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Introspection and the Phenomenology of Free Will: Problems and Prospects

Abstract: *Inspired and informed by the work of Russ Hurlburt and Eric Schwitzgebel in their ‘Describing Inner Experience’, we do two things in this commentary. First, we discuss the degree of reliability that introspective methods might be expected to deliver across a range of types of experience. Second, we explore the phenomenology of agency as it bears on the topic of free will. We pose a number of potential problems for attempts to use introspective methods to answer various questions about the phenomenology of free-will experience — questions such as this: does such experience have metaphysical-libertarian satisfaction conditions? We then discuss the prospects for overcoming some of these problems via approaches such as Hurlburt’s DES methodology, the so-called ‘talk aloud’ protocol, and forms of abduction that combine introspection with non-introspection-based forms of evidence.*

[V]oluntary actions, though generally neglected in psychology, have a distinctive phenomenology which can be studied both qualitatively and quantitatively. (Haggard and Johnson, 2003)

The work of Russ Hurlburt and Eric Schwitzgebel in their *Describing Inner Experience* represents a welcome interdisciplinary collaboration resulting in a series of fruitful exchanges which thereby advances

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understanding of the prospects and challenges for Hurlburt's Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES) method in particular and introspectionist methodology in general.¹ We appreciate the invitation from the editors of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* to participate in this book symposium, particularly in light of some of our recent work that makes contact with the sorts of issues Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel discuss.

Inspired and informed by their discussion, we would like to do two things in our commentary. First, we wish to say something about introspection and the degree of reliability any such method might be expected to deliver across a range of types of experience. Second, because, as philosophers, we are particularly interested in the reliability of introspectionist methodology for answering questions about phenomenology that are relevant to certain philosophical debates, we wish to explore, even if briefly, the phenomenology of agency as it bears on the topic of free will. In particular, we wish to raise and clarify certain difficulties that make the probing of agentic experiences a matter of some delicacy, and then explore (again, briefly) the prospects for successful introspectionist probing of such phenomenology. Clarification with the aim of posing certain questions that might guide enquiry is what, as philosophers, we think we can usefully contribute to issues that are largely (but not entirely) empirical.

I. Introspection and Impotence

How reliable might one expect any (known) method of introspection to be with respect to the details of one's experiences?² Speaking very generally and (we think) uncontroversially, the answer to this question is that there is a range of types of experience with respect to which the reliability of introspection varies from being infallible or nearly so to being completely impotent or nearly so, with many cases in between. We are particularly interested in questions about the limits of introspectionist enquiry as it bears on certain philosophical questions. And we propose to (tentatively) probe its limits by considering the prospects of introspection being able to deliver answers to questions about rather subtle aspects of one's agentic phenomenology. We

[1] All unchaperoned page references in the text are to *Describing Inner Experience*.

[2] We should note that henceforth we will use the term 'experience' to refer to those occurrent mental states — states of phenomenal consciousness — that constitute the subject matter of introspectionist enquiry. Hurlburt prefers the term 'inner experience' while Schwitzgebel prefers 'conscious experience' or just 'experience' for the subject matter of their joint enquiry. They briefly discuss this terminological issue on p. 15.

suspect that introspection alone will prove to be largely impotent in this regard. And if we are right, this fact would bear importantly on the philosophical controversy over free will, given the evidential role of introspection in this debate. In order to approach this issue, it will be useful to begin with some general remarks about the reliability of introspection.

If one considers the range of cases with respect to which introspection might be more or less reliable in revealing answers to questions about the contents of one's experiences, then toward one end of the spectrum, one would expect carefully guarded introspective beliefs — beliefs about certain aspects of the contents of one's occurrent experiences — to approach infallibility. Suppose one is well rested, not drunk, sick, or suffering from any maladies that would interfere with one's capacity to attend to one's own occurrent mental states, and suppose that one is staring at a uniformly red circle painted on a white sheet and is standing close enough so that one's visual awareness is completely filled by an experience of the red circle. And suppose as one attends carefully to one's visual experience, one forms the following belief about one's ongoing (subjective) experience: *I am now having an experience of reddishness*. This belief predicates a phenomenal property (reddishness) of one's occurrent experience, which, under the specified conditions, seems extremely unlikely to be mistaken.³ In such cases, the room for error in one's introspective belief is quite narrow.

Melanie's introspective reports span the range from the admittedly narrow realm of the (nearly) infallible introspective beliefs to the realm of the highly fallible. Melanie's reports are not reports of simultaneous ongoing experience (a good deal of recall is involved), nor are the experiences being reported all perceptual (outer sensory) experiences involving a single sense modality, nor do they all involve simple, easy to classify gross features of experience that are nearly unmistakable upon careful attention. Now the general thought that any method of enquiry (including DES) will vary in its reliability under varying conditions is certainly not a bone of contention between our authors. Both agree that DES and perhaps all existing methods of introspection are very unreliable when subjects are asked to report (on the basis of introspection) the cognitive processes that led up to and produced some occurrent mental state, though subjects may be very

[3] Are such beliefs infallible? Well, it depends on how guarded the belief about one's experience is. Horgan and Kriegel (2007) argue that very carefully bracketed introspective beliefs about certain aspects of one's occurrent experience are or can be infallible.

reliable in describing certain aspects of the contents of those states.⁴ Considering then just the contents of one's occurrent mental states, one main point of disagreement between Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel concerns the degree to which DES⁵ can reliably help reveal aspects of phenomenological detail. Both are inclined to accept the 'exposed' reports⁶ of their subject Melanie in which she is describing the grosser, more salient aspects of her sampled experiences. But Schwitzgebel is far more sceptical than is Hurlburt in trusting Melanie's exposed reports that concern matters of detail.⁷

We do not wish to weigh in on this particular dispute between our authors over their subject's exposed reports. But we are especially interested in questions about the limits of introspection concerning aspects of experience that are of particular concern to philosophers. For instance, at various places in the book the authors discuss the question of the relative 'richness' of one's total overall experience at a time. If one distinguishes types of experience according to a typical scheme of classification specifying various 'modes' of experience (e.g. visual, auditory, emotional, cognitive, agentive, etc.) one can ask with respect to the totality of one's conscious experience at a time how rich it is with respect to one's having experiences of the various types at the time in question. Call this the question of *inter-modal* richness. Advocates of inter-modal richness claim that at any time one's conscious experience is liable to *far* exceed any aspects of one's overall experience to which one is paying attention and is thus a focal point of attention at that time. Advocates of thin inter-modal views *restrict* conscious experience to what one is attending to at any moment, though they allow that there may be non-conscious occurrent processes related to various modalities that can have an effect on, for example, one's behaviour at the time in question. For instance, as one is sitting at one's desk absorbed in reading *Describing Inner Experience*, the unnoticed (and thus, on the thinness account, non-experienced) stimulus resulting from having a small rock in one's shoe may cause one to spontaneously move one's foot slightly so that the rock is no longer impinging upon one's skin. In between the rich and thin

