Compatibilism vs. Incompatibilism:
An Integrated Approach from Participant Stance and Affect

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Abstract:

Following the recent surge in experimental philosophy exploring how unprimed intuitions enable the folk arrive at judgments concerning free will and moral responsibility, a widespread anomaly in folk intuitions has been reported. This has given rise to two different explanatory frameworks- one counting on affect that has been projected as making all the difference between compatibilism and Incompatibilism and the other relying on Strawsonian participant attitude while accounting for compatibilist responses. The aim of this paper is to bring to the fore the asymmetric folk intuitions regarding ascription of moral responsibility, the expository accounts- one put forward by Shaun Nichols and the other by Eddy Nahmias, and show possibility of reconciliation between the two apparently different views, especially when it comes to unravelling the psychological mechanism underlying compatibilist intuition.

Keywords: Compatibilism, Incompatibilism, Affect, Participant Stance, Mechanistic Stance.

1. Introduction

Among the philosophical fraternity, there seems to be no unanimity regarding whether it is compatibilist intuition or incompatibilist intuition that should be given due weightage. On the one hand, there are staunch

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Incompatibilists like Galen Strawson and Laura Ekstrom who are convinced that it is "in our nature to take determinism to pose a serious problem for our notions of responsibility and freedom"[1] and that "we come to the table, nearly all of us, as pretheoretic incompatibilists".[2] There are philosophers like Daniel Dennett, on the other end of the spectrum who claim that ordinary people care two hoots about whether a convict could have done otherwise while trying to determine whether the person is to be exonerated or proclaimed guilty [3] - they have a natural compatibilist orientation. Susan Wolf notes that compatibilism "seems to accord with and account for the whole set of our intuitions about responsibility better than … the leading alternatives " [4]   While plumbing the literature that makes this debate its centrepiece, what we find is a uniform appeal by philosophers on both sides to draw on pre-theoretic, folksy intuitions. This accounts for the shift of attention to the descriptive question of what are the natural responses of the laypeople while ascribing moral accountability and what makes them judge what they do. We will then scan through the experimental results in the next section and discuss the most viable of psychological mechanisms underlying these intuitions in the third section.

2. Mapping how Folk Intuitions Shape Judgments
of Moral Responsibility

Shaun Nichols and his associate Joshua Knobe ran an experiment to ascertain whether participants envisage human behaviour, especially choices and decisions as deterministic (causally inevitable) or indeterministic (contingent upon the agent's belief and desire). They presented the participants with the description of two universes. Now, most participants chose Universe B (in which choices and decisions *did not have to happen the way they did*, by virtue of the fact that antecedent conditions were incapable of "calling the shots") over Universe A (in which choices and

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[1] Strawson: 1986, p.89.
[2] Ekstrom: 2002, p.310.
[3] Dennett: 1984, p.558.
[4] Wolf: 1990, p. 89.

decisions *had to happen the way they did*, every choice and decision being completely caused by their antecedent conditions).

Let us briefly describe the test conditions. Participants were given the impression that in Universe A, the domain of human behaviour is such that, the coming into being of any choice or decision is the reflection of a rule or a law that the prior conditions of that particular choice always make its occurrence necessary and irreversible. Universe B, in sharp contrast, was designed not to come under such a rule insofar as the domain of human behaviour was concerned.[*] Just as the Universe A condition could lead the participants to believe in the logical possibility (if not empirical) of predicting an agent's act by dint of knowledge of its antecedent conditions, the Universe B condition also gave reason to believe in the empirical possibility that at least human choice-making events could be spared from any causal necessity (such a possibility was stoked by the phrase: "…even if everything in the universe was exactly the same up until Mary made her decision, it *did not have to happen* that Mary would decide to have French Fries"). And when the time came for them to identify which of these two beliefs they found more reliable than the other, we know that an overwhelming number of participants sided with Universe B (the indeterministic universe). Although Nichols' purpose to ask this initial question was "simply to see whether subjects believe that our own universe is deterministic or indeterministic", we may take this result as an indicator of two vying possibilities:

