

# Self-Consciousness and Freedom

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## 1. The Presumption of Open Alternatives

As practical beings, we act with a sense of freedom, or, to use Kant's memorable phrase, "unter der Idee der Freiheit." This attitude is present whenever we are deciding what to do, and it is most clearly revealed when we reflect on what we take for granted while deliberating. Consider a young man, Imad, who lives under an oppressive military occupation and deliberates about whether to join the resistance, leave the country, or continue quietly in his studies hoping that the occupation will be eliminated through the efforts of others. Taking any of these alternatives is likely to have momentous consequences upon his physical safety, his self-esteem, and realization of his goals. Yet, he can no longer tolerate his indecision and feels that he must commit himself somehow. One thing is apparent; Imad faces alternative courses of action, each of which he regards as *open* for him to undertake at the time. Were he to come to believe of any of the alternatives that it is no longer a genuine option, he would cease deliberating about *whether* to take it.

An agent's "sense" or "awareness" of personal freedom is nothing more than a presumption of open alternatives made explicit in reflection. But what exactly is its content? *What* does one accept in presuming a course of action to be "open"? To fix

intuitions, suppose a friend of Imad's interrupts his deliberations and questions him about what he is thinking.

*Friend:* Do you feel that you *can* do any one of the actions you are considering?

*Imad:* Certainly I can, depending upon which one I choose.

*Friend:* Then, if you choose any one of those actions, would you be doing it on purpose?

*Imad:* Well, of course. Why would I choose it if I didn't mean to do it?

*Friend:* Can you tell, at this stage, which course of action you will eventually undertake?

*Imad:* No, not just yet. I've not yet made up my mind on the matter. That's what I am trying to decide.

*Friend:* Are you aware of anything already existing that will *cause* you to take, or to choose, either the path of resistance, leaving the country, or continuing in your studies?

*Imad:* Well, I hadn't thought about that, but now that you ask I guess that I must say no, I am unaware of any such thing; as far as I can tell, it is entirely up to me what I will eventually do.

*Friend:* Would you say, then, that you are *free* to choose either resisting, or leaving, or continuing in your studies?

*Imad:* Indeed, haven't I just told you that I can choose any one of these options?

*Friend:* So, your future concerning this matter is not yet fixed?

*Imad:* That's right; on this matter my future remains to be written.

Assuming Imad's responses to be what one might expect from a normal deliberator satisfying at least minimal conditions of rationality, let us exploit the conversation as a springboard for conjectures about deliberation. There are at least three elements in Imad's sense of open alternatives. First, Imad has a sense of *control* over the considered options insofar as he realizes that (i) they are mutually exclusive, (ii) his performance of any one of them would be intentional, and (iii) which he decides upon is entirely up to himself. Second, cognizant of his own *indecision* about what to do and his uncertainty about what will happen, Imad envisions an incomplete yet malleable future to be shaped partly through his own efforts. Third, in self-ascribing freedom, Imad reveals *self-awareness*. Not only does he view the decision as his own, he understands that in shaping his own future, he will determine what he himself is to become. Were they made explicit, his thoughts would likely take a first-person form: *I* am free to do this or to do that; if *I* choose this action then *I* will do it; and, if *I* do it then *I* will become such and such.<sup>1</sup>

Some construe a deliberator's feeling of freedom as an awareness of the absence of determining causes upon his eventual decision. It is doubtful that the phenomenology warrants this leap,<sup>2</sup> but many interpret the feeling as his *belief* in contra-causal freedom.<sup>3</sup> If so, then any deliberating determinist is automatically inconsistent.

. . . to reject free will is to condemn oneself to a life of perpetual logical inconsistency. Anyone who rejects free will adopts a general theory about human beings that he contradicts with every deliberate word and act. (Van Inwagen 1983, p. 160)

To be sure, the presumption of openness—the idea of freedom—is an acceptance of an ability to shape a future that *appears* as yet undetermined. But must we accept *indeterminism* in order to deliberate? Are all deliberating determinists automatically inconsistent? If not, what is it to deliberate and act under the idea of freedom? In what follows, I show how an examination of self-reference in the idea of freedom opens the door to a novel answer to these questions and a fresh interpretation of the claim that one who acts under the idea of freedom is *thereby* “in praktischer Rücksicht wirklich frei” (Kant 1961, p. 105).