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- [4] The widely held scepticism about the reliability of introspection with respect to the causes of one's experiences is largely owing to the famous paper by Nisbett and Wilson (1977) which is briefly discussed by our authors on pp. 26–27.
- [5] The same question can be raised about any method of introspective enquiry.
- [6] Exposed reports are those that result from employing DES methodology, and are contrasted with 'raw' reports that a subject offers without the aid of DES or other introspectionist methodology. See pp. 254–255.
- [7] See Schwitzgebel's summary of such differences on pp. 293–294.

views are moderate views according to which experiences one is having at any time are liable to *somewhat* outrun one's focal attention. Hurlburt apparently embraces inter-modal thinness, while Schwitzgebel is more inclined toward a richer view.⁸

But in addition to disputes over inter-modal richness, there can be disputes over the relative richness of experiences of a single type. Call this *intra-modal* richness. This too comes up in the book in a number of places where, for example, Melanie is attempting to describe some of her (past) visual imagery experiences and where the issue under discussion is the extent to which these imagery experiences did include at the time they were being had the rich detail that she reports them as having.⁹ The authors do not dispute whether or not various types of experience, particularly those associated with the five senses, can be rich in detail (though speaking for ourselves, our 'external' sensory experiences in any one mode tend to be far richer than any of our associated imagery experiences). They do dispute the extent to which Melanie's exposed reports accurately characterize the exact character of the experience she is attempting to describe. And, of course, if one is attempting to describe as much of one's experience as possible that occurs during a very brief time interval, one is not likely to be able to accurately report in detail those experiences with rich content. But in such cases, the problem may be due to the fact that the experience is both rich in detail and fleeting. Perhaps if one could somehow freeze the experience under scrutiny, one could provide a more thorough and more accurate description of its rich phenomenal characteristics, in which case the characteristics in question would be subject to introspective detection.

In addition to questions about the inter- and intra-modal richness of experience and the ability of introspection to reliably detect rich phenomenological detail, there are related questions about subtle features of various types of experience. That is, there may be experiences that possess a certain phenomenal character that resists reliable introspective detection because the character itself is a very subtle feature of the experience, or because the question one is asking about the character in question is itself a subtle question, or because the concepts figuring in the question one is asking are themselves subtle. Any one or a combination of these features may severely limit the power of

[8] See Schwitzgebel's discussion (pp. 228–234) of his DES inspired study on the issue of richness, and his (2007) article for extensive discussion.

[9] See, for instance, the discussion of Melanie's reports of her experiences at beep 2.1 on pp. 95–108.

known methods of introspection to answer some particular question about the phenomenal character of experience.

Consider the phenomenology of moral experience, for example. One main focus of philosophical interest in this topic is whether such experience has (as an aspect of its intrinsic nature) ontological objectivist purport — i.e. whether the experience is as-of objective, attitude-independent, in-the-world moral properties and relations. In recent years, we two have collaborated on a series of essays about moral phenomenology (Horgan and Timmons, 2005; 2007; 2008a; 2008b), and one claim we have defended is that unaided introspection cannot reliably answer this question about ontological objectivist purport (see especially Horgan and Timmons, 2008a).

Another case in point, which will be our focus here, involves certain questions about ordinary agentic experience — questions that are relevant to philosophical debates about free will. The issue we are interested in is whether introspectionist methodology alone can answer these questions.

II. Agentic Phenomenology and Free Will: Questions and Problems

Free will libertarians make two fundamental claims about the nature and reality of free choice and action.

L.1. A particular action (or choice) of an agent A at a time t is truly free only if it was metaphysically possible at some slightly earlier time $t-\delta$, consistently with the total actual situation that existed at $t-\delta$ and the total internal state of A at $t-\delta$ and the prevailing laws of nature, for A to refrain from performing that action (or making that choice) at t.

L.2. Some actions and choices are (truly) free.

We will call claim L.1 the thesis of *metaphysical indeterminism for agency* (for short, just *metaphysical indeterminism*), and we will call claim L.2 the thesis of the *reality of freedom*. The core libertarian position is the conjunction of these two theses (the core ‘hard incompatibilist’ position is the conjunction of L.1 with the *negation* of L.2). Many libertarians (and also many hard incompatibilists) accept a further thesis:

L.3. In so far as an agent freely acts (or freely chooses), the agent herself is a metaphysically fundamental determinative source of the action, above and beyond any internal states

(mental or non-mental) the agent is in; she exercises determinative control over action and choice in the manner of a godlike ‘unmoved mover’.

We’ll call this latter claim the thesis of *godlike metaphysical sourcehood*. Those who are committed to L.3 are also committed to L.1, and so any evidence for L.3 is also evidence for L.1.

Free will compatibilists embrace L.2, but repudiate both L.1 and L.3. As regards L.1 *vis-à-vis* L.2, they claim that an action or choice can be genuinely free even if determinism is true. Some compatibilists hold that genuine freedom simply does not require the ability to do otherwise — not in fanciful thought-experimental ‘Frankfurt-style scenarios’, and not in ordinary cases either. Others hold that genuine freedom normally does require the ability to do otherwise (except perhaps in unusual circumstances, such as Frankfurt-style cases), but that the relevant kind of ability is conditional — it involves the fact that the agent *would* do otherwise (or choose otherwise) if certain factors *were* different from what they actually are (e.g. different desires, different comparative strengths of desires, or the like). Still others (e.g. Horgan, 1979) hold that genuine freedom normally requires (Frankfurt cases aside, perhaps) a categorical ability to do otherwise that is not readily expressible by a counterfactual conditional, but that this categorical ability to do otherwise is nonetheless compatible with determinism.

As regards L.3 *vis-à-vis* L.2, free will compatibilists deny that free agency requires the agent to be a godlike unmoved mover. Although talk of agents as ‘sources’ of their actions may well be appropriate as a way to mark certain important distinctions — e.g. the distinction between full-fledged actions and other kinds of behaviours such as involuntary startle-reactions to unexpected loud noises — the relevant kind of sourcehood is entirely compatible with determinism. It also is entirely compatible with the claim that every action (and every choice) is fully causally determined (to the extent that indeterministic randomness does not intrude) by prior states and events; thus, agentive sourcehood, whatever exactly it is, is not a matter of the agent’s exerting some kind of determinative influence that transcends the world’s state-causal nexus.

