MIGHT WE HAVE NO CHOICE?

Carl Ginet

I shall be concerned with one possible specification of the old unclear question of whether free will is incompatible with determinism. I want to see if it is possible to construct an hypothesis about the antecedents of human behavior that (1) is logically capable of confirmation, (2) is not already known to be false (i.e., is compatible with all previous observations and well-established hypotheses), and (3) implies that no human being ever has a choice as to whether or not he shall behave as he actually does (ever really chooses the way that he does behave). If we deliberately attempt to do so, can we frame an empirically significant, plausible hypothesis about human behavior that is incompatible with its agents' having any choice in regard to that behavior? I hope to throw light on this question by making the attempt. If the attempt is successful, that should be of sufficient interest in itself. If it is not, then perhaps it will have been done in such a way as to make it possible to see why it has failed, and possibly even to see why any attempt at this task must
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fail (though this may be too much to aim for; I certainly do not wish to claim that the hypothesis I am going to construct is the only one that could have the characteristics mentioned, or that it must be entailed by any that does).

I state the hypothesis in section I, after defining special terms used in it, and show that it does entail that no human being ever has any choice as to whether or not he shall behave as he does. Section II is devoted to arguing that the hypothesis is in principle confirmable and is not now known to be false. Finally, in section III, I consider a certain objection to the claim that it is conceivable that the hypothesis should be confirmed and accepted.

One advantage in tackling the question and the task I have specified is that one can thereby avoid having to consider some of the worst difficulties that typically arise in thinking about the traditional question—difficulties as to the nature of causation and explanation, and as to the significance of “can (could)” in such statements as “I can (could) cross my legs now.” We can do this by avoiding in our hypothesis any use of the notions of causation, law of nature, explanation, and capability—whose proper understanding is a matter of difficulty and dispute—and using instead a notion of our own construction into which we put just what we need.

Thus the principal step in building my hypothesis is to define a certain relation between kinds of events (or states of affairs or circumstances) which I shall call, perversely enough, the relation of contingent necessitation.¹

¹ I suppose that this relation would be part of a proper elucidation of the notion of a law of nature and of one sense of “cause.” But it is not necessary to know whether or not this is so, in order to use this specially defined relation to construct the hypothesis I seek. The question of how my defined relation ties up with traditional notions is relevant to the question of whether the hypothesis

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If ‘A’ and ‘B’ are descriptions specifying kinds of events (states of affairs, circumstances) then A contingently necessitates B if and only if

1. ‘A’ does not entail ‘B’,
2. every instance of A is accompanied by an instance of B (in a manner indicated in the descriptions ‘A’ and ‘B’), and
3. no one ever has a choice as to whether or not an instance of A shall be accompanied by an instance of B.

When A contingently necessitates B, we can say of any particular instance of A that it contingently necessitates its accompanying instance of B. Condition (1) expresses the contingency, and condition (2), the universality, of the relation.² Condition (3) expresses its necessity: it is an association between kinds of events that is regarded as inescapable, as imposing a limitation upon our choice, narrowing the set of alternatives among which we have a choice.*

Another notion that will be useful in formulating our hypothesis is that of what I shall call a complete first-level description of a person’s behavior during a certain period. This I define as a description that contains only

I construct is one to which we are already committed as an assumption or presupposition in our scientific enterprise. This latter question becomes of interest only if the hypothesis has the features I claim for it, which prior question is the concern of this paper. My present opinion on the subsequent question is that no area of our thought does assume or presuppose the hypothesis. And it is obvious that, if the hypothesis does have all the features I claim for it, then a significant part of our thought—namely that part in which we suppose that a person has, and makes, a choice between alternative courses of action—assumes its falsity.

² (1) and (2), as well as (1) and (3), are subcontrary properties of a relation between kinds (descriptions) of events: such a relation could lack either property and still have the other, but it could not lack both.

