeding on one's way, so one can't have done *that* of one's own free will.

So it looks like this. The issue whether you did or did not do the thing of your own free will concerns the choice to which certain characteristics of your act may or may not be attributed. You jumped into the snake pit rather than be impaled of your own free will only if some choice you made explains the act's having that character, and in the making of that choice your will was free. When we then turn around and *deny* that you did what you did of your own free will, we are speaking of a partly different character of the act—its being a jumping in the snake pit and not a proceeding on one's way—and we are denying that any choice you made explains its having *that* character. We *may*, therein, be denying the *existence* of a certain choice: *e.g.* one choice you did *not* have, was the choice between jumping into the snake pit

¹⁷ No choice you made explains its having that negative property, though your choosing the snakepit does explain your doing an act that has that property (of being a-not-proceeding-on-your-way). That is, your choice explains your doing something that *is* not proceeding on your way, but what explains *its being* such an act is the fact that Dracula will not permit you to leave.

¹⁸ It may seem that if that choice (between the snake pit and proceeding on) does not explain your jumping in the snake pit, then you *can't* have done that of your own free will. This, however, is not true; and it does not follow from what has been claimed. It does not follow from the premise that the positive and the negative character of the act (its being F and ~G) must depend on a choice one made—*some* choice—that it must depend specifically on one's choosing that it have that negative characteristic, *e.g.* choosing that it be an act of not proceeding on one's way. Moreover, the claim is false: it is not the case that one does such a thing of one's own free will only if one chose that one's act would have the negative characteristics it has. For instance, one may of one's own free will make oneself a cup of coffee rather than going out for coffee, without having considered going out for coffee, and without in any sense having chosen that one's act would not be one of going out for coffee.

and proceeding unmolested on your way—for there was no possibility of doing the latter thing. The act was *not* done in consequence of your making *that* choice, or any such choice, for you had no such choice. Whether your will was free or not, it was not exercised on *those* options. It is in reference to that fact that we deny that you jumped in the snake pit of your own free will.¹⁹

Let us pull together what has been said about both (i) the sentence and (ii) the proposition it expresses, in this summary form:

i) The sentence “One did A of one’s own free will” expresses some proposition of the form:

One did A rather than B of one’s own free will;

or, more perspicuously, of the form:

p) It is of one’s own free will that one’s act A had some characteristic F and did not have some characteristic G.

ii) Proposition *p* is true, *only if*

1) one did an action A that was F and not G; *and*

2) one made a choice that explains why A was F and not G; *and*

3) one’s will was free in the making of that choice in the sense defined earlier.

This analysis is meant also to explain why the robbed man does, and then again does not, seem to do what he does of his own free will. He does surrender his cash rather than risk his life of his own free will; he does not surrender it rather than keep it of his own free will. Roughly, he does make a choice that explains the first pair of characteristics; he does not make a choice that explains the second pair.

The conditions (1–3) are not jointly sufficient. For suppose the victim makes what we shall call the “complex” choice between the option of giving over his cash and safeguarding his life, and the option of keeping his cash and risking his life. (Each option is described by a conjunction, so the choice has the form *Shall I do F & X or not do F & Y?*) Now it cannot be denied that his making just that complex choice may *explain* his action’s being one simply of handing over his cash and not keeping it,²⁰ and it is explained, as required, in virtue of the content of the choice. But there remains a sense in which it was not of his own free will that what he did was *that—sc.* hand-

¹⁹ Of course, we *may* be denying not the existence of the choice, but rather just that one’s will was free in the making of it: *e.g.* if you knew the impaling wouldn’t really be as bad as the snakes, but you have some neurotic fear of stakes (*sic.*).

²⁰ If a complex cause explains an event’s having a certain complex of properties, it explains the event’s having each property in that complex taken severally. If the ball’s being pitched low and away to a right-handed pull hitter explains his grounding out to the second baseman, it explains the batter’s grounding out, *simpliciter*.

ing over his cash rather than keeping it—even if his will were free in the making of that complex choice. Thus, if the question were asked, “Did he, of his own free will, plain give away his money rather than keep it?”, it is too clear that he did not. If we are to save the intuition that he did not do that of his own free will, it seems the choice must meet some further condition.

