

Chapter 6

Psychological Freedom, the Last Frontier: 1963

THESIS: Freedom of the will is not an on/off switch, something you either have or not. Instead, real-world freedom of the will is an ongoing achievement that comes in degrees, and not to everyone to the same degree. Moreover, our wills can be more free in some circumstances than in others. Because our cultures and systems of government affect people's inclination and ability to make up their own minds, the most intriguing versions of the free will problem today are personal, social, and political, not metaphysical.

Our liberty today is, in so many ways, unprecedented. Where shall we live? What will we do for a living? Shall we be members of traditional religions? Of traditional families? To a degree that previous generations could scarcely have imagined, we answer such questions pretty much as we please. In these respects, the future has never seemed so underdetermined and unconstrained.

Yet, when we focus on well-off members of free societies – people who are stunningly free of economic, cultural, and political shackles – we find evidence not so much of people basking in their liberation as of people shackled from within – shackled by their own anxieties, neuroses, defense mechanisms, and so on.¹ It seems that we are adept at snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. This 'last frontier' of freedom is the topic of the present chapter.

The preceding chapters discussed humanity's halting progress in removing external impediments to our positive freedom.² This progress has diminished one external impediment after another;

but the end result is not so much, or not only, that all impediments have disappeared; rather, we are now in the best position we have ever been to see that there are impediments other than the obvious ones. The most perfect success at removing external impediments to our positive freedom would leave us still needing to confront this last frontier: internal obstacles.

Political theorist C. Fred Alford interviewed approximately fifty young adults and found them largely uninterested in traditional political, civil, and economic freedoms. Apparently liberty in our society is so secure that young people typically take it for granted. Alford's interviewees, who, to judge by the criteria discussed in our introduction, are among the freest people ever to have lived, tended not to regard themselves as especially free. They felt oppressed by unfulfilled desires and by their dependence on friends, family, and co-workers. For them, what we call psychological freedom has become *the* issue.³

From Metaphysics to Psychology

Ever since people began to conceive of their world as law-like, the free will issue has been one of philosophy's most gripping topics. How do we reconcile the apparent fact that we live in a world where every event has a cause with the apparent fact that there are agents – beings who have options and who can *will* themselves to act in one way rather than another?

To be sure, when we treat the paradigm of an event as the transfer of momentum that occurs between billiard balls, free will seems mysterious, even miraculous. But this nineteenth-century picture of physics is no longer current (at least among physicists). Skepticism today is less of a worry about choice being inexplicable in terms of physics, and more of a worry about evidence from psychology to the effect that we are not as autonomous as we think. Even if we set aside metaphysical skepticism, this latter worry remains.

No one is skeptical about our ability to experience pain, yet there are skeptics when it comes to our ability to experience choice.⁴ Why?

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Neither pain nor choice has been explained in terms of physics. If there is a difference between them, it is not one that is explicable in purely physical terms. One apparent difference is that we can be mistaken about whether we are choosing, but not about whether we are in pain. It is not clear how much of a difference this is; but, whatever difference there is, it is to be explained in terms of psychology, not physics. In any case, if there is any miracle here, it concerns something even more fundamental than the ability of conscious beings to choose. (We could have said 'to choose freely,' but the fact that there is choice *at all* is already a mystery.) The real miracle is that there is such a thing as consciousness. In any case, the traditional metaphysical concern about free will is not our present concern. We mention it only to sharpen the contrast: what we are considering here is a newly emerging (and by no means merely academic) form of the free will puzzle.

Alvin Goldman revolutionized epistemology when he set aside the Cartesian problem of proving that we are not dreaming, and focused instead on scientific evidence regarding the question of what makes some belief-forming processes more reliable than others. The same thing is happening again with the free will problem. The free will puzzle, for the twenty-first century, is not about finding room for choice in a world that seems deterministic. Not that we have solved that problem; rather, we simply have a more interesting problem today: a genuine practical problem that calls for, and allows for, a genuine practical response. The problem is, for each of us, to find within ourselves tools for self-control in a world that seems less deterministic, more chaotic, and more prone to the emergence of genuine ontological novelty than it seemed once to be – a world that is largely unpredictable even at the macro-level.⁵

The puzzle of self-control

The first key, of course, to having self-*control* is to have a self; and recent psychological research suggests that this is harder than it

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looks.⁶ In particular, it appears now that minds are less unified than we once thought. Evolutionary psychology suggests that minds are not thoroughly unified things, but rather collections of subroutines that evolved somewhat independently, as responses to specific problems, and that exist as outcomes of separate selection processes. The mind as a whole was not selected for, and exists only in the sense in which societies exist. In other words, there is something to which the term 'mind' refers in the same way in which there is something to which the term 'society' refers, but that something is not a substance.⁷ There is a certain unity to either concept, yet each refers less to a thing we observe than to a chosen way of understanding what we observe.

Neither are minds as transparent as we once thought. We have suspected ever since Freud, and now we have ample reason to believe, that some of what goes on in our minds is hidden from us. Jonathan Haidt likens the human mind to a rider sitting on an elephant. The 'rider' is our conscious mind. We think the rider is in charge, but often the elephant has a goal of its own. Moreover, the rider is always constructing a narrative to justify the path he thinks he has chosen. The rider is unaware that the elephant often makes the decisions that matter, and the rider's story is often just a story.⁸

We take it for granted that there are events – let us call them *choices* – that we control in a way that we don't control other events.⁹ Moreover, our choices make a difference. Things can go better or worse for us, and how well things go depends partly on what we choose to do. In turn, our ability to *care* about how things go implies that we can have a *reason* for choosing one way rather than another. So do we (ever) control ourselves well enough to do what we have reason to do? Cutting even closer to the philosophical bone, do we control ourselves well enough to believe what we have reason to believe? Suppose not. Suppose our beliefs are just events that happen to us, and the felt experience of deciding what to believe after weighing evidence is a delusion. In that case we have no reason to take our beliefs seriously – including our belief that we lack free will.

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Psychologists today are saying that there are impediments to our approaching the world with a mind as open as we would like. (We use the word ‘we’ here in an impersonal sense, but this is a humbling personal reflection as well.) In most cases we take it for granted that the research discussed here was conducted by authors who are not themselves in the grip of the biases they purport to have discovered. The good news is this: the premise that any researcher can construct an unbiased case for, and thus can have good reason to believe in, the sort of biases we discuss presupposes that they are not inescapable.¹⁰

We take it to be as well confirmed as an empirical fact can be that we (including the psychologists who produced the research we discuss) make choices – including choices about how to weigh experimental evidence – more or less freely. (If we do not choose more or less freely whether to view evidence against free will as empirically well confirmed, then we have no reason to take our view seriously.) But we say ‘more or less’ for a reason. Our conjecture, in a nutshell, is as follows:

- (a) Freedom of the will is not an on/off switch, something you either have or not.¹¹ Instead, real-world freedom of the will is an on-going achievement.
- (b) Freedom of the will is achieved in degrees, and not everyone achieves it to the same degree.
- (c) Moreover, not only are some wills more free than others, but any given individual’s will is more free in some circumstances than in others.
- (d) It is because our culture and system of government affect people’s inclination and ability to make up their own minds that the most fascinating and important versions of the free will problem today have more to do with psychology and politics than with metaphysics.