1) The folk are staunch indeterminists, inveterately agent-causationist style; they may of course be libertarian indeterminists without being agent-causationists. They gauge an agent's freedom of action and will by considering whether the person in question caused that action by dint of his own will; and that being the case, they believe that it is quite an

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[*] The description of Universe B read: "Now imagine a universe (Universe B) in which *almost* everything that happens is completely caused by whatever happened before it. The one exception is human decision-making" (Nichols: 2007, p. 673).

(empirical) possibility that Mary could have chosen to have something other than French Fries as she, like all humans could but be left on her own will. They think that such a possibility will be marred by a *necessitarian* causal law. The folk are thus incompatibilists.

2) The folk believe that it is important that an agent is able to do otherwise than he originally wanted to. However, this ability to exercise a climb-down is made possible only when the agent modifies his original belief states or desire states or plans. Mary could have had an ice cream instead of French Fries only if she wanted to (a change in her desire state ensured it). The folk may think that it is so obvious that one needs not even make a mention of it. The folk thus might be psychological determinists and still compatibilists.

Now following the empirical work of Nichols and Knobe on folk intuitions, we will try to find out which of these two possibilities gains more credence.

2.1. Nichols' and Knobe's Findings [5]

a) In this experiment, immediately following the Universe task, participants were randomly assigned either to the *abstract* condition or to the *concrete* condition. The *concrete* scenario read:

In Universe A, a person named Bill murders his wife and children by detonating an explosive at his home with the single motive of being with his secretary with whom he has developed an illicit relationship.

Participants were then presented with the question: Is Bill fully morally responsible for killing his wife and children?

YES   NO

The participants in the *abstract* condition instead received just the question, which was however couched in a fashion that prompted them to think in a more general way. The question posed to them was: In Universe

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[5] For details of this empirical research, see Nichols: 2007a and Nichols (forthcoming) respectively.

A is it possible for a person to be fully morally responsible for his or her actions?

YES   NO

Table 1 shows the results:

	Compatibilist Responses	Incompatibilist Responses
Concrete Condition	72%	NA
Abstract Condition	NA	86%

Table 1

Nichols and Knobe, however, were a bit skeptical whether the "prolixity" of the *concrete* condition took its toll on the subjects who as a result, forgot that the heinous crime was perpetrated in a deterministic Universe. They, therefore, ran the *concrete* condition once more, making the condition a little terse. It now read:

In Universe A, Bill stabs his wife and children to death so that he can be with his secretary. Is it possible that Bill is fully morally responsible for killing his family?

YES   NO

And although the table was a little turned both literally and figuratively, the volume of compatibilist responses (in terms of percentage) in the *concrete* scenario was still much lower than that in the *abstract* scenario (vide Table 2).

	Compatibilist Responses	Incompatibilist Responses
Concrete Condition	50%	NA
Abstract Condition	NA	86%

Table 2

b) The previous experiment primarily looked into the effect of *abstract-concrete* conditions on folksy moral judgments. The results also

contained an indication that some emotive attitudes (anger, sympathy etc. in Bill's case) might spur compatibilist responses. Thus, the hypothesis Nichols wanted to test in the next experiment was whether affect engenders compatibilist intuitions. Here, Nichols once again used the concrete condition as indication has already been found that compatibilist tendencies are tied to a concrete description of a morally salient situation. He thus used the concrete condition as an independent variable and used affect as a dependent variable varying its nuances.

Participants were accordingly randomly assigned to either a *high affect* condition or a *low affect* condition. In both the conditions, half of the participants were asked to consider Universe A as the locus of the agent and his act and the other half were asked to consider Universe B where the agent lived. The descriptions of both the conditions were as follows:

High Affect Condition: As he has done many times in the past, Bill stalks and ravishes a stranger. Is it possible for Bill to be fully morally responsible for this act?