* Examples of kinds of events (circumstances, etc.) having the relation of contingent necessitation are provided later. See p. 96.
the specification of all the places occupied by all the externally observable parts of the person’s body throughout that period, relative to each other and to the adjacent environment, as well as the specification of all the sounds emitted by his body during that same period. Thus “He repeatedly buzzed the other office” is not a first-level, but a higher-level, description. And “His arm and hand repeatedly moved so as to press his finger against the button on the side of the desk” is not a complete first-level description, since it makes no mention of what the rest of his body did at the same time; e.g., that the other hand moved in such a way as to tap a pencil on the desk, the sounds “Where the devil is he?” were emitted, etc.

These preliminaries put us in a position to state an hypothesis that seems to me to meet the requirements laid down at the outset. Let us refer to it as H.

(H) Every temporal segment of every human being’s behavior has a complete first-level description, ‘B’, and a series of antecedent sets of circumstances having the descriptions ‘A1’, ‘A2’, . . . , ‘An’, such that

1. ‘A1’ does not entail ‘B’;
2. Any A1 contingently necessitates A2, A2 contingently necessitates A3, . . . , An−1 contingently necessitates An, An contingently necessitates B; and
3. The human being in question clearly had no choice as to whether or not the antecedent instance of A1 would occur.

It is clear that this hypothesis entails that no human being ever has a choice as to whether or not his behavior shall satisfy the first-level descriptions it does.

Actually H is stronger than it needs to be to have that entailment. It would still have it if it were qualified by adding, at the end of stipulation (3), the phrase “after the latest time at which he clearly had not yet chosen the behavior B.” I do not trouble with this complication because it seems to me that everything regarding confirmability and plausibility that can be maintained about the weaker, qualified hypothesis can be equally reasonably maintained about the simpler, stronger H.

recognizes a fairly obvious logical property of the relation of contingent necessitation. It is this: If a given person had no choice as to whether or not a particular instance of A would occur, and if this particular A contingently necessitates an accompanying instance of B, then it follows that this person had no choice as to whether or not that instance of B would occur. The truth of this statement becomes evident if we replace the condition that the particular A contingently necessitates the particular B with what follows from it by the definition of contingent necessitation, so that the whole statement reads: ‘If a given person had no choice as to whether or not a particular instance of A would occur, and if he (as well as everyone else) had no choice as to whether or not this particular A would be accompanied by the instance of B that did accompany it, then it follows that he had no choice as to whether or not that instance of B would occur.'
had no choice as to whether or not it would satisfy the higher-level description. (If we add to the consequent of this statement the phrase “and it does not,” we get the statement that holds if the higher-level description is such—as some may be—as to entail that the person had a choice as to whether or not he would engage in the behavior to which it applies.)

H

To see that H is logically capable of confirmation and, further, not now known to be false, one must be clear about the notion of choice, used in the definition of contingent necessitation and in stipulation (3) of H. One will not think that any hypothesis that is not obviously false can entail that we have no choice, unless one recognizes that thinking that one has a choice does not make it so. The fact that one is under the impression that one chooses from several alternatives open to one’s choice does not entail that one really does so. Consider a man who, without knowing it, is made a prisoner in his house—while he sleeps, all the exits are quietly barred on the outside. He wakes and, thinking he still has a choice, considers whether to go outside immediately or remain inside for awhile; as it seems to him, he chooses to remain inside. Actually, of course, he has no choice as to which of these two states of affairs will obtain and, hence, he does not really choose (determine) which will obtain.

