

A New Dynamism for Philosophy. Chapter 7: Freedom and Responsibility.

Key Questions: *What is free will and do we possess it? Does materialism support a defensible account of freedom or does it commit its adherents to determinism? Do Idealism or experience-based philosophies offer an account of freedom and responsibility that is independent of causal influence?*

What are moral judgements? What justifies us in making and enforcing them? How ought we to live our lives and to what purpose? Is there such a thing as objective moral truth and by what higher standards should we judge the legitimacy of authority?

The question of free will occupies a pivotal position in modern philosophy. It enables us to move away from the study of experience and reality into the realm of human conduct. In doing so we cross the boundary away from the ontological and epistemological branches of philosophy and into the philosophies of action and ethics. These last include a study of the relationship between individuals and society, the rules by which society is regulated and how they might be legitimised.

The move from consciousness to action is bound to offer the prospect of an added dimension of interest. Thinking devoted to practical issues should have some practical significance, and the potential to resolve issues or dilemmas. Questions of an epistemological nature hold out no such promise, since they have always addressed the foundations of all knowledge rather adding to it or considering how it should best be deployed. Nonetheless epistemological questions occupy an important place in ethical thinking, because the position we adopt on many ethical questions will be anticipated by our epistemological stance. Whatever an idealist or empiricist or dualist theory tells us about the self, or the relationship between mind and body, for instance, will inevitably influence the stand it takes on ethical questions, such as the nature of free will or the extent of our obligations to society. Indeed the extent of this influence has ensured the subordination of ethics to epistemology throughout the history of philosophy.

At an everyday level there is universal acceptance that we possess a measure of free will. We all make choices, implement decisions, and can recognise when we do so without threat or coercion. The level of freedom we enjoy will vary widely according

to our identity and circumstances. Drugs and unconsciousness suspend our capacity to act freely for example. So do imprisonment or other physical constraint, but these leave some residual scope for free action, such as whether to struggle, protest, or merely to contemplate attempting these.

We also accept that freedom of action is never unlimited. Our bodies impose physical constraints on all our endeavours, and predispose us to some actions such as breathing regularly, or satisfying appetites such as hunger. Most also agree that some predispositions are inherited or are present at birth, such as genetic disorders, or the possession of a special talent. To some extent therefore the characteristics that define our individuality are not freely chosen; they are not the result of any decision making process. A well-known metaphor encapsulates this double aspect to our lives. Fate deals us a hand of cards. We can choose how we play the hand, but cannot change the cards dealt to us.

The problem of free will appears when we try to locate a foundation for this understanding of ourselves that sits happily with an ontological /epistemological position on consciousness and reality. We need to define an arena of choice that is free from the causal influences that produce material events, and yet that is not so removed from them to make free actions appear random or arbitrary. Free will gives us the scope to initiate or originate a chosen action from amongst alternatives, without the choice emerging as the only possible or inevitable outcome.

Materialism is bound to feel the problem of free will most keenly, and the most common response is to embrace a philosophy of action called determinism. This is the view that all actions have causes, and are initiated or produced by other material events taking place either inside or outside the body. In theory at least, scientific investigation should be able to locate the causes of all actions, and so reach the position where it is possible both to predict and control all human behaviour. Accepting determinism seems to commit a materialist to a single inevitable future that will be caused by events in the present and those preceding them in the past.

Determinism is an anti-libertarian doctrine inasmuch as it seems to rule out any scope for freedom of choice. If all actions comprise material events or are determined by material causes then, because no one can change the laws by which material events

influence one another, it follows that our actions must lie beyond our control. We become victims of our own material make-up and the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We might think that we have freely chosen a course of action, but it will be events beyond our control that impel us in that direction. No doubt we can isolate circumstances that motivate an action, or neural events that correspond to a decision to act, but when the outcome is inevitable, the supposition of choice is a spurious one.

Although determinism appears to be incompatible with free choice, it is more accommodating to freedom in a weaker but distinct sense. Freedom thus diluted represents simply an absence of constraint or compulsion. Provided we accept what Fate deals out to us, and we accept its impositions, then we might suppose we enjoy the freedom of a voluntary action. Speculative ruminations on choice need not detain us here. All that is required is a resigned and philosophical attitude towards one's actions! Determinism in its weaker guise comes close to Fatalism, a doctrine in which the future, in the form of Fate or Destiny, becomes irresistible. Fatalism is associated more with an attitude of stoical resignation in the face of events, and harks back to the religious beliefs of Ancient Greece and Rome, where control of a mortal's future was entrusted to the superior and presumably freely exercised powers of immortal gods. Some of the Greek myths and dramas, such as "Oedipus Rex", illustrate the futility of resisting a predicted Fate that is always realised, no matter what efforts are made to divert its course.

Determinism subverts the everyday understanding of a free will that customarily implies choice and scope for decision-making. So it is not surprising that those who choose to be swept along with it are a minority, albeit one that is substantial, growing and influential. Nonetheless determinism can appear more convincing by linking its understanding of actions to the contingency or accidental appearance that characterises all natural events. Although it may be true that every material event is determined, it is still possible for a determinist to give sense to the idea that fate might have taken a different turn. We might say of a meteorite that landed in the Pacific, for instance, that had it landed in a populated area, it could have caused many casualties. As no meteorite has a choice in the matter of where it lands, the suggestion that it might have landed anywhere other than where it did must appear to contradict a determinist position. Even so, determinism can still make sense of the suggestion by drawing a distinction between the actual

course of events, and our ability to predict that course. Our limited knowledge rarely guarantees us a single and definite predicted outcome for events such as these, so a range of possible outcomes, each with a designated probability or likelihood, is usually the best that we can produce. To say that the meteorite might have landed elsewhere is to suggest an outcome that is compatible with our existing knowledge and the predictions we can derive from it. It also suggests that there is a likelihood that other similar meteorites will land elsewhere within a wide area.

Here we have a sense of contingency that a determinist can apply to actions as well as events. So complex are the neurological workings of the human being that we will probably never understand them fully and find ourselves able to predict all human actions with accuracy. Accordingly it makes perfect sense for a determinist to argue that, although an action of ours is determined, we might have acted otherwise. Freedom of choice is still an illusion, but at least the language in common use associated with that freedom still has a place.

An unfortunate implication for a determinist position however is that no one could legitimately hold us responsible for any of our actions. This is because praise and blame are only meaningful if they attach to actions that genuinely might not have occurred. If they are inevitable then there is nothing that anyone could have done to prevent them, and praise or blame becomes pointless. If encouragement or discouragement is to work as an inducement, we must presume that we can influence the direction of events. Some determinists ally themselves with a pragmatic ethic in which incentives induce good behaviour, and enforce the moral standards that stabilise and strengthen society. Yet if such an inducement causes the desired action, then the agent has lost control over the decision to act and the outcome becomes inevitable, and ethical considerations no longer apply. And if there is ever any suggestion that we might consider alternative inducements as policy options, then free will re-emerges. The presumption of free choice has to support any moral framework worthy of the name.

The determinist conception of freedom is altogether suspect in any event. It is conveyed in negative terms as the lack of compulsion or the absence of coercion in carrying out an action. Accordingly, so long as we act voluntarily, without let or hindrance, our actions remain free. The difficulty with this definition is that it fails to

distinguish compulsion from manipulation, classifying some actions as free when clearly they are not. Applying the definition, if we are controlling a person's willingness to assent to an action, then he is acting freely. But were the consent obtained by underhand means, using deception or drugs perhaps, then the consensus would be that he is not acting freely. All that the determinist definition requires for free action is that the agent willingly embraces the forces controlling his actions. Some modification to the definition is clearly necessary.

A modified definition must allow some actions to be coerced and involuntary when the agent willingly accedes to their performance. Being prevented from acting otherwise, the agent is not really acting freely, even if he believes otherwise. When coerced or compelled an agent's control passes to another power able to prevent or deflect the execution of a voluntary action and, in cases of manipulation, to bring about its willing performance. Once freed from such compulsion the agent gains control again. At a common sense level our understanding of these actions is unproblematic. The opportunity and the discretion to carry out a different course of action have been restored, leaving open a freely chosen course of action. But there remains a difficulty for the determinist position, because materialism is incompatible with the language of free choice here used to express a common sense view. The determinist version of free will founders because an account of compulsion presumes the operation of free choice. Compulsion can only be seen to operate **in opposition** to the course of a freely chosen action. It is the power to prevent a freely chosen course of action.