Conditions (1–3) do not require that the operative choice should have any particular content or form, but just that its having whatever content it does have should explain the features of the act. It is tempting to suggest that in addition to that *causal* condition, a further *formal* condition must be met by the choice the agent makes. For it seems that if the victim had decided simply whether to hand over his money or not to do so, as one might do were one confronted by a beggar rather than a robber, he *would* have handed it over of his own free will; or again if he had what it took to ignore the gun, and make that *simple* decision, without considering the dangerous consequences of deciding not to hand it over, or the opposite consequences of doing so. (As if he were deciding just what would be the best disposition of the money in his pockets—deciding the issue “on its merits”.) This might suggest that the decision must have a certain *form*, roughly, that of a disjunction of *simple* clauses, the one of which is just the contradictory of the other: *shall I do A or shall I not do A?* This suggestion depends on the fact that the choice between the conjunctive options of giving over one’s cash & staying safe *vs.* keeping it & risking one’s life, is not necessarily the *same* choice as that between giving over one’s cash *vs.* keeping it *simpliciter*.²¹ Intuitively, it is the latter choice that the victim could not make, and it is because he had no such choice as that, that he did not do that of his own free will. In so thinking, we are distinguishing that simple choice from the complex choice (between the conjunctive options). It is consistent with the intentional character of mental acts in general that we discern such a distinction. If Oedipus’ decision to marry Jocasta was not a decision to marry his mother, then the decisions we have distinguished may also be distinct.²²

For choices and decisions are intentional acts, or states, and of course in the characterization of such a state the substitution of one term for another may not preserve the truth of the original even if the two terms refer to exactly the same thing; and, the substitution of one clause for another may not preserve the truth of the original even if in ordinary contexts the truth of

²¹ For in that case it will not be true that it is of the victim’s own free will that his act was one of giving over his cash and not keeping it, if those two characteristics will not be explained by his choosing between those options *simpliciter*.

²² The present treatment rests the issue heavily on the character of the choices or decisions that might underlie the act: on the alternative-structure of those choices on the one hand, and on the intentional character of choice on the other. If this is right, then the case for a realist account of free will turn, in large part, on the prospects of realism regarding the intentional.

the original entails the truth of the substitution. Now the identity of a choice is defined, in part, by the alternatives among which one decides: the choice of A or B is distinct from the choice of A or C. The principle of substitutivity does not apply in the context, *chooses between A & B*, to the expressions 'A' and 'B' that describe the alternatives, and neither do normal logical operations have valid application within such contexts. Most obviously, so-called "disjunction-introduction" is not valid in describing one's choices²³: the fact that one has a choice to make whether A or B does not imply that one has a choice whether A or B or C. This is because these terms denote options, and an option is something that is *possible* for the agent to do, or take, or states of affairs one *can* bring about. And of course the fact that you can drink tea or coffee during faculty meetings does not entail that you can also drink gin.

A more pertinent point is that neither does the operation of simplification (conjunction-reduction) have valid application within such contexts. The fact that one has the choice between options A & C, and option B & D, does not entail that one has the choice between A and B *simpliciter*. The child may be given the choice of cookies and milk, or candy and orange juice, but she is not allowed the choice between cookies and candy *simpliciter*. (She has to take the bitter, or nutritious, with the sweet.) This is, again, because what one has a choice between are what one believes to be one's options, and an option is something that it is *possible* for an agent to do or have. She can't have the cookies without the milk. If she *could* make the conjunctive choice, but *could not* make the choice *simpliciter*, then the one cannot be the same as the other.

Since she can't *have* the cookies *simpliciter*, does that mean she can't *choose* between the one and the other-*simpliciter*? No. She might not care *which* of the necessary evils is to come with her choice, which in that case is, so far as she is concerned, between candy or cookies *simpliciter*. In that event, making the complex choice *is* making the simple choice.²⁴ But it may be that she *cannot* make that choice, if she *does* care—hates milk but not orange juice, say. The knowledge that the cookies entail milk, together with the aversion to milk, may make it impossible for the content of her choice to be just cookies. That option is essentially *encumbered* with its consequence, and cannot be disentangled from it. (As Oedipus, had he known who Jocasta was, could not very well have decided just to marry Jocasta; in that case his

²³ As it is in describing the facts—where, if 'p' describes the facts, *i.e.*, is true, then necessarily so does 'p or q'.

²⁴ The options between which one actually chooses (as distinguished from the options offered a person) seem to correspond to states of affairs such that the agent's attitudes toward them might actually comprise causally effective reasons for one to decide one way or another. So if you are indifferent to the respective consequences or costs C and B, of A and B, the choice you make will be between A and B, not A&C and B&D.

decision would have to have been to marry his mother. Unless, perhaps, he really didn't care *who* she was.)