There is, it must be acknowledged, a sense of “choose” in which one can say of our unwitting prisoner that he does choose to remain inside, even though he cannot do otherwise. Choice in this sense might be called ineffective choice: which of the alternatives (that he thinks are open to his choice) he chooses in this sense does not determine which of them actually occurs. He can, nevertheless, be said to choose, in a sense, because he thinks that he chooses effectively, thinks that he has a choice. There is, however, no sense of “choose” in which one can choose without thinking that he does so, in the primary, effective sense. Realizing, as I do, that I do not at the moment have a choice between floating off the floor to hover in mid-air and not doing so, I can do nothing now that would constitute either choosing to do so or choosing not to do so. However vividly I might imagine hovering, however seriously I might say to myself “No, I won’t do it just now,” and whatever feelings of relief or regret I may have for a pleasure missed, it will all be a farce and not really choosing not to hover, in any sense, as long as I am aware that it simply is not open to me now to hover off the floor.

Thus there can be no comfort in thinking that, though it may not, in the light of an hypothesis like H, be a final certainty that we have any choice in one sense of that term, there remains a sense of it (the ineffective sense) whose application could not possibly be put into doubt by any such hypothesis: in this sense, if we think we choose, then we do, and that’s the end of the matter. For one thing, choosing ineffectively necessarily involves being deluded and is thus not a desirable condition—not, I think, better than being without choice in any sense. Moreover, it is a condition that would be logically impossible for those in it to recognize. One cannot ineffectively choose and at the same time be aware that this is one’s case: I cannot now ineffectively choose not to hover off the floor. For choosing ineffectively entails thinking that one is choosing effectively, that one has a choice. So the only question that one can ask about one’s current and prospective situation—or that we human beings as a group can ask about ours—is this: Do I really have a choice, can I really choose which of several alternatives will happen, or not? We either think that we have a choice and that we can choose effectively, or else we think that we have no choice and that we cannot choose in any sense. There is no third contrary alternative that we can believe.
There are cases imaginable where, even aside from possibilities like H, it would be very difficult to say whether a person has a choice as to whether or not a certain state of affairs will obtain. When, for example, I request you to do something and you do it, do I really have a choice as to whether or not you will do it and do I effectively choose that you will, if your doing it depends on your own decision to cooperate? But no such difficult cases are relevant to H or prejudged by it. The general lack of choice as to whether or not one sort of event will be accompanied by another, involved in the relation of contingent necessitation, is supposed to be established on the same convincing sort of grounds (to be discussed below) in every case. And the individual's lack of choice with regard to each member of the set (A) of remote antecedents of a segment of his behavior, mentioned in (3) of H, is to be thought of as based on such clear and certain grounds as the fact that the antecedent circumstance existed before the individual was born.4

Professor Sellars objected in the discussion that it would make no sense to say of any event occurring before one was born either that one had a choice or that one had no choice as to whether or not that event would occur. I am not convinced that he is right in this. Could we not imagine circumstances in which the following snatch of dialogue would be natural and make good sense? A: "But I had no choice as to whether or not that would occur." B: "Why not?" A: "It occurred before I was born. How old do you think I am?" But even supposing that Professor Sellars is right, that would not take the sting out of H but would only entail that the set of circumstances, A, does not include any existing before the birth of the agent in question. Not even that would be entailed if (3) of H were altered to read:

It clearly cannot be asserted that the human being in question had a choice as to whether or not the antecedent instance of A would occur.

Then the disturbing consequence deducible from H would be: With respect to no piece of human behavior can it be truly asserted that its agent had a choice as to whether or not he would behave in that way.

It will be noticed that H contains no restrictions as to the kind of descriptions that may occupy the 'A' slots. I suspect, however, that if descriptions of certain sorts of psychological factors—desires, intentions, beliefs, and the like—were put in the 'A' slots, then stipulation (2) of H would not have a chance of being true. I suspect this because I suspect that such psychological factors, though commonly used in explaining behavior, can never be regarded as contingently necessitating that behavior, because they must always fail to meet either the first or the third condition defining contingent necessitation. If they are described in such a way as to leave it a logical possibility that a person should satisfy the description but behave in some way other than the one being explained, then I think it will always be found that we have no reason to doubt that a person does, while satisfying the description, have a choice as to whether or not he shall behave in that way. If, on the other hand, these psychological factors are described in such a way as to make us feel confident that no one satisfying the description has any choice but must behave in the way that they explain, then I think it will always be found that this is because the description entails that sort of behavior—the connection will have been made necessary at the expense of its contingency. Whether or not this is the case—and it is not to my present purpose to argue it—it does seem clear that when we offer psychological factors to explain choices of behavior, as the factors in the light of which the agent chose the behavior he exhibited, which we often do, then we cannot regard those factors, or some set including them, as contingently necessitating that behavior.