Low Affect Condition: As he has done many times in the past, Mark decides once again to dodge his taxes. Is it possible for Mark to be fully morally responsible for this act?

The results (vide Table 3 & Table 4) indicated that the influence of affect on compatibilist responses cannot be overlooked.

	High Affect Case	**Low Affect Case**
	The physical tormentor's case (Indeterministic Universe)	The tax dodger's case (Indeterministic Universe)
Percentage of Participants assigning MR	95%	89%

Table 3

	High Affect Case	Low Affect Case
	The physical tormentor's case (Deterministic Universe)	The tax dodger's case (Deterministic Universe)
Percentage of Participants assigning MR	64%	23%

Table 4

In Table 3, responses are, as expected, more compatibilist than incompatibilist, especially when the agent Bill is taken to be in the indeterministic Universe. But the emotion-steeped conditions seemed to have further provoked the subject to judge that Bill is fully morally responsible which is evident by the figure "95%" of the High Affect Condition as against the "89%" of the Low Affect Condition. In Table 4, that presents the responses of the deterministic world scenario, even the concrete condition cannot substantially evoke Judgments of MR although it did in an earlier experiment (see Table 1), when it is tempered with a low emotional content as is evidenced by the figure "23%". In sharp contrast with this response is the figure "64%" elicited by the emotion-laden condition.

It is to be noted that Nichols and Knobe ran the two previous experiments to gather evidence regarding a rampant suspicion that affect infuses an infelicity (a bias, to be precise) in folk theories and judgments of moral responsibility that then goes to trigger compatibilist intuitions. Results of the first experiment hinted that the affect-inducing concrete cases might elicit compatibilist responses while an affect-neutral abstract condition that induces us to think in a cold, cognitive way might be responsible for incompatibilist responses. However, the second experiment, according to Nichols, went a step further in projecting another pointer, that it may be not so much a difference between abstract/concrete conditions as it is between affect-neutral and affect-laden conditions that delimit

compatibilist intuitions from incompatibilist intuitions. The case in point is a curiously "low-key" performance by compatibilist intuitions on the tax cheater's case which is a concrete case all right but significantly marked by affect- neutrality.

c) Nichols tested yet another hypothesis laid down in the real/actual world versus alternate/hypothetical world. His hunch was if determinism is ensconced in an actual universe it would elicit mostly compatibilist responses; the alternate universe condition, on the other hand, would, by and large give a leeway for denial of free will and MR.

Subjects were randomly assigned either to the *actual* world condition or to the *alternate* world condition. Both the worlds were characterized by a deterministic description. Here determinism was couched in terms of genetic make-up and environmental influence. Thus it was stipulated in both the conditions that given that each decision in this world (*actual* or *alternate*) *has to happen the way it does*, any individual having the same genetic make-up and environmental influence would decide to embark on the same action because every decision is an invariable result of the past conditions- the past conditions here being genetic make-up and environmental influence. Subjects were then presented with three statements aimed at finding out how the subjects assess the relation between the deterministic condition of the world given to them and the possibility of free will and MR. They were asked to respond with various levels of agreement and disagreement.[6] We will here focus only on the MR scenario. The results are presented in Table 5 and 6.

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[6] The level of agreement or disagreement was based on a scale of 1 to 7 where 1 corresponded to complete disagreement, 4 corresponded to a neutral stance and the rating of 7 meant complete agreement. The numbers quoted in Table 5 and Table 6 indicate mean responses.