We shall stop short of asserting that it is a necessary condition of its being of one's own free will that one's act was F and not G, that one *actually* makes the choice between F and G *simpliciter*. Given the other conditions, it may be sufficient, but it is not necessary. For if a shopper decides to buy a coat in the middle of summer because it is on sale—*i.e.* to buy it now and pocket the savings—she may do so of her own free will even though she never decided simply whether to buy the coat or not buy it; she might have bought it largely because it was on sale. She may have decided only between buying the coat now & saving and not buying it now & not saving. So actually making the choice *simpliciter*, *i.e.* without regard to the consequences, seems not to be necessary. Still, it seems it was of her own free will that she bought the coat rather than not, only if she *could* have made the choice *simpliciter*. If she *couldn't* have done so—that is, if she couldn't have disregarded the question of the savings—then that consequence of buying the coat essentially encumbers the choice. And it is not so clear that it *was* of her own free will that she bought the coat rather than not (*tout court*). What seems to be required, then, is just that the agent *could* have made the decision *simpliciter*, and that is what we shall propose.

It is of one's own free will that one's act A had some property F and did not have some property G.

if and only if

- 1) one did something A that was F and not G;
- 2) one made a choice between doing something that was F and doing something that was G, and was capable of making that choice *simpliciter*;
- 3) the fact that (2) (semantically) explains why (1); *and*
- 4) one's will was free in the making of that choice in the sense defined earlier.

Let us see whether we are equipped, now, to deal with some recalcitrant cases. Our misgivings began when we questioned the implications of the characterization of freedom of the will, as that condition of the will that guarantees the possibility of making the rational decision: this seemed to require us to say that the robbed man whose rational capacities are unaffected has surrendered his money of his own free will. But one is inclined to deny that he did. A good account must make sense of the inclination to *deny* that the victim complies of his own free will—even where (as must be granted) there *is* a choice between doing what he did and *some* alternative B, in the making of which his will was free, and from which the act resulted: thus even when it may *also* be *true* to say “he did it of his own free will.” Now

that sentence will at the same time say something *false*, if there is a salient choice that the person did *not* have about whether to give up his money.²⁵ There will be such a sense if there is a decision between giving up the money and *another* pertinent alternative C, such that he did not have *that* decision to make. Here C might plausibly be, *to spend the money on something he had wanted to buy*; or, *to continue unmolested on his way*. He might have just walked on, hoping the gunman would not press the issue, but whether he could get away with that would be too much in doubt for him simply to *choose* to continue on his way without further trouble. While he might hope, he would not positively *believe* he *could* do that. And without such a belief, he could not very well *choose* to do this, and in that sense he *had* no such option or choice. Here we depend upon a notion of “having a choice” between actions which requires the possibility of *choosing* either action, not just of the possibility of doing either thing.²⁶ We deny that an agent did a thing of his own free will, not just when the act resulted from a choice in the making of which his will was not free, but also when there is a “salient” choice the agent didn’t make at all, either in freedom of will or in its absence. The same analysis, in terms of the absence of a choice, seems to work for our other cases, even when we suppose that the agent’s freedom of will (or capacity to decide rationally) is fully and securely intact.

Thus Sophie’s choice. Arriving at Auschwitz, she was “allowed” to choose which one of her children would be taken from her and killed: if she would not choose, they would both be taken; if she chose one of them, the other would be spared. The very point of her tormentor’s evil game was to make her choose, and even to exercise her freedom of will, by giving her a choice.²⁷ Even so, we might correctly say that Sophie did not *of her own free will* hand over her daughter to be taken away and killed; and we might say this because “she had no choice”. She did of course have a choice, *sc.*,

²⁵ The same sentence can be true or false if the pronoun ‘it’ is anaphoric for the act *via* the alternation, “A rather than C.”

²⁶ Albritton urges that neither limitations imposed by the way the world is, nor one’s believing that certain acts are impossible, should be taken to constrict the freedom of one’s will, in the sense of this discussion or his own. (Neither should the lack of any desire that would be satisfied by a certain action be taken to do so.) That is agreed, and it fits with the present characterization of such freedom. For these factors do not delimit the capacity to make the rational choice in a situation. But they *do* determine what choices one *has* in a situation. And consequently they delimit the acts that one can be said to have *done of one’s own free will*. For evidently one does not do a thing of one’s own free will if one had no choice whether or not to do it; and, if one thinks either that it is impossible to do it, or that it is impossible not to do it, or, if doing it would serve none of one’s desires, then in a relevant sense one did not have such a choice.