I mention all this only to indicate that there may be difficulties in supposing that H can ever draw support from such psychological explanations of behavior. But to admit that there are—or may be—such difficulties with these psychological explanations is not to have to regard any possibility of confirming H as infected by them. For
there are other sorts of factors always present—namely, physiological (including neurological) states of the human organism, external physical forces impinging on it and their physical circumstances—whose candidacy for contingent necessitators of human behavior is clearly not marred by such difficulties. So, to be on the logically safe side, we can think of the sets of circumstances that might be candidates for the 'A' slots in H as restricted to this physical sort.

With these preliminary understandings, the claim that H is confirmable and not now known to be false is not, I think, terribly difficult to support. It seems to me that we can imagine future observations that would make it reasonable to believe H—or to accept it, in the sense in which it is commonly said of an hypothesis in a science that it is accepted.

As a first step in imagining such future observations, we need to look at some cases where connections of contingent necessitation are already reasonably believed to hold, and to consider what sorts of observations those beliefs are grounded in. Such beliefs are numerous. Some are stated by the following conditionals: If a piece of copper surrounded by ordinary atmospheric conditions becomes hotter, then it must expand. If a small material body, such as a bowling ball, is left near but not in contact with a very large material body, such as the earth, without anything between them but air, then the small body must move into contact with the large one. If a baseball is hurled with the maximum force that a normal man can muster, in such a way that, after traveling 10 feet from his hand, it strikes at right angles the center region of a piece of glass of just the same sort, and mounted in just the same way, as the glass in that window in my childhood home, then the glass must break.

That we do believe there is a relation of contingent necessitation between the kind of thing described by the antecedent of each of these conditionals and the kind of thing described by its consequent is easily seen when we check them against the three defining conditions of contingent necessitation. (1) We do in each case understand the antecedent and consequent in such a way that the former does not entail the latter. This would not be clear in the first case if "hotter" were defined theoretically in terms of molecular motion, nor in the second case if gravitational force were taken to be part of the concept of matter or mass, but I am supposing these terms to be understood in more ancient, everyday, pre-theoretical senses. (2) We do in each case believe that every instance of the antecedent description (so understood) has been and will be accompanied by an instance of the consequent description. (If this is not so, as some of them stand, it is because of deficiencies in the antecedent description that could, I think, be overcome without too much difficulty.) Finally, (3) we do believe that no one ever has any choice as to whether or not an instance satisfying the antecedent description shall be accompanied by an instance satisfying the consequent description.

I cannot here explore in detail the sorts of observations that justify us in these beliefs in each case; nor can I discuss the philosophical difficulties that can be raised about how such observations can justify such beliefs. I can only put the matter in a rather rough and familiar way, and say that what we do as a matter of fact take as justifying such beliefs are the facts: (a) that quite a number of instances of the antecedent have been observed, and each of them was observed to be accompanied by an instance of the consequent, and (b) that instances of the antecedent have been observed or produced under a variety of circumstances, including any with regard to which there seemed a chance that in them the consequent might not accompany the antecedent. In short, we have never been able to observe the antecedent unaccompanied by the consequent, in spite of our making every effort to do so.