It is impossible for a person to be fully morally responsible	
Alternate Condition	**Actual Condition**
Greatly agree (5.06)	Greatly disagree (3.58)
Incompatibilist response	Compatibilist response

Table 5

People should still be morally blamed for committing crimes	
Alternate Condition	**Actual Condition**
Greatly disagree (3.67)	Greatly agree (5.35)
Incompatibilist response	Compatibilist response

Table 6

2.2. Nahmias' Findings [7]

Nahmias' experiments also produced varied responses on the question of the feasibility of moral responsibility under the shadow of determinism. He however has a different set of explanations for the emergence of the pattern of intuitions he encountered. We will first present the compatibilist responses produced by his version of a similar line of experiments cited in the foregoing.

a) Participants in this experiment were once again presented with the description of physical law determinism in the dressing of a "prophetic"

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[7] For details regarding Nahmias' empirical work on folk intuitions, vide Nahmias: 2005, 2006 and 2007 respectively.

supercomputer. The deterministic proviso was couched in the following manner:

A supercomputer with the knowledge of all the laws of nature and the present state of affairs of everything in the world at its disposal can predict any future event. Thus, at a specified time, say, on March 25, 2150 AD, the supercomputer predicts that 20 years later, on January 26, 2195 AD, a person called Jeremy will rob Fidelity Bank at 6 P.M. The question put to them was whether Jeremy would be morally responsible for his misdeed. They were also asked to judge the moral responsibility of Jeremy if the supercomputer prophesied at the same manner that the Jeremy would save a child. But there was a clear majority of vote supporting that MR on that condition would not be a utopian dream (vide Table 7).

But then Nahmias did not rule out the possibility that the dose of determinism had not been strong enough while making every effort to present the concept avoiding a petitio principii. He concedes that as a result, participants were perhaps "more focused on the fact that Jeremy's actions were predicted by the supercomputer than the fact that the prediction was made based on deterministic laws". Although, he thinks "it would still be an important result that most people do not judge such *predictability* to conflict with free will and responsibility".

Is Jeremy morally responsible for his acts?	
Robbing a bank	Yes- 83%
Saving a child	Yes- 88%

Table 7

b) In the next experiment, therefore, participants were presented with an explicit description of determinism. The scenario read:

Fred and Barney are two identical twins living in a world where the beliefs and values of every person are *caused completely by the combination of one's genes and one's environment*. Now one day their mother put them

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for adoption. Fred is adopted by the Jerksons and Barney is adopted by the Kindersons.

In Fred's case, his genes and his upbringing by the selfish Jerkson family have caused him to value money above all else and to believe it is OK to acquire money however you can. In Barney's case, his (identical) genes and his upbringing by the kindly Kinderson family have caused him to value honesty above all else and to believe one should always respect others' property. Both Fred and Barney are intelligent individuals who are capable of deliberating about what they do.

One day Fred and Barney each happen to find a wallet containing $1000 and the identity of the owner (neither man knows the owner). Each man is sure there is nobody else around. After deliberation, Fred Jerkson, because of his beliefs and values, keeps the money. After deliberation, Barney Kinderson, because of his beliefs and values, returns the wallet to its owner. Given that, in this world, one's genes and environment completely cause one's beliefs and values, it is true that if Fred had been adopted by the Kindersons, he would have had the beliefs and values that would have caused him to return the wallet; and if Barney had been adopted by the Jerksons, he would have had the beliefs and values that would have caused him to keep the wallet.

Once again there were more participants expressing the belief that it would be the agent himself who would be responsible for what they did despite their genetic makeup and upbringing over which they had no control (vide Table 8). That is, the responses of the majority of the participants in this experiment also bordered upon compatibilism.

Is Fred morally responsible?	Is Barney morally responsible?
Yes- 60%	Yes- 64%

Table 8

c) However, Nahmias et al found pre-eminently incompatibilist responses too. Just as Nichols and Knobe exposed their subjects to abstract/

concrete or real/ alternate scenarios that ended up in anomalous pattern of responses, Nahmias hoped to witness the same kind of responses by exposing his subjects to Neuro-reductionistic world versus Psychological-deterministic world scenarios. He also varied these two scenarios on the dimension of alternate world /real world conditions together with the concrete/abstract primer. That is participants were asked to judge responsibility in:

  a) A real Neuro-reductionistic world (to an abstract question)

  b) A real Psychological-deterministic world (to an abstract question)

  c) An alternate Neuro-reductionistic world (to an abstract question)

  d) An alternate Psychological-deterministic world (to an abstract question)

  e) An alternate Neuro-reductionistic world (to a concrete question)

  f) An alternate Psychological-deterministic world (to a concrete question)

Let us then discuss these scenarios one by one. But before that we would describe the Neuro-reductionistic world and the Psychological-deterministic world using Nahmias' phraseology.