## **2. The Background Totality**

Each alternative Imad considers is a course of action he thinks he can undertake. Here, a *course of action* is a representation of a potential doing, not of a bit of behavior considered as an event in the world.<sup>4</sup> Its components are representations of an *action-type* (e.g., joining the resistance), a *time*, and an *agent*, in this case, Imad himself considered in a first person way. The action-type representation can vary in complexity. In some cases it is simple, e.g., pointing upwards with my right index finger, while in others it is correlated with a complex plan, viz., a network of interrelated subsidiary courses-of-action, e.g., obtaining a Ph.D. in Chemistry (Bratman 1987, chps. 2-3, and Mele 1992, chps. 8-11). To decide upon such an elaborate course of action is to ready oneself for a variety of other intentional behaviors over an extended period.

While Imad consciously considers alternatives, he need not be aware *that* the alternatives are open to him. His presumption is likely a matter of tacit commitments, e.g. beliefs, attitudes whose presence is evidenced by the ready responses Imad gave to

his friend's questions. However, since 'belief' has calcified in the lexicon of some to imply an ability to articulate content, perhaps what we want are lower-level doxastic states—better conveyed by 'takes for granted' or 'feels that'—states with content, but for which corresponding linguistic abilities may be lacking. For convenience, 'presumes' shall be used to indicate doxastic attitudes generically, allowing the character of the dispositions to fluctuate among various doxastic levels (cf., Mele 1992, pp. 62, 78).

No one deliberates from a zero point of view, devoid of antecedent knowledge or beliefs. At any time, one's sense of options is established by measuring prospective undertakings against background circumstances and commitments one *takes* to be relevant. Imad, for example, does not consider whether to join the resistance without supposing that the requisite means and opportunities will be in place should he so intend. His *background framework* includes information about past, present and future factual circumstances as well as his ongoing projects and future-oriented intentions. Both sorts of information serve as inputs to further deliberations (Bratman 1987, chp. 3). Some elements of the future portion of the background framework—the *future framework*—are fixed for the purposes of practical deliberation, e.g., that New York is east of Chicago. Others are more fluid, either by being regarded as less than certain, for instance, its raining tomorrow, or by being subject to a change of mind, e.g., my current intention to vacation in Maine next July. But fluid or fixed, the future framework must be recognized as *partial* given that the future is also regarded as partly open.

The background framework with respect to any particular course of action is limited by the agent's understanding of prevailing circumstances and stratified with respect to accessibility. Although only some of its elements reach consciousness, the agent is

disposed to refer generally to the environment within which he acts, for it is not enough if a course of action is presumed open relative to this situation and to that commitment without also being viewed as open *tout <fait*. The presumption of openness is *global* in character since it measures a course of action against *everything that is relevant*, with the quantifier embedded within attitudinal scope. Thus, in responding affirmatively to his friend's fourth question with the qualifier "as far as I can tell," Imad records his attitude about what he can do with respect to a totality of prevailing circumstances. Hence, a characterization of this envisioned *background totality* must be given in order to understand an agent's presumptive content.

### **3. The Presumption of Effectiveness**

Imad's "I can do any of them," in response to his friend's first question, suggests that perhaps all there is to an agent's presumption that a course of action is open is that he takes himself to be *able* to do it (Mele 2003, p. 179). But this helps only if we know what is it for an agent to take himself to be *able* to do something.

A standard means of fleshing out the presumption of ability is that the agent presumes his attempt to do an action would be successful. Imad takes himself as able to join the resistance because his efforts to do so would be *effective*, viz., he would join were he to undertake doing so. He thereby distinguishes between his intentional effort—the undertaking—and his potential doing, while linking them in some way. Here, to 'undertake' a course of action is either to intend it or endeavor to do it, that is, to intentionally embark upon a plan of action that one envisions will eventuate in doing it (e.g., I undertake learning the piano by employing a teacher, buying a beginner's

instruction manual, practicing daily, etc.).<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, one rendition of a *presumption of effectiveness* is this:

**PE.** S presumes that *his* A-ing is open only if S presumes that *his* undertaking A would be effective.

Temporal parameters are left implicit, and the italicized pronouns within the scope of ‘presumes’ reflects the first-person character of the agent’s content and, thus, should be understood as *quasi*-indicators, viz., linguistic devices for ascribing indexical thoughts to another (Castañeda 1967). Thus, ‘*his*’ is a way of attributing to S a use of a first-person concept.