In a similar fashion determinism fails to deal satisfactorily with voluntary actions. Its definition only accords freedom to those actions that are free from compulsion, and takes no account of any attitude or opinion that might accompany one that is compulsory. Again our everyday understanding of freedom allows us to be free to choose to do our duty, even if we are compelled to do it. There is a sense in which we are free to pursue what is required of us, and indeed to set about it zealously. If we have *chosen* not to resist what we are being compelled to do are we said to be acting voluntarily. As this is a freedom that involves choice, determinism won't tolerate it. Perhaps determinism could accept an action that is both free and compulsory when it is set against the consequences that follow from trying to evade it. Then we could freely follow a compulsory course of action in order to avoid the

alternative and less attractive consequences of non-compliance. If we resist arrest, for example, then force may be deployed to compel our removal. Compliance may now be seen by the determinist as both voluntary and compulsory, because we decide to accompany the arresting officer voluntarily. In doing so, we follow the line of lowest resistance and pursue the least undesirable option. But again, how can determinism represent this scenario without entertaining the options or alternatives, and taking the decisions, that its conception of freedom disallows? Only by attempting to exercise our freedom of choice will we discover whether a course of action is compulsory. It is only by tentatively testing our freedom that we discover its limits. The limited freedom of voluntary actions is not enough to sustain a comprehensive determinist theory of freedom, because it only operates in an arena where freedom of choice extends. Determinism consequently appears incompatible with any kind of freedom. Evasion and denial are optional responses but this has been a compelling objection to all materialist philosophy.

Idealism and other experience-based philosophies resist all forms of determinism and embrace a libertarian doctrine of freedom. In its extreme forms it appears that all actions must result from free choice, because choosing or decision-making are conscious non-material events that lie beyond the influence of the material world, and cannot be caused by events there. Undoubtedly considerations of material circumstances and conditions influence our decision-making but, for a libertarian, this is because we have already freely chosen to allow them to feature there. Prison walls only become a barrier, for instance, in relation to a freely chosen desire for liberty. Libertarians sometimes refer to this sort of fundamental drive as a project. Less extreme forms of libertarianism will permit the influence of mental events to act as causes of or obstacles to our actions, though whether they manifest or undermine the expression of free choice is a matter for some argument.

Whatever the attractions of libertarianism, it is clearly going to generate controversy when explaining the compulsion that features in any discussion of determinism. Actions that we are compelled to perform are not likely to fit comfortably into a libertarian mould, if only because they will no longer be so easily distinguishable from their unfettered counterparts. In addition, if the doctrine makes every action, whether compelled or not, a

derivative of a freely chosen project, then we become responsible for every action, including those performed under compulsion. Libertarianism makes us the final arbiters upon the direction of our every movement and indeed upon any decision to do nothing and refrain from action. Well-known Libertarians such as Sartre are not joking when they suggest that we are compelled to be free.

Freedom itself is also a problematic concept for the libertarian. Extreme versions insist that decision-making must be not be weighted by any pre-conditions or pre-dispositions that might incline us to favour one alternative over another. That would be to allow interference in the free exercise of choice, and admit causal influences to subvert it. So take a simple dilemma: whether or not to take sugar in tea. Deciding not to, because of a desire to cut down on calorie consumption, will not be, they would argue, be consistent with a free decision. The decision has been pre-judged and the choice anticipated by an earlier decision concerning calories. This earlier commitment constrains it. To be truly free, therefore none of the available options can recommend itself more forcefully than any of the others. Indeed none can recommend itself at all, because that would be to allow a deterministic influence into the decision making process. Such is the extreme libertarian view.

So what remains of free choice? If we are in no way inclined towards any of the available options, then the choice of one simply becomes random or arbitrary. Prevented from following the inclination to pursue our preferences, we are left with no choice at all. Hence a paradox and the problem of free will. As we understand the concept, freedom of choice consists precisely in possessing the opportunity, ability, inclination and the option to pursue our preferred objectives. Determinism cannot recognise this sense of freedom at all, but the indeterminism of experience-based theories cannot allow anything to influence the decision-making process. It is consequently forced to operate in a vacuum, from which issues only random or arbitrary acts. We could consider less extreme forms of experience-based theories, perhaps. These allow emotions and other conscious processes to act as causes that will influence decision-making. But there is dilemma here over whether these determine an action or not, and this reopens the debate. Whether these conscious events are themselves caused or not is another question and one that simply starts a regress. The seat of the problem in my view is the form of the debate itself. All parties define freedom in opposition to

causation, and determinism is defined in terms of it. Dynamism tackles the issue quite differently.

For a dynamic theory, freedom of choice hinges on the ability to exert our own causal influence upon the world. Exercising a causal influence in the pursuit of one's own agenda is perfectly compatible with freedom. Nor does it commit us to determinism. The issue at the heart of the free will debate is not **what**, but rather **who** controls of our actions.

The reason, I suggest, for a centuries long debate that has polarised around determinism and libertarianism is a misunderstanding of the nature of causality. This is central to a dynamic philosophy and was introduced in earlier chapters. Impeding both an understanding of the self and of personal freedom is a misconception that divides cause and effect into separately identified classes of events, and then postulates an elusive causal influence to re-establish the links between them. Dynamism has proposed a new perspective, and sees events themselves as the product and manifestation of influence. It represents the history of the Universe as the sum total and distribution of the energy it contains, and the influence it exerts to produce events. Causal influence is now represented as the power to expend energy and make things happen in the first place. So viewed it becomes possible to rescue causality from endless sequences of pre-determined events and restore to it the power both to initiate events and sustain them in sequences. In a dynamic universe it is perfectly possible for uncaused events to occur, and the beginning of the Universe could well be a good example of just such an event. The traditional Newtonian model of the Universe as a succession of arrangements of ball bearing type particles that obey timeless and universal laws may yet be true, but can no longer be assumed without demonstration.

Released from the polarity of determinism and indeterminism, it became possible in Chapter Two to recognise the self as an organising or appropriating presence in its own right: one that is able to impose an agenda upon reality and exert its own influence there. The self has the power to shape the course of events in the direction of its own priorities or objectives. In laying claim to reality, or rather parts of it, in a possessive or appropriating manner, the self affirms its identity. Its identity becomes individualised and progressively sharpened as the encounters it instigates, or is in turn subjected to, bring it into contact with other selves. These are

processes by no means exclusive to human beings, but familiar to all conscious life forms, and extend vicariously beyond. Whereas libertarianism sees the self as a spiritual entity and determinism as a material organism, dynamism locates such spirituality as we do possess in a capacity to harness our material bodies towards spiritually enriching activities involving thought, imagination, creativity and so on.

Dynamism can therefore offer a different understanding of freedom as a starting point for a discussion of free will. Freedom is not an extra component to an action that supplements the ability, opportunity and inclination to act. A free self will find itself in unfettered control of its own destiny and able to carry out its agenda within reality until it meets or invites effective opposition from others. It is the undisputed possession of an action, the project of which it forms part, and the consequences that follow that mark out the fundamental sense of freedom that dynamism promotes. So this is the first leg of a dynamic conception of freedom. Free choice is possible because the individual can be his or her own source of influence on the course of events. A dynamic theory allows conscious beings to become a controlling influence on events and take independent possession of their own lives.

Of course there are limits to the freedom of us all. There are physical constraints to my body that find me unable, for instance, to realise my ambition to open the batting for England. I personally would hesitate to say that this inability curtails my **freedom** of action. It just represents one of the limits within which my freedom is able to operate. But I am happy to accept this as a curtailment of freedom if this is thought preferable. More importantly for freedom perhaps are the constraints that we may place upon each other's freedom of manoeuvre. Where actions and projects compete, or come into conflict with one another is where the issue of individuality and freedom is decided. How much freedom we have is a measure of how successful we can be in promoting or championing our own or others' priorities in an arena of conflicting aspirations and ambitions. The extent to we are allowed to be the authentic authors of our own actions is the measure of the extent to which we are truly free,

This dynamic sense of freedom should be familiar to us all. It is all about getting our own way! But it is far removed from the model considered by rival philosophies in the free will debate. It doesn't

dwell immediately on the question of how or whether an action is caused, and is principally concerned with the scope for action created by ourselves and extended to us by others. Let us see if it withstands a more rigorous examination.