Now, once it is realized that this is the sort of thing that, as a matter of fact, does justify belief in a connection of contingent necessitation, the next step is to recog-
nize that this sort of observation could, in the future of this world, conceivably be made with respect to any given sort of behavior-segment as consequent and some set of physiological and/or environmental circumstances as antecedent. Consider the following first-level descriptions of common behavior sequences:

The body moves from a standing position to a position of being seated on a chair, and then the left leg rises and crosses over and settles on the right leg.

The head turns slightly from left to right, with the eyes at the same time moving in the same way relative to the head, and at the same time there issues from the mouth the sounds, "In this paper I shall be concerned with . . ."

The hand and arm move towards a pen, then the fingers surround and grasp the pen, then the hand and arm move to a position above a piece of paper on a desk, and then the hand and fingers move in such a way that the pen traces on the paper the following marks: "My Last Will and Testament . . ."

Isn't it entirely conceivable that for each of these behavior patterns we might observe that a certain sort of internal state of a human being (one, say, that is physiologically and neurologically very, very complex), when occurring in certain environmental circumstances, is always accompanied by that sort of behavior, no matter how we vary the other circumstances? And isn't it just as conceivable that we should discover for each such physiological-cum-environmental-state (that appears to necessitate contingently a certain sort of behavior) a kind of antecedent set of circumstances that it always and inescapably accompanies? And so on, until we arrive at a set of antecedent circumstances that contingently necessitates a considerable chain of bodily-cum-environmental changes, ending in the sort of behavior sequence we started with, and with regard to each of which remote antecedents it is obvious that the person whose behavior is the end of the chain could have had no choice?

The sort of experimentation with human beings (e.g.,

"brain programming") that observing all this would require, makes it a possibility not to be looked (or hoped) for, but it is, still, a logical possibility.

If all this is conceivable for these sample behavior-sequences, then it is conceivable for any behavior-sequence described in a similar first-level fashion. Imagine that we accumulate such observations for a great many different kinds of behavior-sequences. Then that would begin to constitute strong support for the hypothesis that for every complete first-level description of human behavior, 'B', there is a series of descriptions of sets of circumstances, 'A1', 'A2', . . . 'An', such that: (1) 'A1' does not entail 'B'; (2) A1 contingently necessitates 'A2', . . . , 'An-1 contingently necessitates An, An contingently necessitates B; (3) the agent in question clearly had no choice as to whether or not the antecedent instance of A1 would occur.

This hypothesis would be compatible with observations already made and with hypotheses already well-established, because the imagined future observations supporting it are largely of extraordinarily complex circumstances that have not yet, in their entirety, been observed at all. So no observations or experiments testing whether or not these complex circumstances contingently necessitate certain sorts of behavior have yet been made.

The hypothesis we just specified is not yet H, however. Call it "G." H and G are related in this way: H predicates of every actual particular segment of human behavior what G predicates only of every kind of behavior-segment. Thus H is stronger than G, for to say of a kind of behavior that there are kinds of antecedents which, if they were to occur, would contingently necessitate it, is not to say of every actual instance of that kind of behavior that it actually has those kinds of antecedents.

Still, the move from accepting G to accepting H would be a natural one, because the observations that would confirm G would also tend to confirm H, though not in the same degree. For if a set of observations (such as the
ones I’ve tried to suggest) are such as to convince us of C, they must convince us, with regard to some particular behavior-segments, of what H asserts of all particular segments of behavior—namely, that each is (call this ensuing predicate “F”) contingently necessitated by factors clearly beyond the agent’s scope of choice. That F is true of some actual behavior-segments will begin to be convincing support for the generalization to H only when some of those segments, of which we have good evidence that F is true, seem to the agent to be ones that he chooses. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the belief in what must in any case seem to each of us to be so—namely, that he chooses what much of his behavior will be—is surely a reasonable one to hold on the matter. But if there have occurred observations that constituted good evidence that many behavior-segments which seemed to their subjects to be chosen by them are, on the contrary, actually F, then there would be ground for the conjecture that similar facts are there, unobserved, for all behavior-segments that seem to their subjects to be chosen by them. And the more different behavior-segments that seem to their agents to be chosen by them, for which there was accumulated good evidence that they are, on the contrary, F, the stronger would become the grounds for that conjecture. I can see no reason for thinking it inconceivable that such evidence should continue to accumulate until the grounds become strong enough to justify—perhaps even compel—accepting that conjecture—i.e., H—as a well-confirmed hypothesis.