It is a delicate matter to ascribe content with theoretical terms like ‘effective’. A more neutral way to express a sense of connection is through conditionals, as in this refinement of **PE**:

**PE1.** S presumes that *his* A-ing is open only if S presumes that (i) *he* would A were *he* to undertake A-ing, and (ii) *he* would refrain from A-ing were *he* to undertake refraining from A-ing.<sup>6</sup>

This is a condition of *strong* effectiveness correlated to an agent’s ability to *ensure* a performance or result (Van Inwagen 2001, 165; Mele 2003b). Linking a presumption of openness to such strong ability is appropriate if one is fully confident that performance of the action is guaranteed by the undertaking, e.g., raising one’s right arm. However, since probability rules in practical affairs, **PE1** is too restrictive. I make about 80% of the shots I take from the free throw line on a basketball court, and because of this, I assume that my intentional efforts towards making a shot from the free throw line within the next ten seconds will most likely be effective. By contrast, my confidence level in making a shot

from midcourt is fairly low, and it is more accurate to say that only my *trying* to make it is taken as open by me. What is lacking here is control; an open alternative must be the sort of thing that can be done intentionally and regularly, with not too much left to chance or “luck” (Mele and Moser 1994).

While it is questionable just how much control one must have over an option in order for it to be an open alternative, a tentative proposal is that an action is taken as open only if the agent’s confidence level is better than 50%. In that case, **PE1** gives way to the broader formula,

**PE2.** S presumes that *his* A-ing is open only if S presumes that (i) it is more likely than not that *he* would A were *he* to undertake A-ing, and (ii) it is more likely than not that *he* would refrain from A-ing were *he* to undertake refraining from A-ing.

It must be remembered here that the probability conditionals within attitudinal scope are tacitly relativized to the agent’s background totality at the time. For example, I assume that I would be in Chicago within the next two hours were I to undertake going there *given* my presumptions about my current locale, my access to an automobile, etc.

#### **4. The Presumption of Contingency**

By itself, an effectiveness presumption is insufficient for explaining what it is to take a course of action as open. Imad might recognize that it would be easy to collaborate with the occupation were he to undertake doing so, but he does not thereby view collaboration as an open alternative. Why not? Given his conviction in the strength of his values of loyalty and justice, he feels that he could never bring himself to collaborate, at least not

intentionally. Presumably, a deliberator must also take it for granted that he can intentionally perform any action he deems to be open, and, similarly, that he can intentionally refrain, and thus, that the potential act is as yet *contingent*. As Aristotle emphasized, no one deliberates about that which is impossible or necessary. To avoid a facile refutation of determinism it is essential that the modality falls within attitudinal scope, so that we have as an Aristotelian *presumption of contingency*,

**PC.** An agent S presumes that *his* A-ing is open only if at S presumes that *his* A-ing is, as yet, contingent.

It follows that if S takes *his* A-ing to be contingent then he also takes *his* not A-ing as contingent and, similarly, by satisfying **PE**, that *his* undertaking A is contingent.<sup>7</sup>

The problem now is to give some account of the modality in **PC**, for not just any sort of contingency will do. Mere logical contingency is not sufficient, nor, for that matter, any other sort of nomological contingency fixed solely by reference to a body of laws of nature. It breaks no laws for me to be in New York City intentionally at 3 pm GMT on March 15, 2007, but that situation is impossible at 2:55 pm GMT of the same day when I am wandering the streets of Istanbul. An agent can take many course of action to be nomologically contingent without presuming that they are open to him at the time. Instead, a modality grounded in particular circumstances is required, viz., a *relativized*, modality, where a situation P is *contingent relative to* a set M just in case neither P nor not-P is a consequence of M.<sup>8</sup> Many of the *cans*, *cannots*, *mights*, and *maybes* of everyday usage—in terms of which we plan, predict, and ruminate about the past—express some such relative modality, for example, my turning down an invitation to dinner with ‘I cannot.’

To what circumstances must the presumed contingency be relativized in order to secure **PC** as a general principle? If to the *entire* past, as libertarians would have it, then a deliberator who takes a particular action to be already determined will regard it as part of fixed future framework, not as open. As such, it seems easy to locate an inconsistency in any deliberating determinist; as a determinist, one assumes that whatever will be done (chosen, undertaken, etc.) is *already* determined, hence, necessitated, but, qua deliberator, one takes each alternative to be *as yet* contingent, hence, undetermined.