²⁷ Styron’s narrator makes much of this. (She is given a choice because she is a Christian; the imagined aim was to inflict a so-called “sin” upon her.) She would have exercised her freedom of will, in making the choice, if her anguish did not prevent her from making the rational decision, and would not have stopped her from deciding otherwise if that would have been the rational thing to do.

whether to surrender her daughter or her son, but *that* choice is not the one we are denying that she had, when we say that she had no choice. What choice *is* it that she didn't have? We might put it this way: she did not have the choice whether to keep both her children with her, or send one of them to its death. Or this way: she did not have any choice, whether to hand over her daughter to be killed, rather than to keep her safe at home in Kraków. She did not have *those* alternatives, that choice. This is what gives sense to our denying that of her own free will she handed over her daughter to be killed; she did not do *that* of her own free will.²⁸ More fully, the act has this character: it is an act of surrendering her daughter to be killed and not an act of keeping her safe at home in Kraków. But while the act does *have* that character, either (a) that character isn't explained by any choice she made or (b) if it is, the explanation of it does not meet the required condition, because she could not decide whether to surrender her daughter to be killed or keep her safe at home in Kraków.

Consider the choice black parents might have made when granted the "freedom of choice," so-called, where to send their child to school. The choice they would have, and might make, is whether to send their child to the better school and jeopardize the family's livelihood or instead to send their children to the inferior school and safeguard their livelihood. They might make that choice of their own free wills, in the absence of incapacitating fear or anger. In that case they did, of their own free wills, safeguard their income and send the child to the inferior school. But there was another choice

²⁸ Findings as to whether an act was done of the agent's own free will, as here analysed, match findings of moral responsibility. What was she morally responsible for? Not for the murder, that day, of at least one of her children: she had no choice as to whether that would happen. Neither did she bring it about (of her own free will or otherwise) that at least one child would be killed. But she did have a choice as to whether one rather than both would be killed: she had a choice whether to choose one of them to protect. She is morally responsible for choosing to make that choice rather than refusing to do so; *and* she made that choice, of her own free will. And finally she is morally responsible for the fact that it was her daughter who was killed that day, instead of her son, because the choice she made was to protect her son and hand over her daughter.

But the act of handing over her daughter was the act of handing over her daughter *and* giving one of her children a chance of surviving. And that was something she did, possibly of her own free will, because she did choose whether or not to do that (*i.e.*, that conjunction of things). One might think it *morally* to her credit that she accepted the offered choice, and responsibility; or one might think it so *like* complicity that it was morally wrong to choose, no matter how terrible the consequences of not doing so would have been. In either case, Sophie is held to be responsible, for choosing at all, and/or for choosing as she did. She chose to offer them her daughter rather than her son, because the older and stronger child would have a better chance of surviving. Of course, had she chosen to let them take the boy because the girl was her favorite child, even though she thought only the boy had a chance of surviving, one might think she'd done something morally wrong. (She might be held morally responsible for neither of her children's having any chance of surviving, instead of one.) Unless, perhaps, this favoritism was so powerful an attachment as to have made it impossible for her to have made the better choice.

they were deprived of by the segregationist conspiracy, and that was the choice simply whether to send the child to the better school or not to do so. This decision is distinct from the former one. Consequently, the fact that they made the choice, whether to safeguard their livelihood and send the child to the inferior school, even if their wills were free in the making of it, does not entail that we are saying something false when we say "it was not of their own free wills, that they sent the child to the inferior school." For we may be saying that it was not owing to their having chosen to do *that*, that their action has that characteristic. And that may well be true.

The crucial distinction between decisions (the complex one vs. the simple one) depends on the point that logical operations do not necessarily preserve truth when applied within psychological contexts, and specifically, that the operation of simplification, does not. It does not follow from the fact that someone chose to do A and B, that she chose A *simpliciter*. While the parents of our example could and did choose the conjunctive option, they did not choose the first conjunct *simpliciter*. They *could not* choose to send the child to the better school *simpliciter*. They could not choose that because they would *know* that to do so would *be* to jeopardize their livelihoods; and it might be impossible for them to choose to do that. Once informed by threats or knowledge, the options in question may be *essentially* conjunctions: one has the choice whether to do A-and-risk-X, or to not-do-A-and-not-risk-X.