Neuro-reductionistic world: Imagine that the neuroscientists in our universe or in an alternate universe (which was given an imaginary name Erta) have discovered that every single decision and action we perform is *completely caused by the particular chemical reactions and neurological processes occurring in our brain* at the time, and that these chemical reactions and neurological processes in the brain are completely caused by earlier events involving our particular genetic makeup and physical environment.

Psychological-deterministic world: Imagine that psychologists in our universe or in an alternate universe (Erta) have discovered that every single decision and action we perform is *completely caused by the particular thoughts, desires, and plans we have* at the time, and that these

thoughts, desires, and plans are *completely caused* by earlier events involving their particular genetic makeup and upbringing.

We will now present the results of a) and b). 81 subjects were given the description of the (real) Neuro-reductionistic world and another 71 subjects were presented with the description of the (real) Psychological-deterministic world. They were then asked to respond to the following questions with either "Yes," "No" or "I don't know".
1) Taking the above scenario for granted, do you think we are morally responsible for whatever we do?
 (2) Do you think we deserve to be given credit or blame for our actions?

Now, It was found that subjects were more inclined to perceive the real world, where choices were determined by mentalistic states like thoughts, desires etc. as conducive to holding one guilty and praiseworthy; the world where brain states were an established cause for choices was viewed far less amenable to moral accountability (see Table 9).

	The Brain World	The Mentalistic World
The inhabitants have MR	40.7%	88.6%
The inhabitants deserve blame	37.7%	85.7%
The inhabitants deserve praise	48.7%	85.9%

Table 9

Let us now turn to the results of c) and d). In this experiment, 90 subjects were presented with the Neuro-reductionistic world condition and 65 subjects were presented with the Psychological-deterministic world scenario. Participants on both the conditions were additionally told that these worlds are similar to our world but still differ from ours as a species called Ertans inhabit them. However, the findings by the neuroscientists (in

the Neuro-reductionistic world) and those by the psychologists (in the Psychological-deterministic world) remained the same. They were once again given the previous set of abstract questions aimed at drawing out their moral intuitions. And as can be seen in the Table below, subjects tended to be more compatibilist in the Psychological-deterministic world than in the Neuro-reductionistic world.

	The Brain World	The Mentalistic World
The Ertans have MR	52.4%	71.9%
The Ertans deserve blame	50.6%	70.3%
The Ertans deserve praise	67%	78.1%

Table 10

Finally, it is the turn for e) and f). Like Nichols, Nahmias also observed that a concrete description of an act censurable from a moral point of view or a morally commendable act mitigates the circumscribing effect of determinism, or as Nahmias would prefer to call, *mechanism*. In order to test the effect of concreteness of morally salient acts on judgments about their permissiveness, Nahmias presented his participants in both the Neuro-reductionistic Ertan world condition and the Psychological-deterministic Ertan world condition with an account of a morally good act (donating a large sum of money to an orphanage by an Ertan called Smith) and a morally reprehensible act (Smith killing his wife to keep alive his extra-marital relationship). Attention now would be drawn in particular to the responses to the morally condemnable act. Here Nahmias found a pattern of results that were in conformity with those in Nichols' concrete condition experiments. Subjects tended to overlook the mechanistic description of the psychological setup of the Ertans and maintained that they would be no less

culpable than if their choices were to be governed by their own intentional states. And those in the Psychological-deterministic world seemed to be ever more enthusiastic about holding the agent of the reprehensible act responsible. The responses are given in Table 11.