But matters are not so simple. To say that a determinist who deliberates about alternatives supposes that *whatever he will do is already determined* is not to imply, for any such alternative, that he takes his doing *it* to be determined. The quantifier ‘whatever’ falls within the scope of his assumption, so that he need not believe *of any* specific alternative that it is already determined. He might accept that one of the alternatives is determined even though he has no idea which one it is. We cannot, then, automatically attribute to the determinist who deliberates about whether to A the bald inconsistency of believing both that his A-ing is determined *and* that it is not.

A better libertarian argument is this. Suppose,

(i) S is a determinist who presumes that one of the alternatives he deliberates about will be undertaken.

Then, by the libertarian analysis,

(ii) S believes of each alternative that his undertaking it is as yet contingent and, consequently, that it is not yet determined.

So, from (i) and (ii) we conclude,

(iii) S believes that there is some alternative that will be undertaken but is not yet determined.

However,

(iv) S believes that everything that will occur is already determined.

Hence, since (iii) and (iv) ascribe incompatible beliefs,

(v) S is inconsistent.

This reasoning, *on* the libertarian analysis of the presumed contingency, does secure an ascription of an inconsistency to deliberating determinists. Does it succeed?

## 5. Attitudinal Contingency

Perhaps some reflective agents do weigh alternatives against the entire history of the world, but the libertarian requirement that *every* deliberator does is dubious. The very existence of deliberators who deny holding indeterministic beliefs constitutes some evidence that they do not. Also, having a general thought involving the concept of “the entire history of the world” requires fairly sophisticated conceptual abilities, perhaps too sophisticated for very young deliberators who are able to have “I can” thoughts about alternatives. For these reasons, the libertarian interpretation of the presumed contingency mentioned in premise (ii) of the preceding argument is suspect. But what other account of this modality is available?

Consider Imad’s response to his friend’s third question. Taken literally, the words ‘as far as I can tell’ suggest an interpretation of PC in terms of *epistemic* contingency, where P is epistemically contingent for S at t just in case neither P nor its negation is a

consequence of what S knows at t. This principle is reminiscent of Spinoza's description of the idea of freedom:

Men are deceived in thinking themselves free, a belief that consists only in this, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined. (*Ethics*, Part II, Proposition 35, Scholium)

But even adapting this account to deliberation before action, combining awareness of a course of action with ignorance of its causes does not yield a sense *of* contingency.

Instead, we need a refinement of PC that brings the modality within attitudinal scope, e.g.,

**PC1.** S presumes that *his* A-ing is open only if S presumes that *his* A-ing is, as yet, epistemically contingent.

Replacing **PC** by **PC1** yields a straightforward way of blocking the libertarian argument. Since believing that something is epistemically contingent does not require believing that it is not determined *per se*, then, taking the contingency in premise (ii) to be epistemic prevents the derivation of (iii).

Although recourse to epistemic contingency is attractive, **PC1** faces difficulties of its own. A deliberator might regard an action as open even if his knowledge rules it out. Adrian might know that Chicago is 450 miles from Minneapolis, yet, still think he can make the drive in five hours traveling at his usual speed of 70 miles per hour. Perhaps Adrian is bad at arithmetic, or, maybe he simply fails to apply what he knows. Again, suppose Rita promises her husband that she will phone their daughter at 3 pm in the afternoon, and, at 9 am, instructs her secretary to remind her to place the call shortly before 3 pm. Given Rita's recollection of past promise keeping, knowledge of her daily

schedule, confidence in her secretary's dependability, etc., she has a justified belief that she will phone her daughter then. But now, at 2:57 pm, occupied with the day's business, Rita deliberates about conferring with her broker on the phone at 3 pm, an action that is inconsistent with phoning her daughter at the same. In so doing, Rita overlooks her earlier resolve, fails to be attentive to what she knows, and deliberates about a course of action she knows to be incompatible with phoning her daughter.

