A Matter of Choice

The Decisive Effect on Human Affairs

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Preface

This book focusses on one substantive issue – the significance of the role of choice in human affairs. Drawing on a range of contributions the case advanced will seek to demonstrate that, though perhaps not often the primary issue under consideration, a concern with choice has featured consistently in a range of literature. Beginning in the Hellenistic world of the Stoics through to the religious and philosophical ideas of the Middle Ages, the question of choice becomes an emergent property in developing discussions of the nature of man (taking their term of reference). It is evident from these early interventions that such analyses could never quite shake off the determining influence of both the gods or God and the heavens above when accounting for the element of choice in human affairs. With the advent of the modern period the early legacy of determinism and free will becomes systematised in connection with a range of other concerns, most notably the issues of morality and ethics. We have, here, too, the depiction for the first time of the free and autonomous individual at liberty to make his very own choices as long as it does not impinge on the interests of others.

The first part of the book concentrates on reviewing the increasing importance accorded to choice in modern philosophical accounts beginning in the seventeenth century. There is an obvious step change with the work of Immanuel Kant and due consideration will be given to his legacy with regard to the parameters of freedom in human choice. In the post-Kantian period, choice comes to be treated as being something of an issue in its own right, with the impetus for such approaches often being associated with the name of Søren Kierkegaard. From the second half of the nineteenth century quite divergent schools of thought become increasingly apparent, although each, in its own way, has something of significance to contribute

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to the, by now, ongoing debate on choice. The account will take us up to quite recent contributions in the early years of this century. Nevertheless, it would appear that such philosophy provides us with only half of the story of choice, seeming to lack consistently the absolutely necessary social and historical dimension to make any real sense of the part played by choice in human affairs.

So, the second part of the book considers those aspects of social thought that add this essential level of interpretation. It has to be said, however, that these social theorists themselves find it hard to make a clean break with the legacy of past conceptions. The question of the status of determinism and freedom of will, for example, just does not seem to want to go away, although it takes on quite new guises. Fortune, fate and belief in luck continue to take their place, somewhat awkwardly, alongside theories of social action and interaction, social structure and power, and access to scarce resources and various kinds of discrimination. The coming of the choice-making sovereign individual seems to have been beset by a series of problems identified in the literature from Locke onwards: an apparent personal unease, disquiet and dissatisfaction; the effect of an impersonal social structure constraining aspiration and opportunity; and individuals finding themselves tied and bound to the social system, in a final irony, by the choices they themselves have been encouraged to make. To contextualise this development the final chapter will explore the economic and political arrangement that has made all of this possible: capitalism in its liberal-democratic moment with a particular emphasis on the effect of liberalism in fashioning a 'home-from-home' for the choice maker.

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Chapter One

Introduction – Following the Progress of the Stars

I

> [T]hey be in the course of the stars and the movings of the heavenly spheres very expert and cunning. . . . But as for the amities and dissensions of the planets, and all the deceitful divination by the stars, they never as much as dreamed thereof.
>
> (Thomas More, *Utopia*, 1996, 40)

In the first part of this introduction we shall be intent on following the progress of the stars. Written in the stars, they say. If so, then in what possible language? What is written in the stars of the o'er-hanging firmament, as they roam across the heavens, will always reflect the material development of the culture over which they make their studded appearance. That said, actual scientific knowledge of the movement of the stars does not at first appear to make a great deal of difference to the assumption of their alleged mysterious and magical effects. The enticement of superstition and magic began to capture the Greek imagination around the time of Alexander the Great. The Hellenistic world, in turn, came to be receptive to astrology (no doubt, drawn in part from the prognostications of the Babylonians) with the belief that the stars watched over its people soon accompanying a characteristic frame of mind. In effect, the stars were attributed a divine potency. There was belief in the necessity of fate and belief in fortune; the inconsistency, here, did not exclude the ongoing possibility of belief in both. For early Stoics, for example, Zeno, founder of the school, destiny as a power which moves matter came to be identified with the deity, Zeus, and became closely associated with both providence and nature. In order to at

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least gain some control over such a situation a special role was reserved for divination. What to do and which way to turn were the perennial problems that confronted them. Chrysippus, the third head of the Stoic tradition, considered the experience of being swayed by conflicting alternatives as a kind of oscillation, with reason struggling to prevail over unruly emotions (fallen judgements) in order to judge what is best. Later Stoics tried to salvage a role for free will and personal responsibility but within certain pre-determined parameters – although to some extent fate equates with providence in Stoicism thereby leaving space for divine intervention. Whilst drawing freely on Stoicism and Epicureanism, it was Seneca's view that a slave is dragged by the fates, a wise man led by them (Berlin 2002, 90). According to Cicero, an action has to be done out of choice and with a good will in order to be virtuous.