At a first glance this appears to place freedom on a selfish base, and seems to promote the unattractive idea that its fruits are limited to those who pursue their own individual interests and recklessly brush aside all opposition. Not so. Chapter Two devoted some time to showing how the discovery or realisation of self-interest is only possible in opposition to those of others and that it is easily possible to maintain the voluntary interest of an individual in line with the joint interests of those organised into a society. Indeed individuals who cooperate in order to enforce a consensus are bound to represent a stronger force than the isolated individual who opposes it. If a society can preserve the voluntary allegiance of its members in securing and maintaining an area of common concern, their freedom remains intact, and will flourish along with its effectiveness.

One advantage of a dynamic definition of freedom is that there is no incompatibility between an action being free and its being caused. It makes perfect sense to suggest that feeling tired made me think, or caused me to think, about going to bed early. The main condition for the action to be free is that the desire that brings it about is authentically my own. Nor is it inevitable that the cause produces the effect of making me turn in early for the night. I am perfectly free to try to resist the effects of tiredness and continue working. Again the desire to counter the influence of tiredness, with exercise and refreshment for example, needs only to be willingly endorsed as mine for free actions to issue.

Determinism founders when it tries to make the distinction between voluntary actions that are free and those that are not. Drugs and hypnosis are often introduced in this connection to suggest examples of actions that are not free, and yet are willingly endorsed by an unsuspecting agent. For dynamism, this is a question that investigation can answer. We are looking for an inauthentic action, and evidence of manipulation by other agents. If we suspect that there has been manipulation involving drugs or hypnosis, then we need to look further. Freedom and responsibility are closely associated, and the problems may become complicated. How free and therefore how responsible is someone who, for example, consumes an excess of alcohol and

becomes more suggestible as a result? The answer will depend upon how much was drunk and with what purpose, and requires a further examination of the circumstances. But we should not assume that the complexity of an investigation will prevent us obtaining answers to the questions it poses.

Deciding whether an action is free may be difficult, but the difficulties are practical rather than theoretical matters of principal. The difficulties may be theoretical for Determinism and doubt has to be cast upon its viability as a philosophical theory in consequence. Dynamism at least is able to suggest the ways in which we can resolve the practical difficulties that may impede an investigation. The tools for deciding are available even if the evidence is not. Clearly it is a good idea to have some grounds for suspecting that freedom is being at all compromised if we are to proceed. Otherwise we may presume, without fear of contradiction, that an action with every appearance of being free truly is so.

Dynamism is not constrained to take a polarised view of actions as either wholly free or wholly determined, and is able to endorse and complement our usual balanced appraisal of behaviour. It is customary for us to regard people and actions as more or less free according to circumstances. To decide just how free, we need to locate the possible active encouragements and constraints, and accord to them due weight. Many interesting debates are likely to emerge if we begin to discuss, for instance, the effect of a child's education or upbringing on their freedom of action, or try to decide an age, or a stage, at which they are ready for the privileges and responsibilities of adulthood. It might not produce immediate answers, but a dynamic position should at least enable us to make a positive contribution to these debates, and find itself reinforced in consequence.

A dynamic theory still has some way to go however. It has also to demonstrate whether we genuinely possess free **choice** when the circumstances favour free action or whether, as determinism states, every decision is determined and every outcome a foregone conclusion. It is one thing to remove all impediments to an action as a condition for individual freedom. But it is another to show that the unrestrained self, apparently controlling its actions, is doing other than blindly following an underlying series of impulses or instincts. Determinism may coherently argue for a sense in which we are victims of our own psychological profile.

If Determinism is right then every action must have a predictable outcome. When the right causal pre-conditions are in place, then a predictable action inevitably follows. But it is important to make it clear, at a psychological level, that the predictability of any action is not really sufficient grounds for withdrawing freedom of choice. Most of us predictably cave in to all sorts of temptation when they are presented to us, but a decision to succumb to bribery, for instance, is still one that has been freely chosen. The same applies to sequences of actions that could indeed extend to an entire life history. Most of us know someone very well, and are able to anticipate their preferences when we present them with any sort of choice. When others confirm our well-grounded predictions, they offer us evidence that confirms, not a determinist interpretation, but the view that the preference was indeed one that was freely chosen.

If determinism is able genuinely to undermine free choice at a psychological level therefore, it will have to be more ambitious. It will have to propose and engineer situations where choice is subverted, and a course of action accurately follows a predicted line that is consistent with influences other than choice. The action must run counter to free choice whilst seeming to comply with it. An example of this might involve a hypnotist who suggests to a man that, when he is released from hypnosis, he sits in one particular chair. Accordingly, when he is released, he is then asked to choose any from a number of seats. Very often he will go to the predicted seat, believing he has freely chosen to do so, and yet without knowing why. Were determinism able to reveal an invasive network of similar surrogate forces that pre-dispose all our choices in such predictable patterns, then perhaps it may claim to have subverted free choice altogether. But of course it cannot because examples such as the one given are unusual and remarkable occurrences.

The difficulty for determinism is that it has very little force once we reunite agent and action in a dynamically understood conception of causality. In examples such as the hypnotist scenario, the subject is either kept in ignorance of the predictions, or is informed. If the subject has no conscious knowledge of the predictions, then he has been the unwitting victim of the hypnotist, and so the action does not qualify as free in any event. Were all our actions so engineered by manipulative individuals, then we most certainly

would not be free, but the onus falls on the determinist to show that this is indeed the case. Which of course it isn't.

If the subject is informed of the predictions, then he must now decide whether to go along with the prediction, or whether to attempt to resist it. Whatever the decision, freedom of choice can help decide it. In opting to go along with the prediction, free choice has been exercised unless there is evidence to suppose otherwise. But there is also the option to resist the prediction. The subject may understandably wish to reassert his individuality or may simply want to restore his actions back towards some original objective or priority. If the resistance succeeds, then he will have imposed anew his agenda upon reality and re-taken the initiative. If he fails then admittedly he still has not broken the shackles of the hypnotist, but there will be signs of some struggle or resistance to the controlling hypnotic power. And from a dynamic point of view this is precisely what free choice consists in. It grapples with the instincts and inclinations that impel us in order to appropriate them and lend them an authentic direction. Determinism cannot eliminate this process without destroying our very identity as human beings and conscious, living creatures. Determinism has simply been unable to grasp this central feature of conscious life. The dynamic point of view might seem to suggest that there is a regress here, and that the drive for authenticity is in turn the product of causal influences that subvert free choice. But this line of argument is self-defeating for determinism because, as Chapter Two argues, it leaves itself unable to locate any self that is subject to determining influences it promotes.

If determinism cannot work at a psychological level then its best hope is to reassert its links with a materialist philosophy and look for underlying causes for all our actions. These would be in terms of our biology as organisms, the chemistry of our cells and the physics of the atoms of which we are all composed. Since, according to materialism, everything that we are composed of at any given time consists of an arrangement of molecules and cells, it seems fair to infer that the life history of each of us is a succession of such states. It also seems reasonable to infer that our progress from one state to the next comprises a series of chemical reactions and physical processes. These are changes that we can fully document and explain using laboratory techniques, enabling us in theory to predict accurately all future states using these techniques alone. A materialist conception of ourselves implies that physical and chemical actions and reactions

control all our actions, leaving no scope for freedom of choice. We appear to possess free choice, but the appearance is an illusion. I have no wish to promote the view that we are composed of something other than material processes, but the issue is still one of whether this fact is enough to deprive us of our freedom of action.

Both materialism and the determinism that associates with it have grown from a mechanistic conception of the Universe that assumes that the occurrence of every event has some cause in another event, and that allows every future state of the Universe to be predictable from the knowledge of its present state. But it is no longer clear that this is even a theoretical possibility, since quantum theory proposes that there are sub-atomic events that are undetermined, and that chance and the laws of probability currently represent our best means of predicting their appearance. So determinism rests upon an assumption that it is perfectly entitled to make, but one that is no longer wholeheartedly endorsed by the conclusions of scientific research.