It might be questioned whether Rita still knows, or even believes, at 2:57 pm that she will telephone her daughter at 3 pm. To be sure, in overlooking her earlier resolve she has forgotten what she knows she will do, but forgetting—in the sense of a temporary recall failure—does not imply loss of a previously held belief or of supporting evidence for that belief. Rita's ready acceptance of her secretary's reminder at 2:58 pm indicates that the original dispositions, intentional, epistemic and doxastic, are still in place. In the heat of the moment we might forget our friend's name, but we do not conclude sudden ignorance. We recognize that the propositions a person knows and believes are not equally accessible, but tagged with varying degrees of retrievability within epistemic and doxastic hierarchies.

A solution is at hand. Insofar as we are describing an agent's *presumed* contingency, the qualifier 'epistemic' in **PC1** should be read as occurring within attitudinal scope. We can then see that the presumed contingency involves a potential first-person identification since it is relativized not to what the agent knows, but to what the agent would express with 'what I now know'. In other words, **PC1** gives way to the more nuanced,

**PC2.** S presumes that *his* A-ing is open only if S presumes that *his* A-ing is, as yet, contingent relative to what *he* then knows.

With this version, it is clearer that the consequence relation used to define the relative contingency is also within scope, thereby establishing the second index on the relative modality (see note 8).

**PC2** is immune to the counterexamples affecting **PC1**. Rita can temporally overlook what she knows at 2:57.45 pm. At the same time, in the midst of her deliberations, she asks herself whether she can confer with her broker at 3 pm, and answers affirmatively: “yes I can, as far as I know.” At that moment, she assumes that *she* can confer with broker at 3 pm relative to what *she* then knows, for she overlooks the justified belief that *she* will phone *her* daughter at 3 pm. Her assumption about what she can do is deflated 15 seconds later upon the secretary’s reminder of the commitment to phone her daughter, triggering retrieval of the said belief. But it existed at 2:57.45 pm, simultaneously with her disposition to affirm that *she* will phone her daughter. The difficulty is avoided because the qualifier ‘what *she* knows’—or, ‘what I know’ in her thought—occurs within attitudinal scope. Thus, in first-person terms, to take phoning the broker at 3 pm to be contingent relative to “everything I now know” is not to take it as contingent relative to each proposition that I know but, instead, relative to the totality of what I know. Though her global belief might be false, Rita is not in the absurd position of assuming that phoning her broker at 3 pm is contingent relative to the first-person proposition that *she* knows she will phone her daughter at 3 pm.

Unfortunately, even if we insist on an internal reading of the quantifier ‘what I now know’, **PC2** will not work. Suppose you ask me whether I will visit you in Copenhagen when I am traveling in Denmark next August. Believing that I will remain in Chicago throughout that time, I respond with, “No, I cannot, since I won’t be traveling next

August.” On reflection, recalling my own spontaneous nature and fondness for northern Europe, I privately acknowledge that for all I know I *might* very well be traveling in Denmark next August. Yet, I retain my intention to remain in Chicago and my belief that I will not be traveling then and, consequently, I rule out traveling as an option. Traveling in Denmark next August is not contingent relative to what I believe, though I acknowledge its contingency relative to what I take myself to know. This suggests that the words 'as far as I can tell' in Imad's fourth response point to *doxastic* contingency, so that **PC2** yields to,

**PC3.** S presumes that *his* A-ing is open only if S presumes that *his* A-ing is yet contingent relative to what *he* then believes.

Again, 'what he then believes' must be read as falling within attitudinal scope, otherwise this principle would fail before the Rita example given that she believes whatever she knows. Quite simply, one who deliberates about A-ing takes no set of *his* beliefs to be sufficient for *his* intentionally A-ing or for *his* intentionally refraining.

We now have an interpretation of the background totality that anchors an agent's presumption of openness; it is the set of propositions that *he* then believes, that is, all and only those readily accessible propositions *p* such that he is disposed to endorse, *I now believe that p*.

## 6. The Doxastic Analysis

Combining **PE2** with **PC3** results in the following characterization of an agent's sense of openness:

**PO** . S presumes that *his* A-ing is open if and only if S presumes that relative to what *he* then believes, (i) it is more likely than not that *he* would A were *he* to undertake A-ing; (ii) it is more likely than not that *he* would refrain from A-ing were *he* to undertake refraining from A-ing; and (iii) his A-ing is, as yet, contingent.

Each of (i)-(iii) is subordinated not only to ‘presumes’ but also to ‘relative to what *he* then believes’. Let us add that a set constitutes a range of presumed open *alternatives* just in case the agent takes each to be open for him and presumes that they are not all conjointly realizable. A *minimal* range is a course of action and its complement.