Now as anyone acquainted with the philosophical issue knows, one main argument marshalled by libertarians (and also to some extent by hard incompatibilists) is the apparent evidence of introspection. Those who accept L.1 and L.3 often make two claims about agentive phenomenology. First, the phenomenology of agency as revealed by introspection possesses libertarian purport. That is to say, experiences

of agency possess, as part of their intrinsic nature, phenomenal characteristics that present oneself to oneself as possessing an ability to do otherwise that is incompatible with determinism, as well as presenting oneself to oneself as a godlike, causal-nexus transcending, source of one's choices and actions. Second, (assuming the methodological claim that the better a theory about free will is at accommodating the data of experience the more plausible the theory) this introspective evidence provides some support for the metaphysical position that free will both genuinely exists and genuinely involves these very attributes.¹⁰ Here are two particularly clear examples of this mode of argument from John Searle and Timothy O'Connor respectively, both of whom are claiming that introspection reveals that agentic phenomenology has libertarian purport:

Reflect very carefully on the character of the experiences you have as you engage in normal, everyday human actions... You will sense the possibility of alternative courses of action built into these experiences... that we could be doing something else right here and now, that is all other conditions remaining the same. This, I submit is the source of our own unshakeable conviction of our own free will. (Searle, 1984, p. 95)

It does not seem to me (at least ordinarily) that I am caused to act by the reasons which favor doing so; it seems to be the case, rather, that I produce my own decisions in view of those reasons, and could have, in an unconditional sense, decided differently. (O'Connor, 1995, p. 196)

O'Connor, in this same passage, points to this phenomenological data as evidence for L.3 because, as he says, that thesis 'captures the way we experience our own activity' (*ibid.*).

But such appeals to introspection are contentious. One worry about these various phenomenological claims is that perhaps they are theory-laden. As Nahmias *et al.* (2004) point out in reviewing these conflicting appeals to introspection, the armchair phenomenological data being reported might be tainted by the philosopher's philosophical views about the free will issue. They write:

Introspective reports [by philosophers] about the relevant experiences are likely influenced by theoretical commitments of the philosopher doing the introspection. Introspection does not simply present 'pure' content to be analysed, rather, by the time philosophers develop theories of free will, they introspect through the lens of their theoretical commitments. (*ibid.*, p. 163)

[10] Hard incompatibilists, however, hold that there is decisive countervailing evidence against the existence claim. Phenomenology reveals what free will would have to be like in order to be real, but people's experiences as-of actually possessing free will are illusory.

A second worry, related in some ways to the first but also importantly different from it, is that although the phenomenology itself may well have aspects that are aptly characterized in the manner of Searle and O'Connor, a problematic element of theory-ladenness enters in if one takes that phenomenology, thus described, to have libertarian purport. It is one thing for the phenomenology to be aptly described as 'an experience as-of the act's emanating from me myself' (and likewise, to be aptly described negatively as 'not an experience as-of my bodily motion being caused by *states* of me'); it is another thing for phenomenology that is aptly described this way to have libertarian *satisfaction conditions* involving one's being a godlike unmoved mover. Likewise, it is one thing for the phenomenology to be aptly described as 'an experience as-of having an unconditional ability to do otherwise in my actual circumstances'; it is another thing for phenomenology that is thus aptly described to have libertarian satisfaction conditions involving the falsity of determinism. Problematic theory-ladenness might intrude itself not in the use of the phenomenological descriptions themselves, and not in the aptness of these descriptions in characterizing the phenomenology of freedom, but rather in one's construal of the intentional content of the pertinent phenomenology as thus described — its satisfaction conditions. I.e. even if the phenomenological descriptions are quite apt rather than being tendentially theory-laden, libertarian-style *interpretations* of those descriptions nonetheless might be tendentially theory-laden: such interpretations might misconstrue the intentional content of the phenomenology, its representational purport.

Nahmias *et al.* (2004) do not seem to notice the possibility of the second, more subtle, kind of theory-ladenness. They clearly suspect authors like Searle and O'Connor of the first putative mistake, and they clearly believe that the language deployed by such authors is not apt to describe the actual phenomenology of agency. We ourselves think, however, that it is introspectively *just obvious* that actions are normally experienced as emanating from oneself as source, and also are normally experienced as being such that one could have done otherwise in the actual circumstances. If tendentious theory-ladenness intrudes at all — and we believe it does — this happens not in the mere deployment of these phenomenologically apt descriptions, but rather in one's interpretation of the representational purport of such phenomenology as thus described. This more subtle kind of theory-ladenness, we would maintain, is operative not only in arguments (like Searle's and O'Connor's) to the effect that libertarian purport as an aspect of agentive experience is clearly evident introspectively, but also —

ironically — in the assumption by Nahmias *et al.* (2004) that phenomenological descriptions in terms of ‘self as source’, or ‘unconditional ability to do otherwise in the actual circumstances’, could be aptly applied only if the phenomenology of free will has libertarian satisfaction conditions (we have in mind the possibility that phenomenology that is aptly described this way actually has compatibilist satisfaction conditions — a theme we return to below).

Worries about theory-ladenness notwithstanding, Nahmias *et al.* (2004) do not think that appeals to evidence gathered by introspection in grappling with the free will issue is hopeless. They propose that it is the pre-philosophical, relatively theory-free phenomenology of ordinary folk (philosophers excluded) that should serve as the real data that a philosophical theory about free will ought to accommodate. And they see some hope of being able to get at the relevant phenomenological data through careful introspective methodology.