Such scientific developments offer scant comfort for a non-determinist however, since the prospect of random and unconnected events underpinning our actions is as alien to the notion of free will as that of inviolable chains of causality binding them. If we are going to dismiss determinism then we need to attack its central governing idea, whereby the natural sciences offer us the only accurate means of understanding, controlling and predicting human behaviour.

It may not be important, but it is unlikely that a determinist could draw upon examples to illustrate this more extreme version of his theory at the present time. One reason for this is that the simplest actions of the human body are so complex that we remain a long way from being able to catalogue all the changes that take place as an action occurs, and still further from beginning to use them to generate predictions. Yet, more importantly, it is doubtful whether such a programme could ever vindicate the determinist cause. If a body movement is to be recognised as an action of any kind, then it needs to be understood in terms of its purpose, and significance, and these will reflect the ways in which the agent and others conceive the situation of which the action forms part. The same body movement in a different situation, or repeated in the same situation, will produce different actions on each occasion. It is only by engaging as conscious beings in a situation that we can read

and ascertain the nature of the actions taking place there. Laboratory science probes reality at a level beneath the point where such distinctions can be made.

In order for determinism to proceed it will have to demonstrate that it can reconstruct and read an action from a scientific examination of its atomic components alone. And yet it seems unlikely that any situation could be identified with a single arrangement or sequence of atomic events. There are alternative ways of conceiving any situation, and subtly different ways of executing one and the same action always seem to be available. Actions possess a cultural context that cannot be read into an arrangement of atoms or molecules. If we are ever able to dissect a location where people have been active, and examine it exclusively and comprehensively at an atomic level, we will always, I suggest, find ourselves at a loss to extrapolate and give a full account of what had gone on there. Forensic science is useful in helping to reconstruct a scenario, but contributes only a part towards a full understanding. It doesn't set the scene for an action, nor tell us precisely very much about what did happen. It can tell us nothing about the reasons for it happening, and little on what the consequences might be. And without being able to understand actions at this level, persisting with the claim that they are predictable is an untenable as well as an unsubstantiated claim.

It may be that we are destined to destroy ourselves completely in a series of nuclear explosions so powerful that all that will remain of humankind is a precise arrangement of gas molecules and fine ash particles; each one with a unique composition and location that has been determined by the physical and chemical history of the World before it. It may also be true that, whatever we try to do to prevent this fate, we are powerless to alter the inevitability of this unique outcome. All our so-called free struggles and endeavours have precisely the same result. Since we are nothing but biological organisms, then the belief that our actions can ever change the future to prevent this outcome is surely futile. But we could not read the history of the World in a detailed examination of the gases and ashes we leave behind. Even the simplest questions concerning how we could have allowed ourselves to reach this point cannot be answered. As free conscious beings the questions we ask and the understanding we seek reflects our concerns/agenda as free living things, and the inextricable belief that we can change our surroundings in dealing with those concerns/agenda. Every action we take presumes this belief. It is

not inevitable that we or our descendants will destroy themselves in such a fashion. The supposition is no more than a hypothesis. Nor will we ever have the knowledge necessary to draw this as an inevitable conclusion. Whatever will be will be, whatever that might be. What we know is that that we can continue to influence each other to reflect our concerns and seek to prevent any such end befalling us.

In defending free will from determinism, it is probably not worth taking issue with the assumption that every situation comprises a complex of physical and chemical states, and that only chemical or physical changes are responsible for producing a new situation. More important for a discussion of free will is whether any action can be identified with such a complex, and whether predictions based on actions so conceived can offer lucid explanations of the causes and direction of human conduct. After all it is actions and the ability to predict them that is central to determinism. At the human and social level of immediate interest we need to understand situations in terms of the concepts that we as conscious beings can readily recognise and supply. Here we determine whether a situation represents a suitable arena for the promotion of our interests and how we might best secure them. In other words we decide how best to act. Because we are human beings we inevitably have an interest in operating here, and cannot help but assess every new situation from the action-oriented perspectives our humanity supplies us. Even if the future is determined and predictable at the physical and chemical level, it will still take a person with an understanding obtained at the level of active involvement who will be needed to read the situation it may represent.

The fact that we need to concede the existence of free will, as a practical imperative, still fails to dispose of determinism however. For some philosophers free will persists as a belief, but only as an illusion. It exists as a guiding principal or a “form of life” that is justified pragmatically, but which has no sustainable foundation in reality. This is probably a view with which many concept-based philosophies would also concur. Free will on this view exists simply as a convenient assumption. It helps us, whether as individuals or as a species, to steer and understand a course through life, but nothing more.

Dynamism of course disagrees with this view. Free will and the actions it produces form a part of the human and social fabric of

our lives and so belong to reality. All discoveries result from applying our faculties for perception and action in this arena. In pursuing our ambitions there we engage the forces that reality commands. Dynamically conceived the success or failure of these endeavours tells us something of the extent of reality and what it truly contains. Human beings in possession of free will represent an indispensable part of the social dimension to human existence that we will have to recognise and negotiate with. The freedom of others is as real as other people and their lives. Inconveniently, freedom does not make other people predictable and amenable to the fulfilment our own aspirations. Getting to know others and learning to live compatibly alongside them requires us to acknowledge and manage their interests alongside our own. It demands life skills. A thorough grounding in particle physics is a valuable thing, but will do little to help us acquire such skills. To suppose that free will is a self-deluding "form of life" is really a capitulation. It acknowledges the necessity for free will whilst admitting defeat in the quest to locate it. Dynamism has not had to travel too far to find it operating at the core of all conscious activity.

The attempt to argue for a shadowy semblance of free will in this guise forms part of a grander plan for some philosophers and scientists. It is an important compromise proposal with a twofold aim. First it aims to do away with the idea of the mind as a spiritual source of action in favour of an evolutionary and biological explanation for consciousness and its emergence. Second it opposes determinism and seeks to maintain and defend our everyday notions of choice and decision making, and the moral framework on which they depend. The suggestion is that, if we look at the evolution of ever more complex biological actions and interactions in simple life forms, then there comes a point where it becomes more convenient and useful to regard them as intentional systems of cells that are pursue living objectives. The complexity and subtlety of the social lives of humans represent only an extension of these same processes. Examples include the emergence of language, the manner in which we can calculate and anticipate likely responses from others, or the delicate balance we achieve between an appraisal of group and individual interests. These are processes and activities that evolve and succeed because they promote our interests, and so it becomes convenient and useful if we acknowledge and apply them ourselves.

As Descartes tried to do over three centuries earlier, evolutionary theory attempts to preserve consciousness and free will in a period of rapid scientific progress, but fails because it can't substantiate a sense of freedom beyond its mere appearance. Evolutionary theory suggests that ideas and practices are adopted, not as the result of deliberation and choice, but rather because their enactment has succeeded and benefited those best able to implement them. It creates the impression that they simply appear ready-made for us and independently of consciousness. So the theory hopes to bypass the problems that consciousness would raise were it allowed an instrumental role in shaping its output. But consciousness can't be sidelined and ignored, and won't just go away. The evolutionary model is being misapplied in a vain attempt to sideline consciousness. New ideas and practices do not behave like biological organisms that have thrown up a profusion of random variations over countless generations. Their production is focussed and directed rather than arbitrary. The ability to think and learn are far more effective aids to selection than Darwin's natural alternative! Human history is moving far too quickly for random generation to be a viable parallel explanation. Explaining how individuals devise and encourage the social conditions under which cooperation will flourish, for instance, must make mention of an association individuals who can recognise and grasp ideas, focus upon them, apply and modify them. All this has **resulted** from consciousness. Evolutionary theory seems to want to construe our actions as those of a glove puppet that simulates conscious activity. It aims meticulously to construct a biological model of human being whose actions are indistinguishable from one that is conscious. This is being evasive. Consciousness is a real and controlling influence, not just over the actions of glove puppets, but also over the origin and direction of its own development. If a theory cannot acknowledge and explain this fact, then it is not worthy of our attention.