Generalizing the presumption of openness to all cases of intentional action, so that every undertaking is a choice from at least a minimal range (Searle 1984, p. 96; Kapitan 1991), we come to the central hypothesis of this essay: to act “under the idea of freedom” is to undertake a course of action that one presumes to be included among a range of open alternatives.

Imagine that Imad consciously believes what a local astrologer told him, namely, that it is already determined that he will choose just one of his three options and, hence, that his choosing any of the other two is impossible relative to the entire past. Imad has no idea which alternative this is, but suppose that he not so irrational as to believe *his* choosing the option *he* is determined to choose is also *undetermined* by the past. Can he continue in his deliberation about the three options? According to the libertarian, since Imad does not presume the alternatives to be undetermined then he cannot presume them to be open and, therefore, either he will not deliberate or, if he does, he must view his deliberation as pointless.

This result seems incorrect. Imad might reason as follows. Look, I have to decide upon something in order to keep myself from going crazy. I know that I will act intentionally only *through a conscious effort on my part*, even if it is already determined, by the stars or whatever, that I will choose one particular course of action and not some alternative. As far as I can tell, the matter is entirely under my control even though, at this stage, I am undecided what to do. I must, in any case, try something and it is only through deliberation that I will make the best choice.

It is a strength of **PO** that an agent can believe an alternative is doxastically contingent while abstaining on the question whether it is contingent relative to the entire past. Imad retains a sense of an open future to be partially completed by actions resultant upon choices that he yet takes as contingent given circumstances as *he* understands them. Coupling this with his belief in the effectiveness of his undertaking and his desire to choose for the best, we have all that is needed to give his deliberation a “point.”

## 7. The Open “I”

The sense of freedom is saturated with self-awareness. An agent self-ascribes freedom by taking alternatives to be open for *himself*, identifying *himself* as the agent of a potential future action that is likely to be brought about by *his* own intentional undertaking, and tacitly relativizing openness to what he takes *himself* to believe. What conception of self-awareness is needed to accommodate the sense of freedom described in **PO**? This is a large issue, but two major components are evident, *first person identification* on one hand, and a *projectible autobiography* on the other. Let me explain each in turn.

The self-awareness in question is not mere reflexive awareness, that is, of a person who happens to be the same as oneself. Instead, it is *first-personal* awareness involving an indexical identification of oneself via a unique first-person mode.<sup>9</sup> Each indexical mode is analyzable in terms of three factors: first, an *indexical concept*, e.g., being a *you*, being a *this*; second, an immediate datum or *index* (Nunberg 1993) located at a position within an agent's perspective; and third, an *orienting relation* linking the item identified to the index. An index is any item of immediate awareness with a position within the spatial and/or temporal array of items one is aware of (one's *perspective* at the time). Each indexical mode is a relational property the identified item has only *as* an object of indexical identification; just as no one is a *you* apart from being addressed as such, so too, nothing is an *I* except through first-person identification. Accordingly, the celebrated "self" is not a substance so much as an ephemeral status that a thinking being manifests from time to time.

Identification is *deferred* when routed through something else one is aware of, for example, when I look at a photograph of a cathedral and think, *That building is in Paris*. The cathedral is identified, but only via the orienting relation of *being pictured by* to the photo. Identification is *direct* if the identified item is the index—with identity as the orienting relation—as when I compare two colors and think *this is darker than that*. A token of a simple demonstrative can also reflect deferred identification, for example, when I say that *this has a nice beach* while pointing to a locale on the map. Similarly, my *I am too tired* in response to your request for a game of tennis, suggests a direct identification of me, assuming the index is myself now. But first-person identification is deferred if the past or future self one thinks of is not identical to the present *I*. As Kant

said in the Paralogisms of the first *Critique*, we cannot assume that there is an underlying identity to account for the uses of 'I' at different times. It is equally possible that distinct entities are identified, each connected to my present self by a suitably intimate orienting relation.