In this chapter, we confine ourselves to a handful of the most notorious lines of research. In part, we discuss these studies precisely

because they are notorious. However, the worries they suggest seem to us to be genuine, not merely widely regarded as genuine.¹² None of these findings underwrites metaphysical skepticism about the general idea of free will, but the results considered together do suggest an alternative (and politically portentous) psychological basis for a measure of skepticism, implying that threats to the autonomy of our wills are various, serious, and real.

Shackled by Social Pressure

Milgram

Perhaps the most disturbing of all psychological experiments, Stanley Milgram's 1963 study seemingly shows that we have a propensity to obey orders even when we believe that what we are being ordered to do is immoral (for instance to deliver life-threatening shocks to a fellow human being), and even when we want to disobey. Social pressure, it seems, makes us cowards – something profoundly at odds with the picture we would like to have of ourselves.

Milgram brought in a subject; introduced the subject to another one, who was in fact an actor; and told both subjects that they were part of a study of learning. Milgram assigned to the first subject the role of teacher, and to the actor the role of learner. The teacher's assignment was to ask questions and to deliver an electric shock to the learner for any wrong answer. The shocks supposedly began at 15 volts and increased by 15-volt increments to 450 volts. The higher voltage settings had warning labels such as "Danger: Extreme Shock" and, after that, "XXX." The teacher, after observing the learner hand-cuffed to a chair and hooked up to electrodes, was taken to another room and told to begin the test. The learner/actor began giving incorrect answers according to a script, and the punishment commenced; the learner eventually complained of a heart condition, then began screaming to be released as the voltage mounted toward

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what the teacher's control panel described as increasingly dangerous shock levels. If and when the teacher expressed concern, the lab director, again according to script, ordered the teacher to continue. When the learner refused to answer, then apparently collapsed, the teacher was ordered to treat non-answers as incorrect answers.

About 65 percent of subjects kept going, sending what appeared to be ever more lethal shocks into their presumably unconscious fellow subject.¹³ Subjects typically did not want to obey, and often seemed on the edge of hysteria. Some pleaded with the lab director to halt the experiment. Many, being incapable of openly repudiating the director's authority to order the apparent torture and execution of innocent subjects, withdrew into questions about who was responsible. The lab director assured them that he, the lab director, was the one responsible. Once their quasi-defiant challenge about responsibility was so easily met, subjects knew they had asked the wrong question. However, unable to summon the courage to assert themselves more honestly, they froze in the headlights of that authoritarian pressure, and obeyed. Afterwards, in debriefing, the lab director asked the teachers whether there was anything the learner could have said that would have made them stop. Some subjects seemed to be astonished, as if the idea of simply deciding to stop had not occurred to them. They had lost sight of the real issue – namely that they had been causing pain to an innocent person and had been unequivocally asked to stop.¹⁴ They got wrapped up in what was, to them as well as to observers, a spurious question about whether they would be responsible. The real question was not whether they would be responsible for the train wreck but whether they could prevent it.

In a fiendishly clever follow-up, G. A. Shelton familiarized students with the Milgram experiments, asked them whether today's more skeptical citizens would be as obedient today, and then recruited them to help her put the question to a test by running a follow-up experiment.¹⁵ She asked the students to pose as lab directors. The experiment seemed to unfold according to the standard design. But this time the teacher, too, was a collaborator. After a while the teacher

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began, according to script, to report being under excruciating stress, begging the lab director to terminate the experiment. Yet 22 of Shelton's 24 lab directors, unaware that they were the real subjects, dutifully followed to the hilt Shelton's instructions to play the lab director role, saying: "No, the experiment requires that you continue. Please administer the shock and go on to the next question."¹⁶

Asch

Here is an even more chilling thought: when people go along with the crowd, what if it isn't just their actions that go along, but their beliefs as well? Only slightly less notorious than the Milgram experiments, those of Solomon Asch suggest that being in the presence of a seemingly unanimous opinion can warp our judgment even when the issue is an uncontroversial perceptual matter that is right in front of our faces.

In Asch's experiments, eight to ten students were shown lines of obviously differing lengths and were asked which line most closely matched a standard length. Only one member of this group was an actual subject; the rest were collaborators. At some point, the collaborators began unanimously to select the wrong line. How did the real subject react? About 25 percent of them stuck to their own judgment and never conformed, but about 37 percent caved in, coming to agree completely with the group.¹⁷ Control groups who responded privately, in writing, had one fifth the error rate.

Did the conforming subjects know that the lines they picked did not match the standard? Were they only pretending to agree with the group? Or did they actually come to see the world differently? Recently, researchers repeated a version of the experiment using functional magnetic resonance imaging.¹⁸ By monitoring the brain, they might be able to tell whether subjects were making an 'executive decision' in order to conform to the group or whether their perceptions actually changed;¹⁹ and these later results suggest that many subjects actually come to see the world differently in order to

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conform to the group. This pressure seemingly distorts their perception, not just their will.²⁰ In a different version of the experiment, when the group consisted of real subjects with only one collaborator consistently out of line, subjects were annoyed, reacting to the collaborator with complacency, amusement, or disdain.²¹

In the face of such evidence, it is unclear how confident we should be about our ability to assess accurately any evidence at all, including the evidence just reviewed. The effect of social pressure – of other people's expectations in general – appears to cut deeply indeed.²²

Note that we are talking about situations where subjects had no incentive to comply. They were not trying to humor an authority figure or anyone who could hurt them. The task was not complex. Moreover, it took only three or four collaborators to induce the maximum error rate. No one saw group estimates as irrelevant.²³ Most subjects thought that the problem is not with the majority but with themselves. But subjects were far more resistant to the pressure of a non-unanimous majority – that is, to a group where one out of the several collaborators gave the right answer.²⁴ This suggests more generally that autonomy in the face of social pressure is not a simple matter of individual versus collective will. It is also a matter of having allies from whom one can draw emotional support in the face of social pressure from particular directions, or perhaps it is a matter of being able to fall between the cracks of opposing group pressures.

People may intuitively recognize a prevalent form of discrimination as being wrong, but they may avoid admitting it even to themselves. Sometimes self-interest is part of the explanation, but not always. By analogy, when a deer is 'caught in the headlights' and fails to avoid an oncoming truck, this does not mean the deer prefers being hit by a truck. Rather, the deer cannot bring itself to move despite the lack of external impediments. Sometimes people are similarly frozen in the headlights of a seemingly monolithic social pressure. Social pressure is a key element in sustaining racist, sexist and other discriminatory cultures, and at the same time it helps to explain why such societies change: that is, even when people look the other

way and are unwilling or unable to be the first to break ranks and lead the charge against sexism, racism, drunk driving, littering, and so on, these same people may be quick to follow a rebel's example. Social pressure can keep the lid on; but, when the pendulum starts to swing, social pressure can catalyze the revolution.