On this analysis, the parents did not send their child to the inferior school of their own free wills, if they could not have made any choice which had that as one of its options *simpliciter*. They did, even so, decide whether or not to send their child to the inferior school and safeguard their livelihood. The decision to send the child to that school and safeguard their livelihood is a distinct decision, which they presumably would have been able to make. And it may be that they *did* do precisely *that* of their own free wills—supposing they could have decided otherwise had the alternative been more reasonable. The cynicism of the "free-choice" scheme lay in the fact that there *was* a choice black parents were allowed to make, of their own free wills—it was not that there was *no* free choice to be made—and in the fact that it was made unreasonable for the black parent to make the choice whether to send the child to the better school or the worse one, *simpliciter*. We've argued that the decision they made was *not* to send their child to the inferior school, unless they were capable of making that choice *simpliciter*; and that that is something they would have been unable to do unless they were capable of ignoring its advantageous consequences.

The choice that explains the action must be made under the condition that the agent could have made the simple choice between doing it and not doing it, without regard to the consequences attendant to the consequences (of ei-

ther option) that arise as an accident of the circumstances. If the agent's choice might have been the same, even had it been made in abstraction from those consequences, then the action is not contingent on the circumstances, and they are not essential to its being explained by the choice. What *is* essential is just the prior disposition, or constitution, of the agent's will; the action depends, causally, *just* on the agent's will, and that is part of what is meant by saying that it was *of* one's own will that one did an act. These findings point us to a deeper question. What might it be, about the prior disposition or constitution of one's will, that might account for such powers of choice? After stepping back to get a better run at this question, we shall try one possible answer.

—§3—

We have been concerned to account for a residue of cases in which we deny an act was done of the agent's own free will, even when the agent's capacity for making the rational decision, among the alternatives being considered, is secured by the state of his will. Here the focus of our discussion has shifted from the internal state of the will, or the agent's psychological capacities to decide among his options, given his desires and what he believes to be possible, to the question of what options and choices he has to begin with. But our main aim was to ferret out the "freedom" of the will—the nature of that underlying state or disposition of the will—by examining the concept of it at work in the predicate "done of one's own free will." Our first hypothesis was that this was the property of being such as to guarantee that the agent could make the rational decision among his options. The rest of our discussion, however—even if it does advance the analysis of "done of one's own free will"—does not seem, so far, to tell us anything more about what this "freedom" we ascribe to the will might be.

But, with a few twists, it will. Consider once more the man under the gun, who is completely unshaken in his capacity to make the rational decision. He will decide rationally to surrender his cash *and* safeguard his life, and will do so of his own free will. But it will also be true to say that he did *not* hand over his cash of his own free will, if it was not possible for him to decide to hand over his cash *simpliciter*: and knowing that handing over his cash *is* playing it safe, his options are not simply to hand over his cash or not do so. He cannot, in other words, make the choice *simpliciter*. But now, suppose he *could* do so. Suppose, that is, that even knowing perfectly well what he would be doing if he refused the gunman, he puts this out of his mind and asks himself: "Well, shall I give this man my money, as he proposes, or shall I not?" If we suppose the man capable of making this decision, what we are doing is supposing that he can ignore the consequences of doing the one thing or the other; he ignores the "associated" risks or benefits. He de-

cides the matter “on its merits,” as one might ask oneself “What, after all, is the best disposition of the cash in my pocket?” Whether he decides to keep his money or give it to the gunman, it seems he does what he does of his own free will, so long as he could choose whichever alternative were more rational. If he decides to hand it over, ignoring the life-*protecting* consequences of so doing, he would be giving the money to the gunman of his own free will, in every sense and without qualification—that is, it is not of his own free will just that he is handing it over *and* safeguarding his life, rather than keeping it *and* risking his life.

The capacity to make the choice *simpliciter* may require the capacity to ignore the consequences. If this is, as we now suggest, a necessary condition of one’s having acted of one’s own free will *without restriction*, it means that it is a necessary condition of one’s having acted of one’s own free will that one was capable of having acted irrationally. It is paradoxical, perhaps, that it should ever be a requirement of acting of one’s own free will that one should be able to make a decision irrationally, if the freedom of the will is something that guarantees the capacity to decide *rationally* what to do. But it actually makes sense that it should be so. For when we ask whether someone did something of his own free will, we may be making reference to a decision which, given *e.g.* the imposition of a threat, he can only make if he is deciding the matter in an irrational way. For instance we might be asking whether he plain gave away his money rather than kept it of his own free will, *i.e.* because between *those* options he decided to give it away. And, if he did, then he will have done what he did of his own free will. If, however, he was threatened with death if he didn’t hand it over, it would have been irrational of him to decide the matter in that way, and so, he would have to have done something irrational if he was to have acted of his own free will. For threats, and other circumstances, do sometimes determine that there is but one rational choice to make, and so deliberately to make another choice²⁹ requires one to decide the matter in an irrational way. These are precisely the cases in which one ordinarily *could* not act of one’s own free will.