Not only must a deliberator identify himself in a first-person way, he must also think of himself as an *agent*, a practical being. In so doing, he identifies himself as existing in a particular historical epoch, otherwise there would be no fixed future against which he could plan and choose. He associates himself with a partial autobiography, an accessible personal *profile* that includes a selection of one's self-ascribed properties, relationships, and commitments. While parts of the profile are within the fixed future, others belong to the fluid future. Yet it is important that the profile associated with presently identified *I* not be overloaded. Obviously we do not remember or anticipate everything about ourselves in deliberating, and, as the Rita case shows, even material that might be relevant in planning can be overlooked. The profile at any moment is invariably thin and neutral, for it can include no properties that would rule out the contingency of the course of action under consideration. If I think of attending the ballet this evening as open for me, then I cannot represent myself as having any property that that I understand to preclude or necessitate attending the ballet then. One's profile could never be a complete autobiography, there must be an acknowledged incompleteness of the *I*, otherwise nothing would be taken as open and we would never engage in practical reasoning.

Once I reach a decision, an augmented profile, similar to my present profile but with a different set of commitments and properties, is projected into the future framework. Correspondingly, the spotlight of an open future alternately expands and contracts, for as

I reformulate the image of my future self, the range of my anticipated freedom is transformed. Thus, there is a curious reciprocity between present and future. My future *I* obviously depends on what I now think and do, but because I cannot think of myself as now having control without considering how my future undertakings will be effective, then the representation of myself as currently free is parasitic on my representations of a future *I*. As practical beings, we cannot conceive of ourselves except through future-oriented self-awareness (Damasio 1999, p. 222).

Because we face an open future and operate with a thin personal profile, some conclude that anyone who deliberates about doing an action is undecided and ignorant about whether he will. Baldly stated, this is mistaken. An agent might very well know, or believe, that he will intentionally do an act at a time yet still deliberate about that action in the sense of considering (i) how to do it, (ii) whether it is the right thing to do, and (iii) whether one should stick to one's previous decision to do it. More directly, the Rita case shows that one can even deliberate *whether* to do something one knows one will do.

Nevertheless, some kind of indecision and ignorance, or better, an awareness *of* one's own indecision and ignorance, however rudimentary, is a consequence of the sense of freedom described in **PO**. Given that a deliberator's presumption is relativized to what *he* believes, then a sense that one is not yet *settled* upon a particular course of action—that the *I* is itself open—is to be expected. So, we can understand Imad's professed ignorance in responding to his friend's third question; his response warrants ascription not of indecision and uncertainty but, rather, the *presumption* of such; Imad presumes that he himself is undecided and uncertain. Even *that* is a state of his being unsettled

relative to his background totality. This allows us to accommodate the case of Rita while preserving the insight that decision represents a transition from a state of being unsettled to a state of being settled, that is, of having one's mind made up (Ginet 1966). Moreover, suppose the agent understands that if something is already determined then it will occur and, thus, that if *he* does not yet believe that it will occur then *he* does not believe that it is already determined. Then his presumption of indecision and uncertainty about an action is, at once, a presumption of its *indeterminacy* relative to what *he* then believes. An agent's sense of openness, thereby, includes dispositions to affirm *his* own non-commitment to a specific alternative and *his* causal independence from the background framework.

## **8. Subjective Freedom**

I have described the "idea" of freedom only. Does any type of genuine openness come out of this analysis that might shed some light on Kant's enigmatic claim that one who must act under the idea of freedom is, thereby, really free in a practical respect? I believe it can. An agent satisfying the consequent of **PO** not only presumes a course of action to be open; if his presumption is true, then it *is* open relative to what *he* then believes. This kind of freedom is *subjective*, because it is possessed by the self only—that is, by self-profiled agent cum *I*—and exists only in relation to the agent's practical totality. It is a *freedom* because it is an independence from the relevant past as conceived and, thereby, a springboard for creative action within the anticipated, yet partly incomplete and malleable, future. It is limited and, perhaps in many cases, misleading, but it is enough to

allow Imad to correctly report: *I am able to join the resistance, or to flee the country, or to stay quiet, as far as I can tell.*

Does subjective freedom matter? It does in two ways. First, it is all the practical freedom that is needed in order to *be* morally virtuous or vicious with respect to a particular intentional action. What matters here is that the agent correctly regards himself as subject to obligations and as having control relative to what *he* believes. This “intrinsic responsibility” (Kapitan 1989) is quite distinct from accountability, that is, from someone’s being morally justified in blaming or praising the agent for what he or she has done. That requires, in addition, freedom in the traditional sense of efficacy of the will (Kapitan 2000).