Shackled by Self-Deception

Confirmation bias

The phrase 'confirmation bias' is used to refer to various related phenomena. For example, it seems that we tend to be overly impressed with evidence supporting our existing beliefs and relatively inattentive to evidence weighing against our existing beliefs. We also tend to *look for* evidence supporting existing beliefs rather than to seek disconfirming evidence. Moreover, we quickly become bored (or worse) by evidence in favor of views we reject; we cannot be bothered to evaluate its cogency.²⁵ Moreover, we are heartened by arguments against such views, giving them every benefit of the doubt. We are, it seems, not built to manifest the spirit of science. According to Jonathan Haidt, we tend to use reasoning not to find the truth but to find reasons to believe what we prefer to believe.²⁶ To evolutionary psychologist Robert Wright, the human brain is "a machine for winning arguments" – that is, for seeking victory, not truth.²⁷ It aims to convince others as well as itself.

Interestingly, Francis Bacon, one of the inventors of the scientific method, explicitly recognized an affinity between superstition and what we now call confirmation bias.

The human understanding when it has once adopted an opinion (either as being the received opinion or as being agreeable to itself) draws all things else to support and agree with it. And though there may be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects or despises, or else by some distinction sets aside and rejects; . . . And such is the way of all superstition.²⁸

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Of course, it is one thing for *lawyers* to be self-consciously engaged in an adversarial process aimed at constructing the best possible case for their client, even if the best case has nothing to do with weighing the evidence impartially. It is another thing for philosophers or scientists to do the same without self-awareness, then to conclude that anyone who disagrees is either deluded or dishonest.

To be clear about how disturbing this should be, suppose that a pair of identical clones were given identical information sets. Confirmation bias implies that these clones would reach different conclusions if the identical bits of information were presented in a different order. Prior bits of information, provisionally accepted as true, become hurdles to our accepting later bits of information that weigh against the bits already accepted. But later bits of information, rejected now on the grounds that the evidence for them is not compelling enough to warrant rejecting the bits already accepted, would nevertheless have been accepted, had they been received first. Neither clone makes any clear mistake, yet they reach different conclusions. Their only clear mistake occurs when they start to think that only a deluded or dishonest person could draw a different conclusion from the evidence presented.²⁹

Psychologist Drew Westen published an experiment on a related theory – motivated reasoning – which holds that the brain tries to converge on beliefs that produce maximum positive feelings and minimize negative feelings. His subjects were loyal Republicans and Democrats. Subjects were shown a statement made by a celebrity, followed by information that made the celebrity seem hypocritical. Then the same subjects were presented with an ‘exculpatory statement.’ For instance, a test run had a quotation by Walter Cronkite saying that he would never do TV work again after retiring; this was followed by footage showing that he did TV work after retiring; and this was finally followed by an explanation that the work was a special favor. In the experiment, the celebrities were identifiable as Republicans or Democrats. Democrat subjects strongly agreed that the famous Republicans contradicted themselves, but only weakly

agreed that the Democrats contradicted themselves. Republican subjects, likewise, readily accepted exculpatory statements from Republicans, but not from Democrats. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) showed that a subject's pleasure centers were activated both when she was condemning members of the other party and when she was denying evidence against members of her own party.³⁰

Kahneman and Tversky on anchoring and adjustment

When we estimate how much a piece of new information deviates from a baseline expectation, our estimates tend to be conservative. Suppose that some subjects are shown a typical person, perhaps 5 feet, 6 inches tall, and asked to estimate that person's height in comparison to a 5 foot benchmark: they tend to estimate something in between – that is, between 5 feet and 5 feet, 6 inches. Asked to estimate how that same person's height compares to a 6 foot benchmark, here too they tend to estimate something in between – in this case between 5 feet, 6 inches and 6 feet. The benchmark serves as an anchor; subjects are cautious about straying from it. We surmise that they seek to improve on the accuracy of the baseline measurement. And if the point is to improve on the accuracy of the baseline measurement, then the rational thing to do is to avoid overshooting; one aims instead to land somewhere between the baseline and the correct measurement. The problem is that, when the baseline is arbitrary, there is no reason to use it as a baseline.

Now, to speculate, suppose that a professor asks students to estimate something far more complex, like how much the correct view on the morality of stem cell research differs from the professor's own view. Most professors try to be open-minded. Many succeed; they don't require their students to be clones and are truly satisfied when a student seeks a middle ground and goes away seeming to have learned something. But the search for a middle ground can be a bias in itself, subject to potential compounding when the student goes on to another class, splitting the ideological difference yet again, with

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a new professor. Suppose the new professor's position on stem cell research resembles that of the previous professor. By the time one graduates, one has become a clone after all, with views indistinguishable from those of professors with whom one has repeatedly compromised. No overt pressure is needed. We want to stress that this does not require or presume that the professors are villains. On the contrary, the point is that they may well be individually innocent and nearly (if not entirely) blameless, for they have no inkling of the kind of pressure they apply in concert.

A closely related obstacle to people being free to make up their own minds has to do with the phenomenon of *framing effects*. Before we make a decision, we need to have our alternatives in mind. Typically, we consider our alternatives under a description. For example, the glass we are choosing is half full or half empty. The glass is what it is, of course, so it should not matter how we describe it. The problem is that it does matter; the way we feel about an alternative depends on the way we describe it. To follow Tversky's and Kahneman's example, suppose you face the outbreak of a lethal disease that is about to kill 600 people. You have two options. Following the first option would save 200 out of 600 with certainty. The second has a one-third chance of saving all 600. Given this choice, 72 percent of subjects say they would rather be sure that they saved 200. So far, so good. But now consider a second scenario. Again, you are responding to a disease that is about to kill 600 people; and, again, you have two options. Following one option would result in 400 out of the 600 dying with certainty. The second option offers a two-thirds chance that all 600 will die. Confronted with this choice, 78 percent of subjects say they would rather gamble with 600 lives than choose the certainty of 400 dying. The two scenarios are, of course, two ways of describing the same problem.³¹

Perhaps there is no right or wrong way to frame the problem. Even so, the worry remains: if the problem does not change, then what a student is likely to think about it should not turn on arbitrary details of how a teacher describes the problem. But, apparently, it does.

Confabulation

Jonathan Haidt reports on Don Batson's less famous but truly depressing study of, ostensibly, how unequal rewards affect teamwork. Subjects were told they were part of a team of two, but would never meet their partner. They would answer skill-testing questions together, and, if they answered correctly, they would win a prize. A second aim of the study, subjects were told, was to examine how unequal power-sharing affects teamwork. Accordingly, they were instructed that the prize could not be divided but had to be awarded only to one of the two team members; the other would get nothing. Each individual subject was told privately that it was solely up to him or her to decide which of the two would get the prize. Subjects were given a coin, to use if they wanted to assign the prize by random chance, and were told that their partner would in any event be told that the prize would be allocated by chance. Subjects were then left alone to choose how to assign the prize.

About half of the subjects did not use the coin; of those, 90 percent awarded the prize to themselves. The other half of the subjects did flip the coin, yet they too – 90 percent of them – awarded the prize to themselves. Weeks earlier, Batson had given the subjects questionnaires. Subjects who seemed from these questionnaires to be most concerned about morality were the most likely ones to flip the coin; yet they were no more likely than the others to allocate the prize to their partner.