The aims of an evolutionary perspective are certainly realistic and achievable, but it is not necessary to make a charade of freedom and consciousness in order to bring them about. It is certainly convenient and helpful for us if we treat the actions of others **as if** they were free and conscious agents like ourselves. Since biologically we are similar in all important respects to others, it is likewise useful if we can regard our own actions **as if** they emanate from a being capable of consciousness and free choice. Perhaps it would also be helpful if we learn to recognise certain of the objects of our experiences **as though** they belonged to a

public world of material objects. But this is all self-defeating. The suggestion that something is behaving as if it were something else usually means both 1) that it isn't something else, and 2) that we can recognise it immediately as its undisguised self. The point is that people generally appear to act as if they possess consciousness and free choice in a social and material arena because they are actually and in reality conscious, free and so placed. Not the other way about. It is a fatal flaw in an evolution-based approach to philosophy that it seems unable genuinely to acknowledge such facts.

It is not necessary to get into this position. It is unnecessary to adopt a materialist conception of consciousness as a sole alternative to a spiritual and soul based approach. Dynamism has shown how this is possible. Nor is it necessary to deny the validity the progress of evolutionary biology in order to demonstrate that we retain freedom of choice. A dynamic understanding of causality and the self provides a viable alternative.

So this is a second leg of a dynamic theory of freedom. Freedom refers to actions and no action can be exclusively identified with a single chemical or physical state. Even if specific physical or chemical states are determined, they cannot determine specific actions. Recognising or identifying an action demands concept applications and these involve linking an action and its circumstances to the aims or an agenda of an agent of action. Dynamism has located an essential flexibility here that only conscious beings can recognise and endorse. The study of physics will not suffice to locate it, and will not necessarily enhance the success of our projects. But the flexibility and the freedom are real nonetheless, because at the heart of the dynamic philosophy is a reality that is knowable, and only knowable, through concept applications: a reality that we can discover at a psychological, a physical and many other levels. From its introduction, dynamism has been concerned with alternatives. Characterising a living thing is the pursuit of objectives that embody a flexibility and generality that concepts represent. Free will is the extension of this idea into the arena of action where it translates into choice.

This somewhat lengthy discussion of determinism might have been shortened had I just referred back to the criticisms of Materialism on which it depends. Perhaps I have allowed the theory a longer run than it deserves. Materialism signally failed to account for the ownership of actions and experience, and it is

precisely in terms of such ownership that dynamism is able to define free will. Being unable to account even for the operations of the self hardly puts materialism in a position where we should allow it to dictate to us the fate of all our endeavours. But I have found the discussion useful in helping to unravel some of the complexities of an important debate. A dynamic conception of causality redefines an important relationship in more familiar terms that allows free will to be expressed in terms of ownership, and replaced in a social milieu removed from the probing of laboratory science. Although the advance of the Universe may be seen as an inexorable process of particle realignments, it is misleading to suppose that this has anything much to do with the operation of free choice.

In developing a dynamic theory it has been very important to stress the human perspective, the reality of the encounters it generates and the discoveries it leads to. Free will is not a convenient working hypothesis, but is a real and integral part of our lives. Determinism is part of a larger materialist enterprise that denies this. It may be that a far greater proportion of our actions will become predictable as our knowledge of the workings of the brain and body continues to expand, but we should not readily conclude that such actions are no longer freely chosen. Determinism believes these predictions subvert free choice, but dynamism sees them rather as opportunities to confirm or even affirm that freedom. The debate on free will was instigated by a conception of causality that divided freedom into two types: freedom of choice that imagines itself independent of causal influence, and voluntary freedom, that consents to it. Dynamism has reinterpreted causality and reintegrated these two types. Freedom of choice of course makes a reference to a range of available options in advance of an action. These circumscribe the scope for choice and the possibilities for action. But a freely chosen action, and one that is free from compulsion, are much the same thing. It is an action that is authentically one's own. As to its predictability, that is of supplementary interest. Could you have chosen otherwise? Yes - If you chose freely. But since you chose not to, that is why you didn't do otherwise. That the past is not more like the future is a constant source of regret!

A dynamic free will can help our understanding of ethical issues. Ethics is concerned with appraising human conduct from a moral

standpoint. What are moral judgements? What justifies us in making them? Why should we observe them? These are typical of the most pressing questions of moral philosophy, and are bound up with what is the most important question of them all: "How ought we to live our lives and to what purpose?"

Philosophers of the modern era have tended to give more prominence to epistemology than ethics in their writing. One reason for this is the continuing influence of Empiricism and the analytical approach to philosophy it has encouraged. One of empiricism's enduring contributions to philosophy has been to promote circumspection in dealing with metaphysical questions and in handling subjective value judgements. Since it has often been thought that the legitimation for moral judgements must emanate either from religious authority or subjective expressions of feeling, Empiricists such as Hume have felt entirely comfortable dismissing them as well-intentioned nonsense. Thus disqualified from being a possible source of knowledge, they are not fit to withstand the scrutiny of reason and the rigours of philosophical enquiry.

One of Empiricism's main contentions is that we are not born with innate knowledge or ideas. All knowledge is derived from and so verifiable against sense experience. Facts, theories and judgements must all be measured against the evidence experiences supply. Moral judgements fail to express knowledge because they neither state facts, nor theories, nor principles based on facts, that experience can confirm. A moral judgement, such as "Stealing is wrong," doesn't make a statement about how the world is. Rather it says something about the author's sentiments about how things *ought* to be, and according to Empiricism, what ought to be cannot be inferred from what is.

Empiricism is therefore inclined to regard moral judgements, such as "It is wrong to lie," as subjective and ultimately irrational judgements of value. They express an individual or collective disapproval of lying, and even have a pragmatic value amongst those ignorant of empiricist thinking, but state no fact that sense experience can confirm.

Empiricism arose as a sceptical response to a rationalist philosophy that remains influential in modern concept-based thinking. Early rationalists such as Descartes believed that significant knowledge can be self-evident and accessible to the

faculty of reason. An intuitive act of acknowledgement is often enough to recognise the self-evident, and the intervention of sense-experience is unnecessary. The exercise of reason takes us inside ourselves, where we contemplate ideas or concepts, make discoveries and draw inferences. Truth, Beauty, Goodness, Justice and other important concepts can all be explored in this fashion, and the route to establishing moral authority follows a scrutiny of the pertinent concepts to produce universal and eternal moral truths.

Modern Rationalists after Kant have been less optimistic about the potential for human reason. Recognising that concepts are necessary for all perception and thought has led them to concede that a reality unmediated by concepts is inconceivable. Accordingly the way in which we perceive and represent reality will embody an outlook or perspective that expresses attributes of our subjectivity as individuals or as members of social groups. If our knowledge of perceived reality inevitably reflects such an outlook, then the prospects for authoritative moral judgements that transcend it, and attain an independent legitimacy, have to be slender. In embracing a moral imperative, they argue, we cannot but express an allegiance to the aspirations and agenda of a culture, religion, class or other social formation. Such subjective expressions cannot legitimately demand the allegiance of anyone that is not a member of the groups they represent.

A philosophy that arrives at this position will not possess the tools to resolve moral disagreements, such as whether capital punishment is ever justified. It will recognise that every group will promote its own position, but will have no means of adjudicating rival claims. Modern rationalism has tended to a moral relativism that maintains that there is no yardstick for morality independent of the moral frameworks that competing groups bring to a controversy. It might insist on an internal consistency of presentation, and a comprehensive coverage of issues, but beyond that each moral framework has a validity equal to that of any of the alternatives. So, working within a Western Christian tradition, for instance, we should condemn and seek to outlaw practices such as slavery and female circumcision within our own sphere of influence, but do not have the moral right to extend our condemnation to include the practices in countries where different religious laws, beliefs and traditions operate.

So it is understandable if Empiricists and modern Rationalists are hesitant about making pronouncements on ethical questions. Their philosophical grounding gives them neither the necessary backing nor confidence. The Christian religion has seen a slow decline in political influence in the West over the last three centuries, and has been largely replaced by a liberal/ conservative alliance of sectarian interests rooted more loosely in Church traditions. The consensus that sustains it is often portrayed as under pressure to cope with increasing crime levels and an erosion in the respect for authority in any form. So much so that many feel we are presently undergoing something of moral crisis. There is a widespread perception that society needs to be run according to principles that command the willing allegiance of all. Unfortunately a dwindling religious consensus no longer gives sound principles the necessary authority, and no robust secular alternative has shown itself able to legitimise moral principles, and furnish defensible grounds for their enforcement. So if there is a moral crisis, both Empiricism and modern Rationalism could be accused of moral abrogation, and of having contributed to our present predicament.