We ourselves wish Nahmias and company much luck in that optimistic endeavour, but we also think there are serious obstacles that stand in the way of any method of introspection (or combination of such methods) being powerful enough to reveal decisively whether experiences of choice and action possess libertarian purport. And we have the same misgivings about any method of introspection (or combination of them) with respect to delivering reliable verdicts to the effect that the phenomenology of freedom has compatibilist satisfaction conditions — e.g. conditions that require one’s behaviours to be caused by certain kinds of psychological *states* of oneself, such as occurrent beliefs and occurrent desires.¹¹ That is, contrary to what Nahmias *et al.* (2004) claim, we think that it is quite unlikely that introspection can reveal a decisive answer to the question of whether the satisfaction conditions for agentic experience require certain choices and actions to be caused by the sorts of psychological states that precede and are cited in folk psychological explanations of various choices and actions. We are thus inclined to think that introspection alone cannot reliably answer all the questions about the psychology of

[11] We ourselves do think it is introspectively obvious both (1) that paradigmatic agentic experience is as-of self as source, and (2) that such experience is *not* as-of one’s behaviour being caused by mental *states* of oneself. But this leaves the question of satisfaction conditions largely open. Self-as-source experience could have satisfaction conditions involving mental state-causation of behaviour, even though such experience does not *overtly represent* one’s behaviours, to oneself, as being state-causally necessitated by one’s occurrent mental states. One way this could happen, for instance, would be that the satisfaction conditions are partly fixed by extra-phenomenological empirical facts involving the normal operation — whatever that might be — of one’s act-generating cognitive architecture. For further related discussion, see Horgan, Tienson and Graham (2003; 2004) and Horgan (2007a; 2007b).

choice and action that interest philosophers. Let us explain, beginning with a series of questions about the topic at hand that need to be addressed if progress is to be made.

- (1) Aptness. Do expressions like ‘emanating from the self as their source’, and ‘being such that one could have done otherwise in the actual circumstances’ aptly characterize certain genuine aspects of the phenomenology of action and choice? On this matter, at least, we ourselves are optimistic that the answer is affirmative. But one needs to exercise great caution in two correlative respects — *viz.* in interpreting the representational purport of the phenomenology thus described (on the one hand), and in avoiding theory-laden construals of the descriptions themselves (on the other hand). The descriptive aptness of such characterizations does not, by itself, settle the issue of whether the pertinent phenomenology has libertarian purport.
- (2) Determinacy. Do philosophically inspired questions about the phenomenology of agency — and, more specifically, about the representational intentional content of its ‘self-as-source’ aspects and its ‘could have done otherwise in the circumstances’ aspects — have answers that are determinate, given the intrinsic character of agentive phenomenology itself?¹² Those who appeal to the phenomenology of agency in support of their favoured position on free will seem to take for granted that the answer to this question is yes. But as made clear in discussions by our authors about Melanie’s reports of visual imagery, it may be that with respect to certain questions about matters of phenomenological detail, there simply is no fact of the matter that is determined by the intrinsic phenomenal nature of the experience itself.¹³ So, perhaps no determinate satisfaction conditions accrue to agentive

[12] There are two potential ways that determinate satisfaction conditions could accrue to these aspects of phenomenology. First, the satisfaction conditions might be *fully* determined by the intrinsic character of the phenomenology itself, independently of any non-phenomenological facts about the experiencing agent or about the agent’s external environment. Alternatively, second, the satisfaction conditions might be determined by two factors in combination: (a) the intrinsic character of the phenomenology, and (b) certain non-phenomenological features of the agent or the agent’s environment. One version of this second possibility was mentioned in the preceding note: (a) the intrinsic character of the phenomenology imposes as a satisfaction condition that the given act or choice results from the normal operation of the agent’s act/choice-generating cognitive architecture; and (b) the non-phenomenal facts about the agent’s cognitive architecture figure in the overall satisfaction conditions as the ‘filler’ for the ‘role-slot’ that is determined by the intrinsic phenomenology itself.

[13] See, for example, Boxes 7.7 and 7.8 on pp. 153–154.

phenomenology, given its intrinsic character — neither determinate libertarian conditions nor determinate compatibilist conditions.

- (3) Libertarian purport. Assuming a yes answer to the determinacy question, are agentic experiences such that their theoretically untainted representational contents have veridicality conditions requiring metaphysical-libertarian freedom? In other words, do all, or many, or at least some experiences of agency have libertarian purport?
- (4) Causal compatibilist purport. Again, assuming a yes answer to the determinacy question, do the untainted representational contents of agentic experiences have veridicality conditions requiring that choices and actions be causally determined by antecedent psychological causes and in a way that is not compatible with libertarian purport?
- (5) Potency of introspection. Finally, is any method or combination of methods of introspection powerful enough to yield answers to questions such as 2–4 above?

We are, of course, particularly interested in the fifth question, and we will have more to say about it in the next section. For the remainder of this section, we wish to call attention to four types of difficulty that any attempt to answer questions about the phenomenology of free agency will have to face, and which make getting reliable answers by any method of enquiry particularly difficult. In the following section we address the prospects for any method of introspection (including DES) for overcoming these problems.

A. Motley subject matter

Consider the motley assortment of types of agentic experience that are mentioned by Nahmias *et al.* (2004) as falling under the term ‘phenomenology of free will’: experiences of deliberating, making decisions, feeling free, feeling responsible, voluntariness, efforts of will, authorship, intention formation. We would add to this list ordinary experiences of performing goal-directed actions that arguably one experiences as freely performed. Now (assuming a yes answer to the determinacy question) the obvious thing to say here is that some of these forms of agentic experience may be much more likely to possess libertarian purport than others, and indeed some may possess such purport while other types of agentic experience may not. The point we are making here is important for those doing empirical

research on the phenomenology of free will. For instance, in 1957, C.A. Campbell, a noted libertarian, argued that it is only in cases where one must expend moral effort of will to overcome the urges of conflicting desires and aversions that one is introspectively aware of any libertarian pretensions one's actions possess. He furthermore claimed that only such actions enjoyed metaphysical libertarian freedom; all other actions he thought are causally determined.

So, one important methodological point for those investigating the phenomenology of free will is that different types of agentic experience might enjoy importantly different veridicality conditions bearing on freedom. And here are two related points. First, it may be that many agentic experiences are relatively 'thin' and representationally indeterminate, and so do not possess veridicality conditions that are either determinately libertarian or determinately causal-compatibilist. As Haggard and Johnson (2003, p. 76) point out, many psychologists, reflecting on actions that are 'automatic' (walking, eating, etc.), often suppose that there is very little content to normal experiences of our own agency.¹⁴ Second, it may be that even fairly automatic actions, such as the one Melanie describes at beep 6.4 where she is picking flower petals out of a sink, do enjoy either libertarian or causal compatibilist veridicality conditions, but that those aspects of her phenomenology are part of the experiential background and not part of her focal agentic experience. This point about what is focal and what may be in the background of one's agentic experience engages of course the dispute between Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel over intramodality richness, which we return to briefly in the next section.