So, Haidt says, although professed moralists flip the coin, “when the coin flip comes out against them, they find a way to ignore it and follow their own self-interest. . . . Batson's subjects who flipped the coin reported (on a later questionnaire) that they had made the decision in an ethical way.”³² Evidently, quite a few were lying; but Haidt suspects that many of them did not know they were lying.³³ They were lying first of all to themselves. Haidt says that we are fairly accurate in our perceptions of others; it is self-perceptions that are distorted.³⁴ In the coin-flip experiments, the decision to go with self-interest is

made (recalling Haidt's metaphor) by the elephant. The rider spins a yarn about fairness and equality, but in many cases, often in ways patently hypocritical to an outside observer, the yarn is just a yarn.³⁵

Shackled by Discontent

The hedonic treadmill

We are not free to continue to be happy with our past successes. What was once a source of satisfaction – a promotion, pay raise, new toy, new music – ceases to thrill us after a while. What if our achievements never do more than leave us fleetingly happier than our baseline disposition? From an evolutionary perspective, the winding down of our response to what has become the status quo is prosurvival, insofar as it preserves our sensitivity to novel stimuli. But, although there is this evolutionary advantage to our propensity to revert to our baseline condition, there is also a problem with it when it comes to managing the felt quality of life. The phenomenon of reversion to a hedonic baseline limits how long we hang on to the euphoria accompanying any particular gain.³⁶ We evolved to be alert to change in our environment rather than to remain excited by what is not changing. So we seem condemned to always wanting more. We have to turn to the next project, setting our sights on what we have not achieved yet. Thus satisfaction tends to be ephemeral, no matter how much we achieve.

Intuitively it is better to be rich than to be poor, other things being equal; but there is a limit to what money can buy. This much is common sense. It has been reported – and this is sometimes called the Easterlin Paradox – that, even though GDP has massively increased in the developed world over the past sixty years, people are not much happier now than when they were relatively poor.

What exactly does 'not much happier' mean? In this case, it means people were invited to rate their happiness, or degree of life satisfac-

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tion, on a scale of one to ten. Generations ago, average people judged themselves to be happier than average, and accordingly circled seven or eight. Today, average people still consider themselves to be happier than average, and still circle seven or eight. Does this mean that people are no happier? No. It implies only that average people do not rate themselves higher *relative* to neighbors and colleagues.

In fact, the Easterlin Paradox is grounded in reports that people do not circle higher numbers as they, or their countries, get richer. As a matter of fact, people today *do* circle higher numbers. There is mounting evidence that life satisfaction is strongly correlated with wealth and GDP. Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman concludes from more recent data:

The most dramatic result is that when the entire range of human living standards is considered, the effects of income on a measure of life satisfaction (the “ladder of life”) are not small at all. We had thought income effects are small because we were looking within countries. The GDP differences between countries are enormous, and highly predictive of differences in life satisfaction. In a sample of over 130,000 people from 126 countries, the correlation between the life satisfaction of individuals and the GDP of the country in which they live was over .40 – an exceptionally high value in social science. Humans everywhere, from Norway to Sierra Leone, apparently evaluate their life by a common standard of material prosperity, which changes as GDP increases. The implied conclusion, that citizens of different countries do not adapt to their level of prosperity, flies against everything we thought we knew ten years ago. We have been wrong and now we know it.³⁷

As was recounted by David Leonhardt in the *New York Times*, Japan was the main example originally offered in support of the Easterlin effect. Strikingly, the number of people who circle 10 *dropped* in Japan since the 1950s, even as their GDP was increasing seven-fold. Such a drop is curious to say the least. What could explain it?

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As Leonhardt explains, what happened is that the definition of 10 changed. In the late 1950s and early '60s, pollsters told subjects that 10 meant: "Although I am not innumerablely satisfied, I am generally satisfied with life now." Many people agreed, and circled 10. But in 1964 the most positive answer of 10 was said to mean: "Completely satisfied."³⁸ Some still said yes, but a lot of people who might have agreed that they were generally, even if not completely, satisfied, and thus would have circled 10, were not circling 10 now.

So the drop between the late 1950s and 1964 was not a drop in the number of people who felt *completely* satisfied. Neither was it a drop in the number of people who felt *generally* satisfied. All we learned was this: more people think of themselves as generally satisfied than as completely satisfied.³⁹

Suffice it to say, data is not (and may never be) conclusive, and what researchers think about a topic is not likely to be driven by the data. Our wanting to believe one thing rather than another, then finding a reason to believe, is only human.

Still, despite Easterlin's paradox turning out to be a myth, it remains common sense that, although money *can* buy happiness, it is by no means *guaranteed* to do so. The translation of rising wealth into rising happiness is not automatic at an individual level. Happiness takes work. Even if national statistics reveal that the tide of wealth does indeed make for happiness as a general rule, whether any given individual's happiness rises with that tide will continue to be an open question. Some individuals will fail to capitalize on the opportunities that wealth creates. There are many ways in which people are adept at snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

Comparisons and envy

We have a tragic penchant for reconceiving win-win games as zero-sum games or worse. Rather than worrying about how we are doing in absolute terms, we worry about being well off relative to our peers. It is possible for all people to improve their absolute circumstances

in terms of wealth and health, but it is not possible for one person to gain in *status* without another person dropping. Wealth is absolute; status is relative. Insofar as we come, incorrectly, to see other people's gains as our losses, we tend to create adversarial systems and to choose policies that harm us all.⁴⁰ Our concern for status is not all bad, but being preoccupied by it is bad both for oneself and for anyone having to put up with one's dreary complaints about one's status.

Pundits and many serious scholars alike worry about rising inequality. Perhaps it is realistic to be pessimistic about this, but our pessimistic reading of the literature is that, if there is no such thing as being permanently satisfied by any given level of wealth, there is no such thing as remaining satisfied by any given level of equality either. The astounding increases in life expectancies for the developed world's poor (having doubled over the past century and being now within a few years of the life expectancies of the richest) should be celebrated. That many egalitarians do not celebrate this achievement, and that some cannot bring themselves even to acknowledge it, indicates that wealth and fame are by no means the only currencies in terms of which humans can be insatiable.

Busy, really busy

We, and many of our readers, could spend all day, every day, dealing with email, and – for those of us who teach at a university – writing recommendation letters, refereeing for journals or for tenure review committees, or fund raising. (Members of other professions will have analogous lists.) We have not yet mentioned real work such as teaching and writing. Neither have we mentioned doing what we need to do to keep our homes, cars, and personal relationships in good working order. The stress is nebulous, yet the oppressiveness of it is tangible, sometimes brutally so.⁴¹ Being free is not supposed to feel like this!⁴²

Solutions

Social pressure

First, suppose we accept at face value the evidence that we are biased. What, if anything, follows? Should we be in the business of debiasing people? If so, who exactly should the ‘we’ be? Given how biased the debiasers themselves would be – that is, taking the data at face value – the practical upshot is by no means a clear call for intervention.⁴³

Solving the problem of social pressure, if a solution exists at all, is substantially a personal matter rather than a matter of institutional design. Obviously, educational systems make some difference, so when we say ‘substantially’ we do not mean ‘exclusively.’ Yet we also suppose that the main difference moral education can make is simply to prepare students for the test. And the main preparation is for students simply to be aware that the test is coming and to imagine what form it may take – to be aware that Milgram experiments, or situations like them, are not rare.