Now if we suppose that the “freedom of the will,” designates that characteristic of the will that might enable a person to do such a thing, we must recognize that this character is something more than (not to say other than) one that guarantees the capacity to make the rational decision. For here it shows itself as a state enabling a person to make an *irrational* decision, or at least to decide what to do in an irrational way. One may of course be *capable* of making an irrational decision quite consistently with one’s being *capable* of making the rational decision (and both capacities may be secured in the will). The thesis that freedom is a matter of such a capacity for rational

²⁹ To which one might be making reference, in asking whether it was of his own free that the agent did the act.

choice does not imply that if one deliberately does something irrational one is not doing it of one's own free will. What is necessary to doing the irrational thing of one's own free will, is that one's will should be free in deciding to do it—*e.g.*, that, having irrationally decided to ignore the consequences of refusing the gunman's demands, so as to decide the matter "on its merits", one is then capable of deciding to do whichever one of those actions is, disregarding those consequences, the more reasonable thing to do. The thesis does imply that one *could* give due weight to the consequences that one has irrationally chosen to ignore, but not that one does do so. Consider the obstinate old codger who *will* not go to the doctor, the consequences be damned. This is irrational; but so long as he *could* give due weight to the consequences, he may do what he does of his own free will.

It seems to fall out that the freedom of the will is the will's being so constituted that it is guaranteed that one can make the rational decision, whatever it may be, *while one could also* decide whether or not to do the thing without regard to the consequences, irrational as it may be to make a decision in such a way. But can there be a single condition, "freedom of the will," which at once secures the possibility of deciding rationally, and also the possibility of deciding in an irrational way?

The freedom of the will has apparently fallen apart into two distinct and even opposed (not to say incompatible) conditions: one, the capacity to be moved, rationally, by all the relevant considerations, which the addict, *e.g.*, has lost; and the other, the capacity to ignore certain considerations, which the prudent man under the gun has lost. It is clear why we value the former capacity, and thus the freedom that guarantees it. But we also value something stranger about freedom: we value, it almost seems, plain willfulness; at least, when our ability to choose to do as we will, or what we would, is suppressed, even by the weight of reason, we regard that as a regrettable loss of freedom. And what we regret is not just the external circumstances, but something within us: our own inability to ignore them.

To continue to search for this freedom, on the assumption that it is a unitary property of the will, we should have to do so aboard some hypothesis about the constitution of "the will," of which that freedom is supposedly a property. And we should have to find some property of the will, thus understood, which might give rise both to the capacity to make rational decisions and also the capacity to make irrational ones. Let us try, briefly, one such hypothesis. Suppose that the will is merely the ensemble of an agent's desires, and that various properties of the will (its constancy, strength, freedom, *etc.*) are properties of that ensemble, including relational properties holding among the desires constitutive of the agent's will, and among properties of those desires. Now our question is, what single property of the set of a person's desires could, at one and the same time, guarantee the possibility of

his making the rational decision, whatever that might be, while leaving open the possibility of deciding simply whether or not to do any given thing, disregarding the consequences? What would these possibilities require in a person's desires? They would require, wouldn't they, at least that his desires are such that he does not care, overmuch, about the consequences of his actions? And that means that those of his desires upon which those consequences impinge are not so strong that they necessarily determine his decision. The black parents whose desire for security was not so strong that it was impossible for them to risk that security, and decide the matter on its own (educational) merits, might have done what they did of their own free wills. It is not that one must care so little that it is rational to ignore the consequences; it is (perhaps) that one's will must be so disposed that it is *possible* for one to do so, even if it is irrational. Might this disposition of the will, then, consist in a certain *equanimity*, a *balance of power* among the desires constitutive of one's will? Might it be that that very same equanimity is what is lost to the addict, or the phobic, who suffers from desires or aversions so powerful that there is no guarantee, secured in the disposition of his will, that he *can* make the rational decision—just as, in the rest of us, the desire to avoid any risk may be so strong that there is as little possibility of our *not* making the rational decision. (And that, for better or worse, is also freedom diminished.) If so, then we might have a single property roughly in view with which the freedom of the will can be identified: a certain equanimity.³⁰

³⁰ We would like to thank Martin Barrett, Mark Bauder, Berent Enç, Melinda Hogan, and Greg Mougín for suggestions and discussion.