	Bad Act in the Brain World	Bad Act in the Mentalistic World	Good Act in the Brain World	Good Act in the Mentalistic World
The Ertans have MR	79.2%	81.1%	63%	68.5%
The Ertans deserve blame	74.3 %	85.6%	NA	NA
The Ertans deserve praise	NA	NA	70.5%	75%

Table 11

3. In Quest of the Origin of the Intuitional Dilemma

While combing through Nichols' work, we observed that Nichols used affect or moral sentiments (say, anger and sympathy) as a variable. And quite in accord with what he expected, affect-laden concrete conditions seemed to deflect lay intuition from taking into consideration any deterministic threat, giving rise to compatibilist responses. Incompatibilist responses however were found to be triggered by emotionally neutral scenarios. Following this, Nichols and Knobe found it plausible to posit a hybrid theory. As Roskies puts it:

> Nichols and Knobe postulate that people's conflicting intuitions in different moral scenarios are attributable to the operation of two different subsystems that govern reasoning about moral responsibility. One is harnessed in emotionally neutral cases such as the evaluation of abstract questions, which tends to produce judgments consistent with

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incompatibilist intuitions, and the other is triggered by emotional responses and leads to judgments in line with compatibilist intuitions. [8]

Nichols' affect-based mechanism is somewhat reminiscent of Peter Strawson's theory of non-detached, interpersonal *reactive attitudes* which the latter claims to be insulated from any deterministic threat. According to Strawson, an array of such human emotions as anger, gratitude, forgiveness, resentment etc. that enable us to participate in a human relationship, which he has famously given the nomenclature of *reactive attitudes*, is the springboard of compatibilist intuitions. We tend to excuse ourselves from these reactive attitudes, or rather it would be better to say that we begin to review our emotion-ignited attitudes only when it comes to determining the quantum of responsibility of "only a child", or "a hopeless schizophrenic" or a "perverted" or someone who "behaved purely compulsively"- the kinds of cases that demand the employment of what he calls the *objective attitudes*. But else he makes a strong point that:

> […] it has never been claimed that as a consequence of the truth of determinism […] it would follow […] that anyone who caused an injury *either* was quite simply ignorant of causing it *or* had acceptably overriding reasons for acquiescing reluctantly in causing it.[…] [9]

Echoing Strawson's view that moral sentiments are at the heart of an affective mechanism and consequently account for compatibilist tendencies, Nichols differs from Strawson in that, he proposes the view that incompatibilist reactions are also in a way provoked by moral emotions or rather the diminishing effect of them. Thus, his view is not in tandem with Strawson's Insulationism, but with the Enshrinement Theory propounded by the likes of Galen Strawson and Derk Pereboom. The Enshrinement theorists try to show that moral sentiments also entrench and drive incompatibilist intuitions in contradistinction to Insulationism that maintains

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[8] Roskies: 2006, p.422.
[9] Strawson: 1980, pp. 10-11.

that moral sentiments act as a bulwark against incompatibilist attitudes. In support of their claim, they draw our attention to such cases as the following:

A person called Harris engages himself in a strongly reprehensible crime like murder and is brought to book. On hearing the incident, our negative sentiments are naturally evoked. But as the trial continues, chilling stories of his turbulent past life, a bullying and uncaring family, financial suffering etc. begin to surface. The anger now starts to wear off and our reactive emotions become less pronounced. [10]

Nichols accepts the Enshrinement theory, as he finds it more tenable that incompatibilism is triggered by attenuation of moral anger.

But a difficulty seems to exist with an account of such origin of incompatibilist intuitions as proposed by the Enshrinement theorists. While the moral anger aimed at the original perpetrator diminishes and the perpetrator now becomes the cynosure of sympathy that only a victim of a violent crime can evoke, we find the new perpetrators in his family members and direct our initial moral resentment against them. But if we further find that the moral degradation of these people is also in a similar manner attributable to conditions that they had no hands on, then won't we be allured to pass on our incompatibilist feelings to yet another agent and the process would go on ad infinitum? Borrowing Dennett's words we are then urged to say that the buck has to stop somewhere.