A person has to realize that, in most situations, nothing important is at stake. We feel the pressure to conform, and the pressure creates cognitive dissonance because there is no apparent reason for us to feel as pressured as we do.⁴⁴ We resolve the dissonance by talking ourselves into believing the stakes are high, so as to make the pressure we feel seem rational. In truth, it often makes no difference whether we agree or disagree, so we may as well report what’s on our mind in a civil, humble, non-threatening way.

The hedonic treadmill

One of the most important things we can do in life is to stop, take stock, and count our blessings. Apparently we do not do that naturally. When we count our blessings, we swim against a psychological tide. We can do it, but not automatically. It takes work. It’s a personal

problem: how to stay in touch with our capacity for healthy gratitude, for smelling the flowers. The treadmill makes us less able than we should be to appreciate the benefits of living in a free society.

Intuitively, money does not buy happiness. Obviously, there are people who are relentlessly envious, insatiable, or otherwise self-destructive; but, just as obviously, there are people who pause daily to count their blessings, and those who stop to count tend to be happier when they have more to count. The trick is to be in the habit of counting blessings in relation to a fixed baseline. Insofar as it is within our power, we must discipline ourselves to count our blessings, and we must resist our tendency to discount blessings as they become familiar.

Being unsatisfied

Haidt reports that satisficers are happier than maximizers. Intuitively, this seems inevitable. *Nothing brings happiness unless you are content with it.*⁴⁵ But Haidt also reports it as an experimental finding that maximizers get less pleasure per dollar spent.⁴⁶

Haidt shows that, among the external circumstances which genuinely matter, there are a few simple things. Two words of caution. First, although Haidt's list is prosaic, there is nothing trivial about these findings. They affect our life expectations, and even our life expectancies, in dramatic ways. Second, these factors obviously don't affect everyone the same way, but we are well advised not to give in to the all-too-typical urge to classify ourselves as atypical. There may be exceptions; but, as a rule:

- 1 It pays to minimize noise levels. Traffic noise and so on is a health-compromising stress even if we learn to ignore it.
- 2 It pays to minimize the time we spend commuting by car. We may think we are accustomed to it. We may even think we enjoy it. But we aren't and we don't. Every mile regularly commuted correlates to higher blood pressure.

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- 3 It pays to minimize the time we spend in circumstances where we do not see ourselves as volunteers. (Background noise and traffic are stresses partly because we don't control them.)
- 4 Perhaps most importantly on Haidt's list, it pays to avoid conflict and to resolve it quickly when it does occur, especially at home. Haidt claims that chronic conflict with a spouse is a sure way to reduce happiness. There is no such thing as adapting to unresolved conflict with total success; it damages every day, even those days when we do not see other person. (We suggest a corollary to this point: respond to loved ones with compassion. They are only human, which means they face many obstacles to their autonomy. They are not wired to be rationally autonomous 100 percent of the time, and it is not their fault.)⁴⁷

Shackled by the Dearth of Shackles

We want to mention one last apparent wedge between our objective liberty, understood in some quantifiable sense, and our subjective and qualitative experience of freedom. Namely, we have the time and energy to consider only so many options, and sometimes our set of options expands beyond that point.

Barry Schwartz states that people do better with six options than with more or less. Thus, if you are from Eastern Europe (or, in Schmidt's case, from rural Canada) the first time you visit an American supermarket, you are overwhelmed at all the different yogurt flavors. Let us concede for argument's sake that you would be better off having only six choices. But the very fact that you would be better off with fewer choices motivates you to learn to ignore the noise.

When choosing a restaurant, you do not consider every restaurant within driving distance. Why not? Because, if you tried, you would be overwhelmed. You consider your half dozen favorites, plus one or two restaurants you've heard about but have not tried. We *quickly*

learn to ignore anything that for us is not a real contender. Restaurants you've found disappointing disappear from your mental menu, and what you have left is a short list of real contenders. If Schwartz is right, the number ends up being six. In any case, the number is whatever your personal comfort level allows. The length of your list is not given by external constraints. The constraint is self-imposed. (One genuine problem for satisficers, though, has been created by the pace of the modern marketplace. The problem is this: what once was known to be a satisfactory alternative may no longer be in stock next time we go shopping. Items are 'discontinued' at a sometimes frustrating rate.)⁴⁸

There are such things as smart shoppers, but smart shoppers are experienced shoppers.⁴⁹ Much of the research reported by Schwartz shows something different from what Schwartz thinks it shows: it shows not what it is like to have *more than six options*, but rather what it is like to be *inexperienced*. (We readily admit that feeling inexperienced can indeed be uncomfortable.)

Summarizing, Schwartz describes situations where we confront the unfamiliar. We note that the second visit to the supermarket is not like the first, and that a free society allows people to try again, and to learn. Schwartz would take that away. He has his reasons. He is not obviously wrong. But this is not how we would do it; not how John Stuart Mill would do it; not how a liberal society would do it. Putting some of these points together, the emotional distress we feel about shopping is yet another facet of our experience that reverts to a hedonic baseline, and what we are soon left with is mainly the objective improvement in our circumstances that comes from having better options. Research on the hedonic treadmill tells us that we are built to be sensitive to novelty. Familiarity dulls our reactions. Schwartz is gripped by the attractions of limiting other people's opportunities to experiment with new alternatives.⁵⁰ Would that make us happy? Conceivably. We might be under less stress of a particular kind – we would have more of the stress that comes from being treated like children, less of the stress that comes from being

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free and responsible. But the latter kind of stress is also, to some degree, the spice of life.

There is another issue. Schmitz once said to Schwartz:

I was scheduled for brain surgery in Tucson in March of 2003. A week or so later, when I found out I had the option of going to a more celebrated surgeon in Phoenix, it was the worst day of my life. It was literally a life and death decision. Until then, I was as composed as a person could be under the circumstances. I realized my life was in my surgeon's hands, so I had turned my mind to sewing up the loose ends of my life. Then, unexpectedly, I had an alternative. As you [Schwartz] might accurately have predicted, it felt horrible to have that extra alternative, and to be in a position of needing to make that life and death choice. But what your analysis misses is that, however horrible it felt to be forced to choose among that expanded set of options, I was still better off, indeed (it is clear in retrospect) vastly better off.

In sum, Barry Schwartz is talking about how it *feels* to have important choices to make, which is a different question from whether we are better off having those choices to make. A high-school student today might have to agonize over which college to apply to from among hundreds of options. Then he or she might have to choose from among several acceptance letters. By contrast, Schmitz's parents went to elementary school long enough to learn to read and write, and then they were back on the farm. Life was simpler then; but life is better now.

We think Schwartz would agree with much of this. Schwartz repeatedly says that he is not against options; he appreciates their value. When the time comes to sum up for the popular press, though, Schwartz overreaches.⁵¹ In the process, he ignores a further political point: namely that, if people are no good at running their own lives, letting them run other people's lives does not solve the problem.⁵² We must not make the heroic leap from the premise that we are not good at making choices for ourselves to the false conclusion that we

are better at making choices for others, or at electing people who are better at making choices for others.