Empiricists and Rationalists might retort that moral relativism is a desirable position. It has liberal sounding credentials that seem to promote tolerance and mutual respect. Surely these are virtues that often help resolve moral disagreements. But relativism is spineless. It is powerless to criticise cruelty and oppression where an authoritarian group decides it is justified. Indeed relativists themselves will be unable to see as immoral any oppressive group enterprise of their own that they themselves are determined to implement. Moral principles no longer have validity within a relativist scheme, so it is a waste of time trying to impose them. Any group may sidestep criticism of its actions where relativism is tolerated. It has only to accuse its detractors of discrimination or persecution against its core ethical beliefs. Any ethical arguments that might resolve emerging disagreements will quickly degenerate into conflicts therefore. Relativism neither promotes tolerance nor is able to resist intolerance. To say it promotes a morally neutral stance would be to flatter a position that represents nothing more than moral weakness.

Empiricism was born of the Enlightenment and embraced a rigorous concept of rationality that sought to finalise a break between knowledge and superstition. Methodical investigation leading to scientific knowledge became the new paradigm of

rationality, relegating metaphysics, religion and morality to groundless and misleading expressions of human aspirations. For an extreme Empiricism they lacked not only truth but meaning also. A requirement for reason and the new rationality was the ability to conduct all enquiries impartially, without permitting subjective passions to impede an appraisal of its conclusions. It demanded the ability to stand back from the world and survey all within it disinterestedly. Closely associated with rationality is a fundamental distinction between facts and values. The rational attitude enables us to apprehend reality in its true state.

Dynamism of course recognises no such fundamental distinction. The empiricist concept of rationality has played an important part in releasing us from the clutches of the alchemists and necromancers, but it is a version that amounts to little more than an affected indifference in the face of issues involving truth and falsehood. Empiricism made the error of identifying facts with the corresponding components of reality itself, and sought to understand our knowledge of reality without the mediation of concepts. Concepts can only cloud or deflect an enlightened understanding of reality, it supposed. They embody the superstitions and prejudices that are the antithesis of knowledge.

But there is no knowledge without concepts. They are our passports to reality. The empiricist version of knowledge, where facts are presented to consciousness for endorsement by a rational intellect, has raised insurmountable problems. These include the nature of reality, the identity of the individual self, and almost every other question that Hume's "Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding" considers in such eloquent detail. Empiricism's demand for rigour has been its own undoing. A certain partiality is a necessary pre-condition for all investigation, and concepts embody the outlook that is needed for obtaining knowledge. The Empiricist ideal of a disinterested rationality is unattainable. I have said much on this in earlier chapters, have tried to show how the irrationality that Empiricism deplors can be avoided, and argued that a subjective response can only be isolated as a reaction to an established and objective state of affairs.

Emotions, feelings and other manifestations of partiality often prevent us from recognising the facts of a matter, but only where they are so strong as to hinder the effective and discriminating application of our faculties of perception and judgement.

Dynamism has been happier with a more conventional concept of rationality that is usually defined as the selection of the most appropriate and effective means of securing a given end.

Expressing an emotion can often represent a rational response to a situation, can assist the attainment of one's ends and instigate investigations that seek the truth. Emotions express the values and ends that are needed in order to appraise the rationality of action. Dynamism accordingly opposes the "intellectualism" of Empiricism, and is far less distrustful of emotions. Emotions are not inherently either rational or irrational, but become so only if considered as aiding or hindering an objective.

Nor is dynamism seduced by any Romantic tendency often found in nineteenth century and later Rationalist philosophy. I am probably stretching labels too far here, since by Romantic I am veering towards the suggestion that modern rationalist philosophy has moved away from reason and dispassionate enquiry, and relies too much upon emotional significance to colour and substantiate its view of the world. I seem to be levelling the charge of irrationality against it! I have existentialist and structuralist philosophy uppermost in mind here, and perhaps the Rationalist label doesn't properly extend to these. Nonetheless dynamism tries to combat an exclusive reliance on either reason or emotion in explaining our knowledge of reality. Both types of consciousness emerge from a fundamental and firmly rooted relationship with reality that neither can achieve on its own.

Dynamism has offered us a way of understanding objectivity and subjectivity that is different from these Empiricist and Rationalist models. The objectivity of a fact or judgement precedes any subjective assessment of its standing. Very often established facts and judgements start out as no more than suggestions or hypotheses, which are strengthened through revision, and gain stature in resisting the rigours of investigation and scrutiny. Deeply rooted beliefs that survive such a process of constant examination may turn out to be wrong, but this confirms their objective standing, rather than despatching them into subjective oblivion. Objective beliefs are usually thought to be those that can be **either** right **or** wrong after all. For dynamism, subjectivity is not the hallmark of every feeling, attitude or preference, but usually represents a position freely taken by individuals that runs counter to a prevailing consensus. Many orthodox theories, such as the view that the Earth is not flat, started life as subjective reactions to an earlier orthodoxy, for instance. Anyone proposing them would

have been marginalized. Slowly they gained ascendancy and acquired an objective standing by building a convincing case for their acceptance.

A dynamic distinction between objective and subjective has interesting implications for ethics. One such is that moral judgements can express truth or falsehood, and form part of a body of moral knowledge that can be scrutinised, challenged, revised, and taught. Dynamism maintains there are such things as moral principles, and a place for definite judgements of right and wrong. In a dynamic universe things are recognised and defined by the influence they exert. This means that discovery and knowledge of reality demand a certain immersion that we achieve through engaging and intervening in the forces we encounter there. Correctly diagnosed, moral judgements state social facts and represent forces or attitudes at large in society. They are therefore objective and may express a moral truth. In stating a simple moral judgement, that it is wrong to tell a lie for instance, we state a fact and, in normal circumstances, ally ourselves with its promotion, and help to maintain its effectiveness as a social instrument. The fact is society's disapproval of lying to gain one's own ends, its willingness to discourage it and readiness to apply sanctions to those who persistently lie. We are drawing attention to the existence of a certain social pressure.

There are circumstances where we can acknowledge a moral truth and yet distance ourselves from its endorsement. That society condemns capital punishment as wrong is true. It would be wrong to punish someone by death in Britain at the present time. But there are many who acknowledge this but who believe that capital punishment should be permissible and the law changed. The distinction between endorsing a moral truth and taking exception to it is clearest when the truth is enshrined in law. But the distinction still holds where the truth is supplied by a consensus. Taking issue with an acknowledged social fact is often an expression of subjectivity, but it does raise an issue and debate can help settle it. Subjectivity cannot be universal. For most of us it is necessary to endorse the prevailing moral code for most of the time if it is going to continue as an effective and therefore real influence in society.

I am aware here that the language in which we express moral disagreement doesn't always support the position I am pressing. A debate about capital punishment, for instance, is most likely to be portrayed as one between those who **believe** it is wrong and those

who **believe** it is justified. It seems inconsistent for someone to maintain, for instance that that he **knows** capital punishment is wrong, and state the society view, and then add that he nonetheless **believes** that its reintroduction is right, and so state a personal view. There is no necessary inconsistency here however since we happily express differences of perception in such terms. "I know it is hot in here, but it doesn't feel that way to me." is an example discussed in an earlier chapter. That we are more cautious about expressing moral positions in such terms is probably a consequence of a liberal tradition and the uncertainty that empiricist or rationalist approaches have cumulatively engendered. Dynamism suggests that we are entitled to be more confident about the moral decisions that a free society endorses, and so a more vigorous language would be expected to emerge if ever that confidence is rediscovered. Philosophy is not bound to follow an assumption of linguistic philosophy that leaves unquestioned received forms of usage, especially where they embody questionable philosophical assumptions.

Moral philosophy has sought absolute standards for judging right or wrong, standards that apply to any society at all points in its history. But they can no more be produced for morality than for the existence of reality, truth and other of the more elusive concepts of epistemology. The search for such standards anywhere was born of an over-ambitious Rationalist programme. Dynamism believes in the objectivity of moral judgements but gives them a more modest role. Moral standards tend to express a set of beliefs that are pre-eminent in society at a given time, and very few are either permanent or universal. In this respect they are like many other social facts. Distinguishing them as moral is their expression of a shared concern with the organisation of society, and the codes of conduct that strive to ensure its continuation and progress. Like most other statements of fact they are open to scrutiny and criticism on grounds of consistency, effectiveness and expediency. I have already suggested that here there is scope for subjectivity to operate.