B. Conceptual problems

Among the leading concepts that figure in philosophical discussion of agency and free will are, as we have noted, such concepts as 'able to do otherwise' and 'self as source'. It is a philosophically difficult and tendentious matter to get clear about the semantic workings of 'could do otherwise', both with respect to how this and related locutions are *actually* employed in contexts of agency ascription, moral-responsibility attribution, and the like, and also with respect to how these locutions *should* be employed in such contexts. Compatibilists traditionally have

[14] In opposition to those who think this, Haggard and Johnson comment: 'On the one hand the phenomenology of action is often thin... On the other hand, when we wish to, we can report in considerable detail the processes of preparation and execution of our actions... Moreover, when our actions go wrong, the phenomenology is often very strong indeed...' (2004, p. 76). So-called thinness may be more a matter of inattention to rich agentic phenomenology than absence of it.

tended to try analysing such locutions in terms of subjunctive conditionals — e.g. construing ‘I could have done otherwise’ as equivalent to ‘I would have done otherwise if I had chosen to do otherwise’. But there are other approaches that compatibilists can pursue too, some of which are arguably much more plausible and attractive than conditional analyses of ‘could’-locutions. One little-explored suggestion, which both of us find plausible and appealing, is the following (*cf.* Horgan, 1979): repudiate hypothetical analyses, and construe categorical ‘could’-statements as governed by implicit contextual parameters that normally render such statements compatible with determinism but can take on limit-case settings under which such statements become incompatible with determinism (the implicit parameters determine, contextually, the relation called ‘accessibility’ in modal logic — where a statement ‘Person P *could have* performed action A at time t’ is true just in case there is some *accessible* possible world in which P *does* perform A at t).

So, in light of the subtlety and possible context-sensitivity of ‘could do otherwise’ in everyday discourse, those probing agentive phenomenology for answers to the question of whether, for example, such experiences have libertarian purport must be careful to design experiments or to frame interview questions that are sensitive to such matters. They must be *especially* careful in light of contextualism, since that approach strongly suggests that the explicit posing of freedom/determinism quandaries is apt to create a context that favours limit-case settings of contextual parameters under which ‘could do otherwise’ becomes incompatible with determinism.¹⁵

What is perhaps not as often noticed is that similar conceptual subtlety and potential context-sensitivity arise for the concept of self as source, because this concept too admits of stronger and weaker construals. According to a weak reading, one is the source of one’s behaviour as long as the behaviour is caused by internal states of oneself such as occurrent wants and beliefs — as opposed, say, to having one’s arm moved by someone else, or having one’s leg involuntarily jerk upwards in response to a physician’s tapping one’s knee with a rubber mallet.¹⁶ But the veridicality conditions associated with

[15] A pertinent analogy to bear in mind is contextualist treatments of the concept of *knowledge*, which strongly suggest that the very posing of Cartesian radical-deception scenarios is apt to create a context that favours limit-cases settings of implicit parameters under which, for instance, ‘I know I have hands’ becomes incompatible with the possibility that one is a handless brain in a vat.

[16] Movements analogous to such reflex actions are instances of ‘Penfield motion’ in which the movement of a subject’s body is triggered by an electrode implanted in the subject’s

sourcehood plausibly ‘swing together’ with the veridicality conditions for ‘could do otherwise’ — which would mean that varying potential uses of the latter would bring in their wake varying potential uses of the former, and implicit contextual parameters governing the latter would also govern the former.

And so in probing agential phenomenology for answers to questions about the veridicality conditions for free will experiences — particularly if one is probing for libertarian veridicality conditions — one must be careful to design experiments or frame interview questions mindful of the stronger and weaker ways of understanding self as source. But again, is any method of introspectionist enquiry (or any combination of such methods) sufficiently powerful to reveal reliable answers to questions about whether or not experiences of agency have satisfaction conditions of the *libertarian* kind, i.e. satisfaction conditions requiring the experiencer to be a godlike unmoved mover? We doubt it.

C. Interpretative problems

Related to conceptual problems are those of interpretation. And here it is particularly important to be careful of how one interprets certain negative reports about first-person agential experience. For example, there may be a temptation to suppose that lack of an experience as-of being a godlike unmoved mover is positive evidence for a phenomenology of state causation.¹⁷ It is one thing for one’s agential phenomenology to *lack* any trace of representing oneself as being an unmoved mover, but it is quite another to hold that one’s agential phenomenology does indeed represent one’s choices and actions, positively to oneself, *as being state caused*. Suppose one is thirsty for a cold beer and believes there is one in the next room and so walks to the room in

brain. Penfield bodily motion is *not* experienced by subjects as something they do. For relevant discussion, see Wakefield and Dreyfus (1991).

[17] We suspect Nahmias *et al.* (2004) of committing this error or coming close to doing so. They contrast (i) phenomenological reports ascribing libertarian self-as-source purport to agential experiences, with (ii) the remarks of philosophers who appeal to their own agential experiences in defending compatibilist theories of free will. But of the four authors in the latter camp that they quote, none of them report what would clearly count as experiences as of one’s choices or actions being state caused. For instance, they quote Joseph Priestly who reports that ‘all that a man can possibly be conscious of... [is] that nothing hinders his choosing or taking whichever of the fruits appears to him more desirable’. But in this short passage Priestly does not report experiences of choices or actions being state caused. Their quote from W.T. Stace is not about phenomenology. Their quote from Hume about the origins of the idea of power is a negative point Hume is making against Reid’s theory of agency. And the quote from Dennett is about what the phenomenology of agency lacks, not what it positively contains.

question, opens the refrigerator door, looks for the bottle, spies it, reaches for it, grabs it, closes the fridge door, twists off the cap, and begins to drink. This goal-directed series of actions (or at least some of them) may well include as part of one's agentic phenomenology the idea or representation of one acting *because* one is thirsty. If so, is that an instance in which at least part of one's agentic experience is one's action being *state-caused* by one's thirst? The compatibilist, remember, is someone who thinks that all events (including choices and actions) are causally determined by antecedent conditions but who also thinks that a proper understanding of the very notion of free action is compatible with such determination. So, in the beer-getting example just mentioned (and supposing that it is part of one's overall agentic phenomenology that one experiences what one is doing as a doing because one is thirsty), does one experience any of the actions in question *as being causally necessitated* by one's thirst together with other conditions? We think not. And we strongly suspect that those who think otherwise are over-interpreting what is actually, reliably, introspectible in their agentic phenomenology. It is perhaps easy to go from the thought, *My phenomenology presents me to myself as making choices and performing actions because I have thus and so desires and beliefs* to *My phenomenology presents me to myself as making choices and performing actions that are causally necessitated by thus and so desires and beliefs*. It is very plausible that the phenomenology of agency often includes representational content whose veridicality conditions require the former statement to be true (and also makes this fact introspectively obvious), but we ourselves think it is very far from introspectively obvious whether or not the representational content of the phenomenology requires the latter statement to be true.