The idea that the people around us are neither as rational nor as wise as they think will always be a hypnotically powerful message. People are gripped by the reassurance that, no matter how inadequate they feel, others are worse (because others are oblivious to their inadequacy). A recent review of two books in this genre is titled “Free to Choose but Often Wrong.”⁵³ Here is one way in which we go wrong: we grossly exaggerate how bad it is to be wrong.⁵⁴ Exaggerating the downside of being wrong – of paying for, and having to learn from, our mistakes – beguiles us into shifting onto others the responsibility to choose on our behalf. But the biases discussed here are democratic. They afflict us all, and only a vigilant humility can contain the damage they do.⁵⁵ Even if it is best to have fewer options, this implies only that we need to simplify by limiting our range of options, as in fact we do every day. It does not imply that it is best for someone else to limit our options for us.

We *vastly* underestimate how complicated life was in the ‘good old days,’ but, in any case, as societies evolve, new kinds and levels of complexity emerge. Perhaps more than ever, today’s college graduates must not only figure out how to support themselves; they must also figure out what sort of self they want to support. The basics of earning a living are not much of a struggle any more. At the American poverty line, a typical person’s main caloric struggle will be to avoid obesity rather than starvation – which says something about how far society has come. Today we have time to face the fact that making progress, thereby creating and confronting new frontiers, causes anxiety. And we have made a lot of progress.

The point of having more options, of course, is not simply to have more, but to increase the likelihood of having a good option. We can entertain, as a possible ideal, having just one perfect option – say, the best surgeon who ever lived. The question is, in the real world, what is the best approximation of this ideal: having just one option, having the option of (internet) shopping from a world of alternatives,

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or something in between? (Many people are frustrated the first time they try to search the internet or to use any new technology. Older people often choose to forgo the new technology. The young rarely do.) The best approximation to being presented with the best alternative might be to live in a world that is constantly creating new alternatives (sometimes improving on old alternatives, sometimes not), then leaving people alone to choose among as large a subset of that world of opportunities as they can handle comfortably. In particular, this will be preferable to being presented with a *fait accompli*, chosen by a bureaucrat for reasons known only to that bureaucrat and to the corporations to whom the bureaucrat grants a monopoly privilege.⁵⁶

Revisiting Mill

Such worries underscore John Stuart Mill's conception of the value of liberty: to free our minds, we need to live in a marketplace of ideas, a climate of opinion where unanimity is conspicuously absent.⁵⁷ Part of Mill's point is that we want students not to face a united front. Recall the problem of anchoring and adjustment; if some professors ask students to justify evaluations as (metaphorically speaking) deviations from six feet, we want other professors to be asking students to judge in terms of deviation from five feet. Sometimes we might even want students to be overwhelmed for a time – if this means facing more than six choices about what to believe.

We must at the same time resist the temptation to react to contrary opinions by copping out: by concluding that all opinions are mere opinions, and that there is no truth of the matter. As Mill would have insisted, we must take responsibility for putting ideas into testable form as best we can, then learn from experience that not all opinions are equal. A free society lets Copernicus disagree with Ptolemy, but it does not stop there. It also leaves the rest of us free to figure out – indeed responsible for figuring out – who is right.

One final thought about figuring out who is right, and about the shackles of chronic or gratuitous conflict. In intellectual and personal life, *not needing to be right* is a massively underrated freedom. People who do not insist on treating discussions as competitions to be won or lost are people who are still growing. They tend to be more likable, and they probably learn more.

Discussion

- 1 A group the size of a college class is more than large enough, it seems, to be capable of triggering misperception in Asch-style experiments. Do you ever notice how different some people are in a small group as opposed to a large group? Do you notice how differently they feel about speaking? What should be done about this?
- 2 How much time do you suppose people spend reading or discussing views with which they intensely disagree? Should they spend more? (How much time do you spend?)
- 3 When, if ever, should intolerance be tolerated?
- 4 People today in the developed world are literate. They have a life expectancy approaching 80 years. So they can anticipate 75 years of literate life. Has this fact made them more free?

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Notes

1. Kate Johnson observes in conversation that we are implicitly talking about a Maslow hierarchy of values. We worry about psychological freedom only when, and only because, we have won the more fundamental battles. Michael McKenna notes in conversation that this is a matter of degree. A person who is dodging bullets is not thinking about whether his wants are truly authentic; but a person in prison may be.
2. Here we construe positive freedom as a matter of having ‘real choices’ in the sense defined in our Introduction, that is, as having options together with the capacity to exercise them effectively. For reasons explained in the Introduction, we avoid defining positive freedom in terms of the capacity to get what we want, but at the same time we wish in this chapter to emphasize rather than ignore the fact that circumstances – which arguably include our expanding set of options and capacities – can warp our wants, can blind us to what we most want, and so on.
3. See Brennan 2006.
4. One possible explanation for the asymmetry: we cannot possibly be wrong in thinking that we are aware of being in pain, but we could be wrong in thinking that we are aware of making a choice. Or the pain just is the awareness, whereas choice is something beyond mere awareness; and that is where the possibility of error arises. Our point is precisely that we cannot possibly be wrong in thinking that there are phenomena, such as consciousness of being in pain, whose inexplicability in terms of physics is never treated as a reason for doubting their existence.
5. See, in general, Ismael 2006; see also Bargh and Ferguson 2000. The latter article argues that even higher mental processes are themselves

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best understood from a scientific perspective as being governed by deterministic processes. The authors surely understand themselves to be making an empirical claim, supported by evidence, but their hypothesis is not testable in any obvious way.

6. In Gabrielle Taylor's (1987) analysis, integrity is about "keeping oneself intact." A life of integrity is a unified life. Integrity is a form of freedom. It is the power to continue having a self in the moment. It, too, is an achievement, not a given.
7. See Cosmides and Tooby 1992.
8. Research suggests that we are prone to what is called a *pessimistic bias*: a tendency to believe that the past is better than it really was, that the past is better than the present, and that the present is better than the future will be. And we tend to be wrong about all this. See Jouini and Napp 2006.

There is also research suggesting that depressed people are more realistic than others and that pessimists are more realistic than optimists. Much of the literature is transparently slanted toward confirming depressing hypotheses about human nature. Our main purpose is neither to debunk these attempts – which themselves seek to debunk more inspiring pictures of human nature – nor to depress, or to reassure pessimists that pessimism is realistic. We simply aim to be realistic about how free human beings can be.

9. Michael McKenna notes that, if we think of choices as intentional efforts to settle uncertainty, then many of our actions could count as being subject to self-control even if they do not involve choice in that narrow sense. McKenna tells us in correspondence that, if I see an elderly woman in need of help crossing the street, I straightaway move to help her. I did so freely, intentionally, but I did not first choose to help her (for I was not uncertain about whether I should) and then help; I simply helped. Yet my intention is under my control. (I could have defused it if I wanted, say if I came to believe the woman was a Nazi war criminal.)
10. Do those who deny that humans are capable of rational judgment forfeit their claim to be taken seriously? (After all, those who make such judgments thereby assert that their judgments are not rational.) Transcendental arguments seem too cute, somehow; but, even so, the answer seems to be yes.