One can nevertheless observe that Nichols successfully highlights a salient role played by affect (or the lack of it) in manipulating intuitions-compatibilist in the first case and incompatibilist in the other. On his interpretation, therefore, one possible factor responsible for all this conflict is affect; it is affect that makes all the difference. Indeed, Nichols toys with the following possibility:

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[10] Such concrete cases as the one mentioned in order to demonstrate how even incompatibilist feelings can be harboured by emotions are developed by Enshrinement theorists like Galen Strawson and Derk Pereboom. This particular scenario can be found in Nichols: 2007b.

Our results could be understood as a consequence of the variable involvement of emotion in the assessment of scenarios set in our own or in other worlds. One can think of alternate universes as more removed and less personally involving than our own, so that the very same scenarios would differentially involve emotional areas during processing of questions of moral responsibility. This differential involvement would explain. [11]

Nahmias, on the other hand, puts forward the claim that there is a misplaced apprehension and suspicion on the part of the folk that 1) our freedom to choose and act is overridden by physical and chemical processes in the brain- a paradigmatic case of a mechanistic phenomenon and 2) these mechanistic processes sort of reduce our power of choosing and deciding to nothing more than a *brainwork*. And it is the differentiation that they make between mentalistic processes and mechanistic processes that is responsible for all the conflicting intuitions.

To paraphrase, Nahmias is of the view that an intentional or a participant stance in line with Strawson's reactive attitudes evokes compatibilist responses whereas a mechanistic stance triggered by a fear or a *bypassing* threat that our intentional states, which we suppose to underlie our acts and decision making processes, are reduced to brain-powered, epiphenomenalistic states is responsible for incompatibilist intuitions. Nahmias introduces the notion of Mechanism Incompatibilism in contrast with Pure Incompatibilism. For him, folk as such, may not perceive any threat from determinism; what they count as antagonistic to their concept of free will and MR is a reductionistic description of themselves and their behavioural system. He, accordingly, attributes the low outcome of compatibilist responses on the Neuro-reductionistic scenario to this apprehension of reductionism. As he puts it:

> […] from philosophers to scientists to journalists to the ordinary "folk" we have surveyed—share the intuition that "if our brain makes us do

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[11] Nichols (forthcoming), p.9.

it, then we aren't morally responsible". We think that this intuition runs deep and that it is driven by people's tendency to view a reductive, mechanistic explanation of behavior—for instance, in the neuroscientific language of neural processes and chemical reactions—as inconsistent with a mentalistic (or intentional) explanation—in the psychological language of thoughts, desires, and plans. Because people also tend to ascribe free will (FW) and moral responsibility (MR) only to agents whose actions can be understood in terms of their mental states, people tend to see reductive mechanism as incompatible with FW and MR.[12]

Further, Nahmias seems to advance this view with all the more enthusiasm as in the Fred and Barney case as well as in the Supercomputer scenario participants were found to give a very lukewarm response to genetic determinism and physical law determinism respectively. However, having said that, he adds:

> […] that the claim that incompatibilism is intuitive to ordinary people rests on a failure to distinguish 'pure' incompatibilism (between determinism *per se* and free will) and 'derivative' incompatibilism (between deterministic *reductionism* and free will).[13]

But one might ask whether mentalistic notions are perpetually at loggerheads with mechanistic notions. Dennett once said that:

> The Intentional stance toward human beings, which is a precondition of any ascription of responsibility, *may* coexist with mechanistic explanations of their motions.[14]

We will, however, not enter into the arguments that Dennett subsequently offered, as it does not come within the purview of this paper. But, we can note that concurring with Dennett, Nahmias also says that