A related observation about possible interpretive errors, this time about reading too much pro-libertarian purport into one's agentic phenomenology, has been made recently by Horgan (2007a; 2007b). It is an easy but fallacious inference or conflation to go from *My experience does not present my actions as state-caused* to *My experience presents my actions as not state caused*.

Yet another possible interpretive error, again about reading too much pro-libertarian purport into one's agentic phenomenology, has also been stressed recently by Horgan (2007a; 2007b). Suppose that the following contentions, adverted to above, are all correct: (1) both the concept expressible by 'could do otherwise', and also the concept expressible by 'self as source' are governed by implicit contextual parameters; (2) the satisfaction conditions for agentic 'could'-

statements and self-as-source statements therefore swing in tandem, across discourse contexts; and (3) there are limit-case settings of the contextual parameters under which (i) an agentive ‘could’-statement is true only if determinism is false and (ii) the corresponding self-as-source statement is true only if the agent functioned as a godlike unmoved mover with respect to the given act or choice. If indeed these three claims are all true (as we ourselves are inclined to think), then it would be quite easy to form mistaken, excessively libertarian, beliefs about the satisfaction conditions that accrue to one’s agentive phenomenology — not because of the nature of the phenomenology itself, but rather because one characterizes this phenomenology using *concepts* expressible linguistically by ‘could do otherwise’ and by ‘self as source’. The thought is this: merely raising the general issue of freedom and determinism is apt to create a context of enquiry and discourse in which the implicit contextual parameters governing those concepts take on their limit-case, libertarian, settings; thus, since one deploys those very concepts in describing the pertinent aspects of agentive phenomenology that one is introspectively attending to, one might easily come to think that these phenomenological features *themselves* have libertarian satisfaction conditions. This would be an interpretive mistake, but a very subtle one indeed — *viz.* wrongly construing the contextually invariant representational content of agentive experience as having libertarian satisfaction conditions, where one imposes this construal on the experience because one is describing that experience in terms of *concepts* which, in context, have acquired limit-case, libertarian, satisfaction conditions.

D. Probing problems

Whether one is engaged in armchair introspection or engaged in the kind of collaborative process characteristic of DES, there is much delicacy in how one conducts the probing of one’s own or another’s experiences. This matter of how to conduct an interview is crucial to Hurlburt’s DES methodology. For instance, he insists on avoiding questions that ask subjects about the processes leading up to the experience being probed (DES guideline 10 on pp. 18–19), and as he says, the interview ‘asks essentially one and only one question: “What were you experiencing at the time of the beep?” The object is to get as complete and detailed an answer to that question as is possible, while at the same time avoiding confabulation’ (p. 21). But as he is well aware, the probing that follows this opening question can be a tricky matter when trying to get the subject to reveal not only nothing but the truth, but the

whole truth as well. Avoiding confabulation seems especially worrisome when probing agentic phenomenology for answers to questions about experiences of free will. If, as we ourselves think, any phenomenological aspects of one's agentic experiences that bear on such questions are likely rather subtle and hard to get at through introspection because of the motley array of types of agentic experience, as well as subtle conceptual and interpretive matters that we have just mentioned, then one ought to expect serious obstacles standing in the way of using introspection alone to get at answers to free will questions about agentic phenomenology.

III. Prospects

But obstacles can be overcome, as in the advances that Hurlburt's DES methodology arguably enjoys over methods that do not heed his fifteen guidelines that he sets forth in chapter 2 of *Describing Inner Experience*. And even if introspection (no matter the associated methodology) cannot alone yield reliable answers to free will questions about agentic phenomenology, it may well yield valuable data that can play a role in broadly abductive arguments about certain aspects of the phenomenal character of agentic experiences. What, then, are the likely prospects for accurately and thoroughly describing one's agentic experiences (getting at the whole truth about them, or anyway a lot of it)?

Consider first the use of introspection alone, beginning with the DES method. We note that in the Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel book there is almost nothing said that bears directly on questions about agentic phenomenology, even though in all of the beeps Melanie is engaged in some doing or other (unpacking a chair, walking from hallway to kitchen, eating dinner, talking, reading, and so on). Indeed, in one place in the text, Box 9.7: 'Melanie's experience of activity' (p. 209), the authors agree that they failed to probe Melanie's experience of picking up rose petals from the sink — her doing. Rather they focused on aspects of what she was thinking at the time. But commenting on having not further probed this aspect of Melanie's beeped experience, Hurlburt remarks that doings are difficult or impossible to describe in more detail than we find in Melanie's unprobed initial description of the experience: 'I was leaning over the sink and picking up the remaining petals and collecting them in my hand to throw them in the trash' (p. 206). Hurlburt seems to have concluded over the years that there is nothing more to common, everyday agentic phenomenology than the sort of elements of experience that are featured in

Melanie's report. But if this speculation is correct (and here we are inviting Russ to comment), it may be that the DES method is too narrowly focused on the non-subtle and easily introspectible aspects of one's phenomenology at a very 'thin' time slice of one's ongoing experience to really reveal much about agential phenomenology. The focus on non-subtle, most easily introspectible aspects of experience is something Hurlburt emphasizes. But note also that because the DES method focuses on a *very* brief time slice (what was going on experientially at the moment of the beep), the method may cut the subject off from the diachronic flow of experience over time in which any libertarian or causal-compatibilist purport would most likely be introspectible.¹⁸ So it may be that although DES is the best available method of introspectionist enquiry for getting an accurate description of the gross features of an experiential time slice, it may not be the best method now available for probing agential phenomenology.

Again, because DES is aimed at guarding against subjects' interpretations (rather than mere descriptions) of their experiences,¹⁹ subjects are not primed in the way they are in Schwitzgebel's DES-like 'richness' study that he describes on pp. 228–234. But without some priming of subjects in which the libertarian/compatibilist dispute over agential phenomenology is explained, one worries that the more subtle aspects of such phenomenology will be missed by indiscriminate introspective reporting. The matter is delicate of course, since priming subjects and having them respond to specific questions may have a distorting influence on one's phenomenology.²⁰

In light of these worries (time slice, non-priming, and non-targeted questioning), one might look to other introspectionist methods of enquiry that could be used for purposes of probing agential experience. One such approach is the so-called 'talk aloud' method in which (roughly) subjects are asked to say aloud what they are thinking during the time they are engaged in a particular task.²¹ This method was in fact employed by Nahmias and his associates in a decision making task in which subjects were presented with descriptions of three apartments and told to choose among them on the assumption that they

[18] Schwitzgebel brings up the general issue about DES as focusing only on a thin time slice in Box 4.10, 'Focusing on a single moment and the dynamics of experience', p. 76.