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11. To be clear, acquiring the ability to drive an automobile is part of a developmental continuum (perhaps one that empirically exhibits more or less dramatic developmental steps), but the law still has to pick an arbitrary age limit and treat the state of being qualified to drive as if it were an on/off switch. There may well be analogs in the realm of free will of the idea of being *qualified* to drive, but that is not our topic here. We are treating the capacity to steer ourselves, as it were, as analogous to our capacity to steer an automobile.
12. Gigerenzer (2008) asks important questions about some of the data we present here, and about the computational standards for judging human rationality presumed by some of these experiments.
13. When Milgram asked for predictions in 1963, Yale undergraduates predicted an obedience rate of 1.2 percent. Forty Yale faculty psychiatrists predicted a rate of 0.125 percent. See Blass 1999, 963.
14. Philosophers are aware of this literature, but haven't talked about it much. However, see the work of Nahmias 2007 or Nelkin 2005.
15. Shelton 1982. What we report here conforms to Blass 1999.
16. In 1971, Philip Zimbardo selected twenty-four middle-class male undergraduates to inhabit a simulated prison for two weeks, randomly assigning them to roles of prisoner and guard. In their first encounter, the guards strip-searched the prisoners. Guards went on to develop increasingly sadistic routines, depriving prisoners of sleep and food, assigning degrading chores, and requiring prisoners to simulate having anal sex. When Zimbardo was informed that the 'prisoners' were planning to walk out, he himself phoned the police to ask for help with preventing a 'prison break.' The police declined, and only later did Zimbardo come to see his own behavior as bizarre. Originally planning a two-week experiment, Zimbardo called it off after six days (2007, 211). By his own account, Zimbardo was more than a little carried away with his role of warden. At least one participant said that the guards were just students following Zimbardo's orders and acting out his fantasies about how to intensify the prisoners' humiliation. Zimbardo seemed so bent on confirming his theory – namely that situations and role expectations determine behavior – that he wound up playing a role similar to that of Milgram's lab director. His student guards, then, were arguably no more spontaneous than Milgram's 'teachers' were.
17. Asch 1955, 37 and 1952, 457–8.

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18. Berns, Chappelow, Zink, Pagnoni, Martin-Skurski, and Richards 2005.
19. Ibid. In this study subjects were given a mental rotation task: they had to determine whether two images on a computer screen represented different objects or merely the same object, rotated in space. The baseline error rate was a mean 13.8 percent. The error rates in the presence of wrong information given by a group of confederates, and by a computer, were 41 percent and 32 percent, respectively (ibid., 248). When asked why they went along with the group, 82.8 percent of the genuine subjects said that on some trials they were sure they were right, and, serendipitously, so was the group. 58.6 percent said that on some trials they were not sure but decided to go with the group. 3.4 percent said they were sure they were wrong but decided to go with the group nonetheless. The presence of external information was shown to decrease activity in the occipital and parietal parts of the brain, which are known to govern perceptual tasks. The authors say: "it was striking that the effects of social conformity were detected only in the most posterior aspects – the occipital and parietal lobes." "The lack of concomitant activity changes in more frontal areas was highly suggestive of a process based, at least partially, in perception. Of course, changes in frontal activity could have occurred below our detection threshold, but with 32 participants, we think this unlikely" (ibid., 251).
20. Presumably there is a major evolutionary advantage to being able to track the truth without distortion. But presumably there is also a major evolutionary advantage to being able to 'go along to get along.'
21. Asch 1952, 480.
22. We should note that several experiments have attempted to replicate Asch's results, and some (but only some) have failed. See Perrin and Spencer 1980 and Lalancette and Standing 1990. When everything has been said, the pressures to conform are undeniably varied and serious, but we also see ample evidence that the pressures are by no means dispositive. Resistance is a very real option.
23. Part of the problem is social epistemology. Even if all we want is to have the truth rather than to conform, the fact that a bunch of seemingly normal, intelligent people disagree with me is, after all, a reason to think that I have made a mistake. So it is not entirely unreasonable for Asch's subjects to think that their eyes are messed up.

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24. Asch 1952, 477. What a shame, then, when people with minority views don't speak out. Perhaps we should have someone in every classroom whose job is vocally to disagree with the professor every day or so. The story of the Emperor's new clothes, Asch reflects, is a story of baseless consensus (ibid., 450). What went wrong in this parable is that everyone kept their mouth shut.
25. Of course, there are many more overtly hostile or disrespectful reactions in addition to boredom. Creationists aren't *bored* by evidence for Darwinian evolution. Instead, they are intrigued by the levels of self-deception they think they see in evolutionists. In a way, boredom is nevertheless the more worrisome reaction, because the bias in it is more subtle and harder to control.
26. Haidt 2006, 65.
27. Wright 1994, 280.
28. Bacon 1998, 7.
29. Why are we like that? Otto von Neurath says we are like sailors rebuilding our boat in the open sea. So, as we are patching holes, we encounter driftwood and other materials in an arbitrary order. It's not arbitrary to work with what you have. But, once you have incorporated one piece of driftwood and built other patches around it, it is often not worth ripping it out when a new and better piece comes along.
30. See Westen, Kilts, Blagov, Harenski, and Hamann 2006. Jason Brennan first learned of this study when he was reading a political blog. The blogger – a Democrat – said he believed the results to be true of the Republicans, but not of the Democrats. The blogger was not trying to be ironic.
31. Tversky and Kahneman 1981.
32. Haidt 2006, 62.
33. Ibid., 63.
34. Ibid., 66.
35. Haidt says in a personal communication that a lot of our reasoning goes on after we have already made up our minds. We are reasoning our way toward excuses. Or perhaps it is not as bad as it sounds. If our logic has led to a conclusion that is utterly surprising, it is not a bad thing to be continuing to reason: in other words, to question the unexpected conclusion. But this probably is not what Haidt is talking

about, because to reach a conclusion in the tentative sense just described and to *make up one's mind* are not the same thing.

36. Daniel Kahneman presumably has no particular loyalty to, or even familiarity with, the ancient eudaimonist way of conceiving of happiness; yet he infers from his experimental findings that “the goal of policy should be to increase measures of objective well-being, not subjective measures of satisfaction or happiness” (Kahneman 2003, 4, as reported in Wilkinson 2007, 13). Lest this be misunderstood, let us stress that Kahneman does not look to Aristotle for clues as to how to define what he calls “objective happiness.” Instead, he defines objective happiness as the MRI-measurable momentary experience of pleasure, averaged over time. So, there is a certain sort of objectivity in what Kahneman is calling objective, but it is not a normative claim of objective worthiness in the way that would interest an Aristotelian. We thank Brian Galle for helpful discussion.
37. See Kahneman 2006.
38. Leonhardt (2008) contains a striking map correlating reported life satisfaction with per capita GDP.
39. Angus Deaton (2008, 60) reports that several factors help to explain why recent surveys would show a linear relationship where earlier surveys found no relationship (past a certain point) between national income and life satisfaction. First, earlier surveys included only a small handful of the poorest countries; many of the countries included in the second survey help to smooth out the curve. Second, the earlier survey sampled literate urban people in the poorer countries, ostensibly with the intention of working with individuals more comparable to those surveyed in the richer countries: this was by way of controlling variables other than the difference in GDP. But, by doing so, the earlier survey was comparing the most satisfied people in the poorest countries to average members of richer countries. Once such effects were controlled, the appearance of a kinked relationship between satisfaction and wealth (rising, then flattening) disappeared, according to Deaton.
40. Chris Freiman (in conversation) notes that envy and equality are not the only issues for us to worry about. Brighthouse and Swift (2006) talk about positional goods (such as certificates or licenses the primary value of which is to give us an advantage in job applications) in their work

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on non-egalitarian rationales for equality. We agree that this is a real issue and we applaud the approach. It makes for a different kind of treadmill and we should not ignore it.