Second, to an extent, the more we understand about ourselves, the more we are able to predict our own future actions, then the less subjective freedom we have. This sounds paradoxical given that we normally suppose that an increase in self-awareness augments our sense of options, our know-how, and hence, our ability and control. Of course it does, to a point. At the same time, some self-awareness can actually restrict freedom when it becomes part of the fixed future framework and rules out various options. Thus, there is a danger in obsession with the past and the excessive introspection it creates, for the human mind is every ready to generalize, to detect permanent dispositions where there are mere probabilities, and to self-impose unwarranted feelings of *fāta obstant*. Correspondingly, there is an unquestionable benefit in the uncertainty, indecision, and feeling of control that comes with an increase in subjective freedom. As Nietzsche once remarked, we must learn to forget in order to be free—subjectively free—and, hence, to retain a taste for both creative adventure and moral advance.<sup>10</sup>

## Notes

1. Castañeda 1975, Perry 1979 and others have emphasized the first-person nature of intentional action. The connection of freedom with first-person consciousness is emphasized in Sartre 1957 IV, 1, where self-ascribed freedom is said to be *my* freedom, through which *I* become what I do and what I am. See also, Campbell 1957, chp. IX; 1967, chp. III. While first-person thinking need not be wedded to linguistic capacities to use first-person pronouns (Frank 2002, p. 402; Damasio 1999, pp. 185-186.), it does involve identifying oneself through a concept that we typically express with such words (see Kapitan 1999, 2001).
2. C. A. Campbell 1967, p. 71, argues that we immediately experience contra-causal freedom. A similar view is found in Moreland and Rae 2000, pp. 132-134, and Hasker 1999, pp. 81-86 and 107-109, while Searle 2000, speaks of experiencing a causal “gap” between an action and its psychological antecedents. Double 1991 and Mele 1995, pp. 248-249, doubt that the evidence warrants the inference to indeterminism.
3. That a deliberator *presumes* that his eventual decision is as yet undetermined is found in a variety of writers, for example, Reid 1848, 1, p. 617; Campbell 1957, p. 170; Taylor 1966, 178-182; Castañeda 1975, p. 312; Ginet 1966, pp. 90-93 Van Inwagen 1983, p. 154, and Searle 1984, pp. 95-97.
4. Castañeda 1975, pp. 162-163, contrasts actions considered as “practical doings” with actions considered as “circumstances” or events. Aware that I will be eating dinner at 7 pm, I deliberate about what to do shortly thereafter. I do not consider my eating dinner then as part of the malleable future as much as I view it as a background circumstance.
5. I borrow the term ‘undertakes’ from Roderick Chisholm (1976, chp. 2). While Chisholm also employed ‘endeavors’ as a synonym, Bratman distinguishes intending, endeavoring and intentionally doing an action (1987, pp. 133-138). My use of ‘effective’ is borrowed from Ginet 1966, pp. 92-93.
6. There is a third implicit temporal parameter in **PEI** that fixes the time of undertaking within the interval bounded by those of the presumption and the doing. It need not be assumed that effectiveness is a causal relation, and the conditionals are neutral on this matter. The causal theory of action is as old as Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139a31-32, though recently it has been challenged, e.g., in Libet 2002, Wegner 2002. A defense can be found in Mele 2003a.
7. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1140a. Tentatively, an agent does *A intentionally* just in case he performs *A* because of an intention to undertake a plan of action that includes a reliable strategy for bringing about his *A*-ing at *t*. For more on intentional action and action-plans see Bratman 1987, chps. 3 and 8, and Moser and Mele 1994.
8. A more exact schema for relative modality requires a double index. Letting *C* be any consequence relation and *M* any set of propositions, then ***P is C-ly possible relative to M***

iff  $\sim P$  is not a C-consequence of M. P is C-ly contingent relative to M iff both P and  $\sim P$  are C-ly possible relative to M. This allows us to rate something as logically possible, though not physically possible, relative to the same set of circumstances, e.g., flying from New York to Vienna in one minute relative to the current state of aeronautic technology.

9. This distinction is observed by several writers, e.g., Castañeda 1967; Perry 1979; Chisholm 1981; Frank 1991, 2002. Elsewhere I have developed a theory of indexical identification and applied it to the first person case (Kapitan 2001).

10. Nietzsche.

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