[19] See DES guideline 12: Separate reports from introspection (p. 19).

[20] See similar remarks by Nahmias *et al.* (2004, p. 172).

[21] On p. 16 (Box 2.2, 'Summary of Sampling Methods'), Hurlburt briefly describes six sampling methods (including DES and the talk aloud, verbal protocol analyses) that are used to probe people's experiences. See Ericsson and Simon (1993) and Ericsson (2003) for elaboration and discussion of verbal protocol analysis.

would be living in one of them the following year. Here is how they describe what happened:

Following the basic talk-aloud protocol, we asked subjects to verbalize any thoughts (and feelings) they have as they performed practice tasks and the experimental task. Among our (twelve) subjects the general trend was simply to mention the features of the apartments they liked and disliked. As they read descriptions and while they deliberated, they simply said aloud things like, 'Hardwood floors — I like that', 'Five minutes from campus — that's too far', 'I'm choosing apartment C because it has a washer/dryer', etc. (Nahmias *et al.*, 2004, pp. 175–176)

With some guarded misgivings about whether to understand subjects as reporting their thoughts or explaining their decisions (or perhaps both), Nahmias *et al.* suggest that in their study the subjects were aware of their own reactions to the presented information about apartments and that they by and large chose on the basis of what they found most attractive about one of the choices. Nahmias and associates take the fact that the subjects tended to describe their deliberating and choosing experiences in passive terms and did not mention anything about or suggestive of a self as source as favouring a compatibilist construal of these experiences.

In commenting on the significance of this study, Nahmias *et al.* remark that the talk-aloud methodology employed in their study may itself be impotent in getting at any details of agentive phenomenology that would bear on the free will issue. They worry that subjects who are not primed to pay attention to aspects of their agentive phenomenology may be missing important detail. They go on to suggest a kind of phenomenological interview which, like DES, treats subjects and scientists as co-investigators. So one might consider combining the talk-aloud method with a particular kind of phenomenological interview that would sidestep the problem of relying on memory, would avoid the time slice worry that besets DES for this kind of enquiry, and would involve subjects who are primed by being informed of the free will debate, and would feature scientists conducting such studies who strove to be careful in the manner of Hurlburt in questioning subjects about the details of their agentive experiences and interpreting their responses. But suppose that for whatever reasons the methods of introspection either alone or in combination are not powerful enough to yield decisive answers to questions about those aspects of agentive phenomenology that presumably bear on the free will debate. This might be because such phenomenology is indeterminate with regard to the free will issue. But if one has reason to suppose that the phenomenology is (at least some of the time) determinate with respect to

this issue, then one might appeal to other types of enquiry, the results of which one might bring to bear on the issue of whether people's agentic experiences are likely to have one sort of freedom-relevant purport or not.²²

For instance, our colleague Shaun Nichols (2004) conducted a study whose purpose was to explore the question whether young children around the ages of 4 and 5 possessed the concept of agent-as-cause. Based on his own results together with relevant results from certain other psychological studies on young children, he concluded that children at that age do possess the concept in question, which prompted him to speculate about how they might come to have it. His tentative suggestion is that children acquire the concept, and also a belief in agent-causation, as a result of a prior belief in obligation.²³

Suppose that Nichols is right about children having the relevant concept. Surely this bears, even if indirectly, on whether individuals possessing this concept have self-as-source agentic *phenomenology* at least some of the time — regardless whether they introspectively *report* that they do.²⁴ One could reasonably expect that one's 'naturally' having the *concept* of agent-as-cause would be in part a reflection of one's agentic phenomenology, at least some of the time. Suppose, then, that one grants that one's typical agentic phenomenology as revealed by introspection is *not* that of one's choices and actions being causally necessitated by one's choice and action-relevant desires, aversions, or intentions. And suppose also that children possess the relevant notions of 'self as source' and 'could have done otherwise'. Together these claims (if true) might be a sound enough basis (barring countervailing evidence) that people's agentic phenomenology (at least some of the time) possesses full-fledged

[22] Keep in mind the possibility that people may differ in their agentic phenomenologies and that some people may have libertarian-like agentic experiences some of the time while having non-libertarian and even causal-compatibilist-like agentic experiences at other times.

[23] Nichols assumes throughout his paper that the concept of agent as cause has libertarian satisfaction conditions, as do statements that one 'could do otherwise in the circumstances'. By our own lights, these assumptions are much too quick, and reflect the subtle kind of theory-ladenness that we said above is also operative in Nahmias *et al.* (2004). But as far as we can see, his principal arguments and conclusions do not require those assumptions.

[24] As we said earlier, we ourselves find it introspectively obvious that there is self-as-source phenomenology, even though it is far from introspectively obvious what its satisfaction conditions might be. But some people (e.g. Nahmias *et al.*, 2004) profess doubts about whether experiences of free agency have a phenomenological aspect that is aptly described this way — which makes other, non-introspective, kinds of evidence and data especially germane to the issue.

self-as-source phenomenology — regardless of what various people might say about the matter on the basis of their own introspection.

What about the issue of satisfaction conditions for the phenomenology of free agency? This we think is a much trickier matter, in part because we claim that introspection alone cannot effectively address it. Still, Nichols' results, and his tentative suggestion about how the concept of agent-causation arises in children, both seem to us to provide some degree of non-introspection-based support for compatibilism about satisfaction conditions. This is because there is just no evident reason why the concept of agent-causation itself, or the phenomenology that corresponds to it, would need to have libertarian satisfaction conditions in order to play the role in cognitive economy that Nichols ascribes to it — a role that involves the close intertwining of agent-causation and obligation, both conceptually and experientially. As long as one refrains (as one should) from a tendentiously theory-laden construal of descriptions like 'self as source' and 'could do otherwise in the circumstances', there is no particularly good reason to think that experiences of obligation and of free agency represent oneself, to oneself, as a godlike unmoved mover that transcends the world's state-causal nexus. Rather, given that the satisfaction conditions for agentic phenomenology are not directly ascertainable by introspection, and given that libertarian satisfactions are much more metaphysically extravagant than compatibilist ones, the default hypothesis should be that the relevant phenomenology has compatibilist satisfaction conditions.