41. Are we really busier? Ramey and Francis (2006) claim that leisure hours were the same in 2000 as in 1900. They note that we have reduced work hours, increased domestic labor hours, and increased education hours. So we are busier learning and taking care of our homes than we were, but we spend the same amount of time doing nothing. When Schmidt thinks about the farm he grew up on and the farmers he knew, and about what they and their wives had to do to make it through the day, it is hard to imagine being more busy than they were. Nowadays children seem to be supervised around the clock. Back then, parents did not have time for that. When children shot each other or got their arms chopped off in a piece of farm machinery, perhaps after getting drunk, that was life. Our parents focused on the task in front of them. Today, we suspect, people are not more *busy* as much as more *distracted*.
42. Goodin, Rice, Parpo, and Eriksson (2008) claim that the spare time we have left after the hours we spend working, sleeping, and so on is less important to our life satisfaction than the amount of *discretionary* time we have. They define discretionary time as the amount of time we have left after the amount of time we strictly *need* to spend working, sleeping, and so on. Thus many people work longer hours than strictly necessary, but if they are choosing autonomously to spend their discretionary hours working, they tend to be more satisfied than workers who have no discretion in the matter.
43. We thank Lesley Wexler for the thought.
44. Cognitive dissonance is another notorious threat to our ability to trust our own thinking. We will not discuss the issue here, but see Chen 2008.
45. Haidt 2006, 25. A *satisficer* is someone who seeks satisfactory solutions that may or may not be optimal. Normal people in normal situations typically search their decision space in satisficing rather than optimizing mode. For example, if you are looking for an apartment, you look for something that meets your needs (with respect to price, location, number of bedrooms, and other amenities). Once you find something that meets your needs, you take it, and you save your scarce time for

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other areas of your life where your search for satisfactory solutions has not yet been a success. See Schmitz 2008.

46. Haidt 2006, 102.
47. One further thought on externals that matter: one of the best experiences we could have is the experience of total immersion in a deeply challenging yet manageable task; see Haidt 2006, 95. This total immersion is what Csikszentmihályi (1997) calls 'flow': a state where the end of the action is the action itself, a state where there is no other place to be, just pure absorption – being at home in the moment.
48. Another point, slightly technical but still practically important: maximizers can be bogged down by an excess of options, insofar as they keep searching for more options, uncomfortable with the thought that the option they chose might not have been the best available. Satisficers have no such problem insofar as, no matter how large the set of options is, they stop searching when they find something that is enough to meet the need that sent them searching.

Philosophers argue about whether adopting satisficing strategies is compatible with being a maximizer. It does not matter; what matters is that failing to adopt satisficing strategies is not compatible with being humanly rational. See the essay on "Choosing Strategies" in Schmitz 2008.

49. Needless to say, it does not go both ways. Not all experienced shoppers are smart shoppers.
50. Part of Schwartz's point is that advertisers deliberately bury us in options, thus manipulating us into making suboptimal choices. Now, we don't suppose that Schwartz is reporting the results of any particular scientific research. He is reporting his intuitions, honed in as they are by his reading of John Kenneth Galbraith. Of course, Schwartz's main claim is intuitively plausible. It is not plausible, however, to infer that we would be less subject to manipulation if the government took firm control of deciding which advertisers we could handle.
51. Gregg Easterbrook 2004 makes many of the same points as Schwartz 2003. He does not overreach, though, and perhaps this partly explains why his book does not have the notoriety of Schwartz's.
52. Bryan Caplan's *Myth of the Rational Voter* is one of the more recent entries in the literature debunking human rationality; but, unlike

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almost all of the others, Caplan extends the implications of such human folly from the economic to the political sphere (much as James Buchanan extended insights about rational self-interest from the economic to the political sphere). Caplan focuses on four so-called biases: the bias that blinds us to the mutual benefits of trade in general; the bias that blinds us to the benefits of trading with foreigners in particular; the bias that makes us see job creation per se as a good thing; and the bias that blinds us to evidence of our steadily improving quality of life (to a point that many find such evidence *upsetting*).

53. David A. Shaywitz, "Free to Choose but Often Wrong," *Wall Street Journal* (June 24, 2008). Given the measured and mildly skeptical tone of the review, we suspect that the title of the review was chosen by an editor at the newspaper rather than by the author himself.
54. Lewis Thomas has a charming essay called "To Err Is Human." He claims that the ability of human beings to jump to conclusions unwarranted by the data is what makes such beings great. It is by doing things that do not fit the data – by trying to confirm our biases, by finally admitting that the attempt is not working, and by starting to wonder why – that we make progress. Thomas concludes by asking how we should organize our community given that we are now a single, planet-spanning human community.

We can assume, as a working hypothesis, that all the right ways of doing this are unworkable. What we need, then, for moving ahead, is a set of wrong alternatives much longer and more interesting than the short list of mistaken courses that any of us can think up right now. We need, in fact, an infinite list, and when it is printed out we need the computer to turn on itself and select, at random, the next way to go. If it is a big enough mistake, we could find ourselves on a new level, stunned, out in the clear, ready to move again. (Thomas 1979, 40)

55. It seems so odd to say that it does not matter if poor people feel satisfied with their lot in life – dismissing this as advertiser-induced false consciousness – while simultaneously holding that a few rich people's feeling overstressed changes everything. People feel good about positive change. If they do not understand how much better they should feel about being born at the end of a century in a country where life

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expectancy nearly doubled, this does not change the fact of how much better it is.

56. See Scheibehenne, Greifeneder, and Todd (2009) for a recent, comprehensive survey of the literature on the 'too much choice' effect. They find a discrepancy between the growing number of publications attesting to the effect and empirical data showing no effect, or even the opposite effect. They infer from their own studies that the effect is less robust than was previously thought; it manifests itself in thought experiments where subjects have to justify their choices, but in general it is hard to detect.
57. The Espionage Act of 1917 had made it a criminal offense to criticize the US government. The concept of the 'marketplace of ideas' was explicitly articulated for the first time in the dissenting opinion of Associate Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr (joined by Louis Brandeis) in the US Supreme Court case *Abrams v. US* (1919):

Persecution for the expression of opinions seems to me perfectly logical. If you have no doubt of your premises or your power and want a certain result with all your heart you naturally express your wishes in law and sweep away all opposition . . . But when men have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is better reached by free trade in ideas – that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out. That at any rate is the theory of our Constitution.