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[12] Nahmias: 2007, pp. 215-216.
[13] Nahmias: 2006, p. 230
[14] Dennett: 1982, p. 170

mechanistic system can also be purposive and, intentional systems. But, he has reason to believe that unprimed intuitions are not directed by such a belief, may be because our experience does not warrant that. Thus he says:

> […] when people adopt the mechanistic stance toward an agent (for instance, when primed by a description of decision-making in terms of neural processes), then they tend to disengage from the participant stance. And they tend to treat the mechanistic explanations as precluding mentalistic explanations. [15]

It may seem at this juncture, that Nichols and Nahmias are explaining the anomaly in intuitions from two very different expository frameworks. But signs of reconciliation, nevertheless, can be traced in both the positions. Nahmias, for instance, acknowledges the role of emotions in galvanizing judgments of MR, especially in accounting for those cases where despite a portrayal of a reductionistic description of human acts, compatibilist responses do not exactly put up a poor show (see Table 10 and Tale 11). He, however, seems to be more a supporter of an affective competence model. For him, emotional responses should be considered *enabling factors* that engage the cognitive processes that we employ from within the participant or intentional stance. Although he grants the possibility that the competence of affect may suffer a setback; that these emotion-driven cognitive processes may function in a sub-optimal way when we make abstract judgments about agents in general conditions.[16]

Again, like Nahmias, Nichols also suspects the "natural-ness" of incompatibilist responses, at least the kind found by Nahmias. He avers:

> The idea that our behavior is not caused by our mental states is truly, deeply disturbing. […] if our actions aren't caused by our mental states, then commonsense psychology is profoundly mistaken. We think that our actions are caused by what we intend, and our intentions are

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[15] Nahmias: 2007, pp.233-234.
[16] Nahmias: op. cit., p.235.

produced by our thoughts and wants. Epiphenomenalism trashes all of this.[17]

4. Postscript

The presentation of the folk-study on moral reasoning by Nichols and Nahmias, the two aficionados and champions of XP (experimental philosophy as it is fondly called) in tow, in the foregoing, has the following objective:

Laying bare the areas where philosophers irrespective of whether they cling on to the compatibilist view or to the Libertarian (agent-causationist as well as non-agent causationist) standpoint can go wrong and thus alerting them to the exercise of "exercising some temperance", so to speak, even as they claim that their view about free will and MR is more intuitive. In fact Nichols and Nahmias both form a consortium of sorts in sharing the view that this descriptive project of plumbing folk intuitions and drawing a parallel between folk beliefs concerning choices and responsibilities and the rationales concerning the same, ambitiously put forward by their philosophical counterparts has an enormous bearing on the normative or prescriptive question. They certainly believe *a fortiriori* that work on meta-ethical issues and practical moral philosophy will be enlightened, given the wealth of data on the asymmetric nature of folk predispositions about the issues of moral accountability they have garnered. Now, if the folk display a wavering attitude, when it comes to ascertaining culpability, in the light of a circumscribing portrayal of our biological and psychological makeup, then do we need to rethink and revamp our present moral practices of reward and retributive punishment? Both, Nichols and Nahmias point out the importance of the findings of their empirical research in addressing this normative or prescriptive question. The normative question also gives rise to two warring camps - that of the Revisionists or Revolutionists versus the Conservatists. Revolutionists maintain that we need to embark on a thorough review of the existing moral practices lest the

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[17] Nichols: 2006, p.310.

folk intuitions about MR turn out to be a distorted case of moral judgment. The supporters of Conservatism, on the other hand, believe in holding on to the moral practices. Focusing on the debate, however, should better be left for another occasion. We may, nonetheless observe that whether it is the affective competence or affective bias or a natural participant attitude as fomented by the reactive attitudes driving compatibilist responses, assigning responsibility is a task that involves our emotionally intertwined practical experience. Hence, perhaps there is no immediate need for any Revisionism.

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