There are various kinds of non-introspectionist empirical evidence which, together with whatever evidence may be revealed by introspection (no matter how limited in themselves), may support an abductive inference about the veridicality conditions of agentic experience.²⁵ Such an argument is strongly suggested in, for example, the writings of C.A. Campbell with regard to agentic experiences other than experiences involving moral effort of will. As mentioned earlier, Campbell held that introspection reveals that in cases where one must exert moral effort of will to overcome the force of contrary desire, one's experiences represent oneself as being a godlike metaphysical source of one's action (L.3). He calls the kind of self-activity that such agentic experiences of moral effort represent one as having, 'creative self-activity', which he contrasts with what he calls 'expressive self-activity' (Campbell, 1957, pp. 148–157). Expressive

[25] Several kinds of evidence to this effect, which we will not rehearse here, are set forth in sections 3.5 and 3.6 of Horgan (forthcoming).

self-activity is characteristic of those agentive experiences in all other cases of willed action²⁶ where one's experiences are *compatible* with those actions being causally determined, although those experiences do not themselves *overtly represent* one's actions as being state-caused. He writes:

If self-activity did not reach beyond the expressive mode, then so far as I can see, man's power of self-determination would be of very limited significance indeed. His choices would, no doubt, still be self-determining, in the sense that whatever end a self-conscious subject chooses he accepts as his *own* end. But such self-determination is formal rather than real, and is consistent with the effective determination of his choices coming from factors external to him. (*ibid.*, pp. 155–156)

So, according to Campbell, the phenomenology of this class of agentive experiences, characterized by a kind of self-activity, is consistent with causal compatibilist purport, although such experiences do not themselves represent one's actions as being causally necessitated by one's desires and other mental states.²⁷ However, he also held that non-introspective empirical facts about a person's inherited nature and her environment provide evidence that the veridicality conditions for ascriptions of freedom in such cases are causal-compatibilist. In such cases one acts according to one's strongest desires 'and [he writes] I cannot see to what else we can point as determinant of the man's strongest desires (and accordingly of his choices) save the particular kind and degree of his congenital impulses *plus* the environmental situation by which they are in varying degrees fostered or discouraged' (*ibid.*, p. 156). For Campbell, then, the evidence of introspection in these cases is consistent with one's self-expressive actions being state-causally necessitated. And when combined with evidence about the formation of desires and character generally, Campbell thought one may infer that cases of ordinary willed action have causal-compatibilist veridicality conditions.

[26] Campbell distinguishes willed from impulsive 'action' and holds that it is only with respect to the former type of action that a sense of one's own self activity is present (1957, p. 147).

[27] One way for this to happen would be for the phenomenology of expressive-mode agency to only partially determine its satisfaction conditions, in a way that allows a further constitutive role for extra-phenomenological facts about the agent (e.g. facts about how one's cognitive architecture normally operates to produce actions expressive of one's ends). *Cf.* notes 11 and 12 above.

IV. Conclusion

We ourselves are fairly pessimistic about the power of any known method of introspection (or combined introspectionist methods) to reliably deliver answers to questions about the phenomenology of agency that would either favour or disfavour (even for a restricted range of types of agentive experience) the hypothesis that such experiences possess libertarian satisfaction conditions. We are likewise sceptical that introspection can reliably deliver answers to questions about whether, for a range of agentive experiences, such experiences possess the kind of satisfaction conditions that require state-causal determination. And we have explained what we take to be among the main conceptual, interpretive, and methodological problems to be confronted in conducting introspectionist enquiry into matters of agentive experience and free will. If introspection is impotent with respect to answering such questions, this may be due to outright indeterminacy of satisfaction conditions, given the phenomenology. But it may also be due entirely to the limits of the power of introspection itself, granting that phenomenology does have satisfaction conditions that are either libertarian or compatibilist.

We offer these negative remarks not on the basis of any experimental evidence, but on the basis of our own understanding of the complex free will controversy, plus our belief in the pertinence of various non-introspection-based kinds of evidence both experimental and non-experimental, plus what we have learned about the challenges to introspectionist methodology from reading our authors' book. However, we do think there is such a thing as agentive phenomenology, with rich and distinctive phenomenal aspects. And we wonder to what extent that phenomenology may be fruitfully investigated via introspection. So, we end with some questions for our authors about this matter. Our questions are not meant to challenge any of the claims made by either of our authors; rather, they are questions whose answers we ourselves are unsure about, and about which we would like to hear what our authors have to say.

First, as noted earlier, DES does not seem particularly well-suited to explore this kind of phenomenology, since it focuses exclusively on a very thin time slice of experience. Still, might this method, perhaps with proper questioning focused on reported experiences that involve doings, enable subjects to accurately describe aspects of their experiences of doing? Perhaps if experiences of ordinary doings of the sort that Melanie reports in beep 6.4 (picking up the rose petals) are phenomenologically thin (or appear to be so), then probing cases

where subjects experience having to exert self-control are better for probing any intra-modal richness possessed by at least some sorts of agentive experience.

Second, might other methods of introspection, including verbal protocol analysis (talk-aloud) or something like it, be better suited, perhaps in combination with DES-like probing, for reliably revealing whatever phenomenological features there are to agentive experiences of at least some types that can be accessed via introspection?

Because any such non-DES methodology might involve both priming and targeted probing, our second question leads to a third. Is the sort of priming whereby subjects are made aware of issues regarding agency or free will, and then asked to report on any aspects of sampled experiences that have to do with the issue in question, likely to greatly distort any reports about their experience that subjects offer, making them more suspect than the reports by Melanie that Hurlburt thinks are reliable?

Fourth, Hurlburt is extremely critical of premature hypothesis testing in psychology because he claims that such testing ‘elevates the status of presuppositions rather than diminishes it: A hypothesis is entirely (or almost entirely) shaped by the presuppositions that lie behind it’. But might there be a way of generating descriptive data about people’s agentive experiences that involves relatively presupposition-free questioning *vis-à-vis* views about free will and agentive experience generally? We don’t see why not (not that Hurlburt would say otherwise). In fact, the observations we have made about the conceptual, interpretive, and methodological obstacles to overcome and pitfalls to avoid in the investigation of agentive phenomenology should serve, we think, in helping investigators avoid the bracketing issue that Hurlburt claims is the central issue of consciousness studies and the science of psychology (p. 263).

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