This can only represent a starting point because the standards that a society enforces may themselves be immoral. Morality is not just a descriptive term but signifies a special type of endorsement as well. It is subject to moral criticism at a more general or higher level, and this we shall need to explore.

If we dispense with absolute and timeless moral standards bolstered by religious authority, it does not follow that we must immediately settle for their truth in relative terms. Moral judgements often attempt a statement of society's beliefs and its readiness to enforce them. This makes them a social force to be reckoned with, and real enough for all to see. Through enforcement they seek to promote acceptable conduct, and prevent or discourage the deplorable.

It is worth mentioning that some standards aspire to only limited influence however. They may confine their strictures to small or exclusive classes, groups or clubs, or concern themselves only with minor matters of protocol. The behaviour of an English gentleman might have been encapsulated in such a code, for instance, and individual gentlemen's clubs continue to enforce dress or other sub-codes. Moralists are noted for their zeal in seeking to extend their influence beyond their converts, and so risk becoming a major source of conflict in society. Many strive to impose principles they believe to be valid universally and permanently. Why should this happen and when is it justified? We will also need to determine which standards are legitimately enforceable and the scope or range of their enforceability.

One reason for the inevitability of conflict is that membership of society is compulsory. If we need a definition to proceed with the discussion then a society can be defined in simple terms: as a group of people living together under a common authority. Life outside of society or some association is not a feasible proposition, and so we cannot avoid the potential for conflict represented by our membership of some social or economic groups, by virtue of our class, occupation, family position and so on. The resources on which we depend are sometimes scarce and always unevenly distributed, so the priorities we set for their allocation are another potential source of disagreement. A third is that the circumstances under which we presently live represent a legacy of earlier, and often unresolved conflicts, leaving us members of overlapping communities. Religious, racial and economic groups do not correspond with the boundaries of state power. As members of different groups ourselves, we are sometimes subject to the conflicting demands they impose. As individuals our lives are inextricably bound up with different groups, and groups themselves are likewise locked into relationships of interdependence that make separation neither possible nor desirable. But we should not be unduly pessimistic about these bonds, since harmony is

likewise possible only in society, and we all have some interest in promoting its well-being.

Dynamism reinforces the widely accepted idea that the interests of society are bound to prevail over those of the individual. Society contains too many individuals for one to dominate all the others with a complete disregard for their interests. Biologically no one is possessed of such super-human powers as to make such domination likely or possible. Even despotic leaders must make astute calculations of the needs of confederates if they are to accede to and maintain a grip on power. Each of us owes our existence as individuals to the society that nurtures us. All our basic needs depend upon some social organisation to supply them. Moreover, from a dynamic point of view, our very individuality is dependent upon society to give it definition, because our individuality is largely defined in opposition to the consensus that only a society can generate.

Since society is more powerful than any individual no unaided individual is able to monopolise the direction of society's activities in what society perceives as the pursuit of its own interests. In a sense therefore the interests of society are sovereign. If we are going to assert our individuality and promote self-interest, we must therefore confront the interests of society. And good grounds will be necessary to justify making a priority of our own interests. A society that successfully pursues its own interests will meet no opposition and require no justification. Selfishness will be opposed and needs to be justified. If there is any foundation to morality then it must be at a social level, and must aim to examine the interests that a society pursues and the manner in which it seeks to achieve them. No society is perfect, so criticism and opposition are justifiable where it fails as an effective instrument of its interests. We will need to ascertain how a society best determines the direction of those interests, and how conflicts between societies can be resolved. Most importantly, when does a society possess authority and thus legitimately pursue its interests?

Dynamism therefore eschews an ethic built on individualism. Society has not been and cannot be formed from freely associating clusters of self-sufficient individuals. It is doubtful whether the individualism latent in both Empiricism and Rationalism could ever offer us a satisfactory concept of society, and a sustainable ethic in consequence. It is an individualism that underpins liberal and conservative politics, where morality and government emerge in

response to a supposed need to regulate individual self-interest. When individual wishes are sovereign, the supposition of authority will always be suspect and harbour resentment. Because authority appears to contradict individual liberty, it is still sometimes thought necessary to invoke a deity to underwrite it.

Dynamism however has endorsed a theory of truth on which a concept of authority can be built. In assessing all truth claims and securing a stable foundation for knowledge, free investigation must be allowed in order to permit the scrutiny and criticism of prevailing versions of the truth, and encourage the introduction of justifiable improvements and alternatives. A healthy society should never be afraid of experiment and making mistakes. Society has an irresistible claim to pursue its own priorities in the most effective manner, and an unfettered access to truth and the means to attaining it form necessary conditions for optimum effectiveness. Protecting these optimal conditions is possible only in a society that maintains and guarantees the conditions necessary for free investigation to flourish. If it is to continue to serve society's interests, legitimate authority has to permit not just free investigation, but an unhindered scrutiny of its own operations. The guardians of effectiveness must be effective themselves. This should aim to ensure the effectiveness and the legitimacy of authority in the face of non-democratic opposition represented by religion, birth and so on. The prediction is by no means guaranteed but, in the long run, the assertion of society's interests should sustain a pressure in favour of a freer and more democratic organisation. The claims of non-democratic authority never withstand scrutiny because they impede the progress of a free society and its legitimate ambitions. When authorities or groups undermine society's freedom then criticism and resistance become justified when directed towards its restoration. Persistent and systematic abuses of rights justify extreme actions that might include secession.

A free society is in principle a sufficient legitimising authority for the creation and enforcement of its own moral standards. It may encounter opposition, but opposition loses its legitimacy if it resists a free society and its interests. Standards that achieve and maintain a consensus, where there is the freedom to discuss, scrutinise, challenge and ultimately dissent from them, gain a force and authority that is real and objective. Society has the right to exclude those that threaten its effective continuation, but not those who seek to change it and participate in its development.

Participation is a hallmark of freedom. To raise a moral concern, in an effort to change the prevailing consensus, is not an arrogant or presumptuous gesture. Raising an issue for debate is simply evidence for a free society at work. Society's right to reach and implement its own decisions is not an unbridled process, vindicating the persecution of minorities, for instance. A moral principle that is legitimate must be consistent with the continued protection and promotion of a free society, in which all participate, and where opposition and new ideas can flourish. Slavery and infanticide are examples of practices that are wrong in principle therefore, because they deny access and participation to those who pose no threat to the operations of free government. We have a duty to oppose or condemn them wherever they occur. Individual opposition is not a merely subjective expression of sentiment, nor a derivative from a liberal Christian respect for human life. It enforces a standard that is real and absolute.

A dynamic ethic gives us the right and the free will to participate in, but the duty to comply with, all decision-making, and to accept responsibility for our actions. Accepting our responsibilities is an acknowledgement of the right of society to ensure and enforce this compliance. Dynamism offers us neither a libertarian nor an authoritarian philosophy. Its definition of authority encompasses the conclusions reached from the interaction of free individuals, and so it opposes the widely accepted view that freedom and authority are opposites. What it offers is a more balanced view. It affords us only as much liberty as is consistent with authority, and only as much authority that perpetuates liberty.

Dynamism can also help us answer the perennial question of why you or I should feel obliged to do what society tells us we ought to be doing. Why should I not tell a lie, for instance, if it suits me to do so and it will go undetected? The question is naïve and misguided because it rests upon the assumption that individual self-interest is sovereign and inviolable. The assumption is false. Society's interests take precedence over those of any individual, because society is the source and guardian of that individuality. Its membership happens also to outnumber our individuality to an overwhelming extent. In general terms it is wrong to lie because it is not in the interests of society to encourage duplicitous practices that undermine mutual respect and contribute to an atmosphere of distrust that will impede a whole range of our transactions.