III

It might be thought that an objection to the claim that it is conceivable that one should be justified in accepting H arises from the fact—already mentioned in passing—that, as things are, a person cannot help having the impression that he chooses large portions of his behavior. In these present circumstances, for example, it must seem to me that I do have a choice as to whether or not my legs will cross in the next minute and, as I cross them, that I choose that this rather than something else is what happens. I have no idea how I might avoid having this impression—other than thinking that the obvious circumstances are quite different from what they are. Let us label “K” the proposition that no one can avoid the impression that what much of his current and prospective behavior is, or is going to be, is chosen by him. H and K together entail that no one can avoid the false impression that much of his behavior is chosen by him. So, it might be objected, accepting the conjunction, HK, necessarily involves committing oneself to an inconsistent set of beliefs. To believe HK one has to believe that some of one’s beliefs, the identity of which one knows, are false. But surely it is absurd for one to affirm that a certain belief one now has, and can specify, is false—to say “It is my present belief that my present belief that... is false.” Thus, the objection concludes, to believe HK is absurd and impossible, and since believing K is all right (since it is true), to believe H must be absurd.

To this one reply is that the absurd form of statement just given above is not a fair statement of the position that accepting HK would put one in. K refers to an unavoidable impression, and not to a belief, for a good reason. A fairer statement of the position, and a non-aburd one, results if the second occurrence of “belief” in the above statement-form is changed to “impression”: “It is my present belief that my present impression that... is false.” Some delusions, upon being recognized by their subjects to be such, vanish completely; others change to illusions—i.e., false impressions. When, for example, the train in which one is sitting begins to move past another train alongside (which is stationary), one sometimes has the impression that the other train, and not one’s own, is moving. Sometimes this impression vanishes with the realization that, from the objective point of view, one must say that his train is moving and the
other is not. Sometimes this impression remains with one, to conflict with one’s simultaneous knowledge of what is really going on; one is aware that one has an illusion that one can’t, or at least doesn’t, shake off. Similarly, to accept H would be to believe that a well-confined objective view of the situation conflicts with one’s subjective impressions that one chooses one’s behavior; it would be to regard these impressions as ineradicable illusions.

It certainly is possible to have an illusion that one is choosing which of several alternatives takes place and at the same time to know that it is an illusion. In those rides that amusement parks sometimes provide, in which one sits in a car that follows a track through a darkened room of illuminated objects, the car sometimes has a steering wheel. If one turns the wheel in the directions suggested by the environment—directions in which the car is actually going—one can easily get the feeling that one is steering the car—even though one knows all along that he is not. A child might think he actually was steering the car, in which case he could be said to “choose” its changes of direction, in just the same sense in which the unwitting prisoner in our earlier example “chooses” to remain inside—i.e., ineffectively. If H is true, then our past choosing has been similarly ineffectual and delusory (and, of course, our future choosing will be). One who believes H, if it is true, will, while he does so, have illusions of choice with regard to his behavior similar to the adult’s illusion of steering in our example.

\[\checkmark\] The example does not, however, provide a perfect analogy to our situation if H is true. There is this interesting difference: in the example of the ride, the ineffective or illusory choice of path is independent of the path actually taken, in that the rider could at some point have made a different (ineffective or illusory) choice of direction from what he actually made, but the path taken by the car would still have been the same (in which case, the delusion or illusion would probably have ceased).

\[\checkmark\] But, supposing H were true, one could not suppose that the coinciding of so many of our ineffective or illusory choices of behavior with the behavior that actually takes place is the tenuous, lucky sort of thing we have in the ride example (or in the earlier unwitting prisoner example). It simply is not at all plausible to suppose, on the assumption that H is true, that I am just lucky that I chose (ineffectively) to cross my legs just now—because, if I had chosen not to, they would have crossed anyway, and my delusion that I choose what my legs do would have been shattered.

But one who supposes that H is true does not have to make this implausible supposition along with it. Rather, he can suppose that the behavior we have the impression of choosing and the behavior we actually engage in, coincide so well because the impressions of choice and the actual behavior are contingently necessitated by the same factors. Thus, they would be interdependent, but not in a way that would mean that our impressions of effectively choosing are true. We can illustrate the sort of situation envisaged by making our ride example more fanciful. Suppose that the path that the car takes is controlled by some person other than the rider, who also controls (through, say, instruments attached to the rider’s brain) what delusions or illusions of steering the rider will have, and suppose that this controller sees to it that the path he makes the rider think he is choosing is always the same as the path he (the controller) makes the car take. In this case, even though it is true that, if the rider had had the impression of choosing a different path the car would have taken a correspondingly different path, it is still the case that the rider’s choice-impression does not determine what path the car takes, that the rider has no choice of any sort as to what path it will take, and, hence, that he does not effectively choose its path. This is the proper sort of analogue for what it is plausible to suppose our situation to be, with respect to our impressions of choosing our behavior, if H is true.
When I say that \( H \) and this supplementary hypothesis as to why our choice-impressions coincide so well with our behavior are plausible, I mean it only in the sense that we now have no strong evidence that they are false: they contradict no observations already made and no well-established hypotheses—only our strong impression that we do choose our behavior. The latter, since its existence is quite compatible with the truth of these hypotheses, can be no conclusive evidence against them, though it may be a good reason, in the absence of strong evidence for them, to continue to believe that we do have choices. In any case, this impression is such, as a matter of psychological fact, as to make it difficult, even impossible, for us to believe otherwise; thus it renders \( H \) implausible for us, in another sense of the term. We cannot imagine what it would be like to believe \( H \), and to regard ourselves as constantly illuded, in the way that it entails.

This is not, however, an entirely novel kind of difficulty. It would have been similarly (though perhaps not so greatly) difficult for some ancient thinkers to imagine what it would be like to accept the Copernican hypothesis and to regard as an illusion their impression that the earth on which they stand is fixed and the sun moves over it. Now, for us who accept the Copernican hypothesis, talk of the sun's rising and setting (in fact any talk of absolute motion or fixity) has acquired the status of metaphor. Talk of having a choice and choosing might acquire the same status for people who really believe \( H \).

Another reply to the objection stated at the beginning of this section is this: Even if it could be shown that it is impossible for anyone to believe that \( H \) is true—by showing that there is an essential connection between being a creature capable of belief (a conscious being) and believing that one has choices (which is, I believe, a fundamental tenet of at least some existentialists)—that would not demonstrate that \( H \) is false. One would need another argument to show—what is not self-evident—that any truth must be capable of being believed.

I. INTENTIONS

My aim in this essay is to explore the interconnection of a number of concepts which are of particular interest to the philosophical psychology of action. The interconnection of these concepts concerns their respective roles in the concept of practical reasoning, and it is with some reflections on the latter that this essay will begin and end. By "practical reasoning" I understand reasoning which, if carried to its conclusion, ends in a practical assertion in one's heart and, possibly, on one's tongue. By a practical assertion, I mean in the first instance an assertion which is of the form

such and such shall be the case.

I use the very uninformative place-holder "such and such"—which amounts to a variable for states of affairs.

1 Let me remind the reader that in this and other essays I use "shall" in such a way that it always (as it does not in ordinary English) expresses an intention—in a suitably broad sense to be characterized below—of the speaker.