From a dynamic point of view, efforts to persuade an individualist to act less selfishly are unlikely to be effective. There is little point in introducing a notion of enlightened self-interest in order to coax a liar into better habits, with the offer of rewards in heaven, or the more immediate gratification of a sense of moral supremacy, for instance. These tend to reinforce a self-seeking attitude and perpetuate the inclination to lie when suitable opportunities arise. Selfish actions are wrong because they do not promote society's interests, and society has the right therefore to disapprove of, discourage and apply sanctions to those who work against it. Even if there is every prospect of a lie succeeding, it remains wrong for the same reasons. Proceeding under these circumstances is simply evidence of an immoral selfishness. Dynamism does not deplore all individual actions and motives and equate them with the selfish. Far from it, since most can be encouraged, nurtured and harnessed to enrich and enhance a broad range of social interests. Individuality and selfishness are not the same, as the selfish action is one that sets out to subvert another's interests. The concept of the individual is the broader one that embraces the times and places of a unique personal history, or that characterises the manner in which an activity is performed.

A dynamic position insists on individual participation in the decision-making process, but that does not lend it a close affinity with liberal philosophy. Liberalism offers individuals as much freedom that can be enjoyed without jeopardising the freedom of others. It promotes a belief in the sovereignty of individual freedom moderated only in the light of the need to resolve conflicts and effect compromises between individuals. Its failure lies in an insufficiently strong distinction between selfishness and individualism. It places no obligation upon those who are fit and talented enough to benefit society to make any contribution towards its welfare. Dynamism differs strongly on this point. Social responsibility takes precedence over individual self-interest and obligations to society are fundamental.

Although a dynamic moral theory may help us answer some important questions, the discussion has been conducted in a very general fashion, and is bound to prompt a large number of more specific questions. Society has been described in only the vaguest of terms for instance. How are society's interests to be determined, differences between societies to be resolved, and when does a group within society have the right to break away and

form its own independent community? How should a free society conduct its affairs, and how rigorous should it be in the enforcement of its priorities? These are just a few examples. I shall not even begin to attempt most of these here. The main aim of the present chapter has been to draw together some of the conclusions reached from previous ones, and use the understanding of the self, of freedom and of subjectivity that has emerged to help suggest a new grounding for ethical thinking. To examine a specific range of questions at length would be to tilt the balance of the enterprise too much way from its central thrust, and will be best tackled as a separate project. So for the moment the materials for a dynamic ethic are just laid out in kit form.

Nonetheless a little further exploration is possible and will be helpful. The grounding for an ethical theory that is pertinent to this chapter concerns the recognition of absolute standards by which we might judge society and its rules. Judgements on what is moral in a particular society here and now should make use of such standards, but the manner in which they are applied and the sort of conclusions they will produce will depend upon an assessment of the society in question. It would be foolish to devise a set of rules for the free and ideal society and then attempt unconditionally to impose them anywhere with immediate effect. An effective intervention requires an appreciation of a social context that will receive it. Every society is an inherited network of interests, customs, traditions, bonds and rivalries that needs to be examined and understood before any ethical measures are introduced. There is little point, for instance, in insisting on the introduction of a freer system of government in a state where there is no understanding of democracy, where illiteracy is widespread, or where there is bitter sectarian conflict. Only piecemeal progress can be hoped for. Such measures that may work are of the sort that fall outside the scope of the present chapter.

Many of the issues that are raised when examining a free society have to be decided by debate. Any free society requires a measure of democracy, but mass democracy, in the sense that every decision involves the whole populace, is neither a feasible nor a practical option. Some delegation of authority is going to be essential, though the extent and form of this is up for the members freely to determine and revise for themselves. In times of emergency the power to scrutinise and dissent may be suspended, but power to restore them with immediate effect should never be conceded.

Appropriate levels of sanction and reward are also matters for discussion and decision within a historical context. The aim of punishment in a free society should not be revenge or retribution. These are likely to exacerbate and prolong antagonism between aggrieved parties and work against the progress within a free society. Punishment offers the opportunity to condemn a wrongdoing, and for Society to renew its resolve to defend itself against those forces that undermine the freedom of its members. Its effectiveness will be the extent to which the removal of the privileges of society membership acts as a disincentive or deterrent to all potential offenders. Alongside this I believe that rehabilitation should comprise an element of any punishment programme, offering education and training, and conditionally linked to the restoration of forfeited rights and privileges. Persistent offenders who devote their efforts to undermining the authority of society are liable to be justifiably excluded from it. If they show no inclination to contribute to society and its aims, then the period of exclusion could be indefinite. That is a matter for discussion. That freedom of society always takes precedence over individual liberty should not be however.

Here I shall pause the debate, having sketched out the direction in which a dynamic ethic might proceed. It has not been easy to complete these last few chapters. The longer I worked on the ideas they contained, the more they appeared as obvious expressions of common sense views that scarcely in need of elaboration. Some of the central problems of philosophy have lost their potency and urgency for me, and that makes me complacent. But I am precisely where I aimed to be when I undertook this enterprise. The insights seem genuine enough, and offer a reappraisal of consciousness, the self, time, space and human freedom. Where the ideas are not original they represent the most compelling elements of other theories, and come together in a consistent and comprehensive manner to help prepare the ground for further progress in moral philosophy. I am especially pleased with the simplicity and accessibility of the dynamic approach. All of us seek standards by which to guide our understanding and conduct, and academic philosophy has done little to help the vast majority meet this fundamental need. Philosophers have made the subject far too inaccessible, when all that most of us crave are some simple insights that will supply satisfying answers to a few basic questions. Dynamism tries to do just that. Try it for a month

and see if you find the same complacency creeping pleurably over you. You have got a life. Now get yourself a philosophy!

Summary of Conclusions: Free will means a genuine freedom of choice that initiates an action from a selection of alternatives. There is a distinction between freely chosen and voluntary actions, but actions can only be deemed voluntary within a framework that presumes free choice. Materialism cannot defend a freedom based on voluntary actions alone, and is unable to contribute to an understanding of moral responsibility.

Idealism and other libertarian philosophies defend a freedom of choice in opposition to causal influences, but free actions become indistinguishable from those that are random or arbitrary, and responsibility unavoidably attaches itself to every action. These and other philosophies make the mistake of identifying freedom with the removal of causal influences, when these produce all actions. It is the question of *whose* influence produces an action that is most important in deciding whether or not is free.

Dynamism brings together several conclusions from earlier chapters to offer a new perspective on freedom and responsibility:

A dynamic conception of reality, where events result from causal influence,
of consciousness as emerging from the imposition of an agenda upon reality,
of the self in which ownership underpins personal identity, and
of truth that is attainable within an objective and knowable reality.

Together they offer a conception of freedom as the unencumbered execution of an authentic personal agenda. It is a freedom that doesn't imply selfishness and is compatible with causal influence.

Materialist attempts to undermine free choice rely upon a problematic account of causality and an obsolete understanding of scientific knowledge. Predictability and causality are compatible with free choice. That all our actions are subject to biological/chemical/physical constraints or influence leaves human freedom unaffected because no action can be identified with any single set of biological, physical or chemical events. So if causal links can be located between such events, it does not follow that the same links exist between the corresponding actions they underpin.

Dynamism is also critical of materialist theories that attempt a reconciliation with free will. These fail to address and explain the role of deliberation and choice in producing a free action. A model of evolutionary biology is often misapplied to disguise this attempt to sideline consciousness.

These evolutionary theories are forced to subordinate the directness of the relationships between conscious individuals, and are even reduced to suggesting that relationships with our own actions and our own experiences is indirect. This leaves the self and its freedom of action with only a theoretical existence at a more abstract level, in order to escape the direct first person perspective.

Empiricism and Rationalism are sceptical about extending any absolute legitimacy or authority to moral judgements. Dynamism eschews the excessive reliance upon either intellect or emotion that respectively sustain their moral scepticism. It reaffirms its distinction between subjective and objective and invokes its theory of truth to promote the view that moral judgements can make factual statements about social forces or pressures. Society is more influential than and fundamental to individual interests and an ethical individualism is unsustainable. The interests of society are sovereign. Since free investigation is a necessary condition for attaining truth, a free society is the one best adapted to determine and devise the most effective means of realising its interests. The judgements and decisions of a free society make a legitimate claim on the allegiance of its members. Its members likewise have an unqualified right to defend a free society and its interests. This lays a foundation for an authentic moral code that will aim to ensure individual fulfilment by maximising opportunities for contributing to Society's welfare.