Even by the time of the late Roman Stoic Marcus Aurelius, providence still features. In his *Meditations* he holds that: 'Whatever may happen to you was prepared for you in advance from the beginning of time' (Marcus Aurelius 2004, 123) and as he says, referring to one of the three Fates, she who spins the threads of men's lives: 'Submit yourself to *Clotho* with a good grace, and let her spin your thread out of what material she will' (38). He warns, too: 'Fate is at your elbow' (32). The force of nature, it should be noted, is also an insistent presence featuring in high profile. In rejecting the very idea of a world devoid of gods or providence he announces that:

> The whole divine economy is pervaded by Providence. Even the vagaries of chance have their place in Nature's scheme; that is, in the intricate tapestry of the ordinances of Providence. Providence is the source from which all things flow; and allied with it is Necessity, and the welfare of the universe. (12)

He insists that: 'You must remember that all outward events are the result of either chance or providence; and you cannot reprimand chance or impeach providence' (160). Yet, as regards choice he still manages to say the following:

> To change your mind and defer to correction is not to sacrifice your independence; for such an act is your own, in pursuance of your own impulse, your own judgement, and your own thinking. If the choice is yours, why do the thing? If another's, where are you to lay the blame for it? On gods? On atoms? Either would be insanity. (94-95)

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In fact, the great paradox of the *Meditations* is that, even after invoking fate and providence, so much of the content is spent proposing to us how best to live our lives, over which we somehow seem to be in control: 'Our master-reason is something which is both self-awakened and self-directed. It cannot only make itself what it will, but also impose the aspect of its choice on anything which it experiences' (60). Not only do we get a feel in the reference, here, of a proto-individual but one for whom reason is, quite literally, the be-all and end-all.[1]

Just as the heavens turned, a millennium later medieval heads were to be turned by a complementary idea: the wheel of fortune. One day you were up; the next day down. Unaccountably, your fortune waxed and waned as the wheel turned in its treacherous revolution. Even so, perhaps you could get fortune's wheel to move in a favourable direction for you. It was Machiavelli's view that fortune favoured, not so much the brave or bold (as in Pliny the Younger and Terrance), as the young, just because of their impetuosity; lady luck, it seemed, turned her back on the old and cautious. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, Montaigne was to observe that events largely depend upon,

> fortune, which will not conform or subject itself to our reason and foresight . . . to understand things aright, it seems that our opinions and deliberations depend upon fortune just as much, and that she involves our reason too in her uncertainties and confusion. 'We reason rashly and at random' concludes Timaeus in Plato 'because our judgements, like ourselves, have in them a large element of chance'. (Montaigne 1958, 129-30)

So, it may well be that with judgement, which we might have assumed to be pre-eminently the realm of reason and the rational, we have never fully freed ourselves from the play of fate and fortune. Take note of this then from Montaigne, the great scrutiniser of himself. He infers that timing, circumstances and the flux of life itself condition any decision taken, yet he considers that his plans were well-chosen according to the opportunities he had. He admits to some serious and grievous errors in his life, committed, he muses, not for lack of good judgement but for lack of good fortune. He identifies hidden and silent elements in our experience, most often in human nature, largely unanticipated but arising in given circumstances:

> If my foresight has been unable to fathom and predict them, I have no complaint against it; its functions are limited. If the event

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> goes against me; and if it favours the side I have rejected, there is no remedy. I do not reproach myself for this; I blame my fortune. (Montaigne 1958, 246)

Despite what he has to say about fortune in these passages, we still hear it as modulated in the cool, calculated tone of reason.

Indeed, everyone, it would seem, at some point has outrageous fortune buckled to his back. This was Shakespeare's view of Richard III, who set his life upon a cast and was to stand the hazard of the die. Hamlet, too, was led to discourse on something very similar. In fact, Shakespeare is the one who captures best the vaulting ambition of the star of fortune. Amongst numerous references, we have only to think of *Romeo and Juliet*, described in the Prologue as the 'star-cross'd lovers' whose love was written in the stars. Yet, by Shakespeare's day we are at an end of a period when life's consequences are seen to be hanging in the stars and such associations are coming to be relegated to mere folklore with a more critical rendition of the world almost at hand. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare has Edmund say: 'Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law / My services are bound.' Yet, in response to Gloucester descrying unfortunate portents in the heavens, Edmund derides the very idea of man laying his 'goatish disposition' to the charge of a star:

> This is the excellent foppery of the world! that, when we are sick in fortune, – often the surfeit of our own behaviour, – we make guilty of our disasters, the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity: fools, by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on. (*King Lear*, I.ii)[2]

A generation or so after Shakespeare, and living at the time of the English Civil War and its aftermath, the poet Andrew Marvell felt he had been fated 'by the Malignant Starrs' and 'Forced to live in Storms and Warrs' (Marvel, cited in Hill 2001, 310). The stars could also make impositions on love:

> Therefore the Love which us doth bind,
> But Fate so enviously debars,
> Is the Conjunction of the Mind,
> And Opposition of the Stars.
> (Marvell, cited in Hill, 2001, 309)

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So, whilst the stars might have been seen to be divine (by the Stoics and others), stars, too, could be seen to be bringers of malady with their influence often being interpreted as malign. Not only great events but one's own personal well-being could hang on the direction of a star. In Italian designation (probably sixteenth century) the influence of the movement of the stars caused, amongst copious others, the illness we now know as influenza. It is no wonder that people looked out for something to give them an inkling of their fate. Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* catalogued the bewildering array of oracular practice in prognostication up to his time. In a copious list of 'techniques', of what he calls at one point 'but juggling and confederate knavery' (1962, 135-36), is a reference to horoscopes, astrology and the determining aspects of the stars.

In this way, that canopy bedecked with jewels staging its supposed 'heavenly compulsion' would still go on to rule in certain quarters. The zodiac of the heavens was to be divided up into twelve equal parts but with subtly different characteristics and alleged prophetic properties. Though it is not the intention, here, to mock the astrologer, the stars (and planets) figuring in horoscopes need not detain us long except to note that they display one very characteristic feature relevant to the present discussion. Most often, in amongst all the other sophistical pronouncements, is the idea of arriving at your preferred destination, having first arrived at the right decision or made the right choice. Therefore, you have to put into practice both choice and action (so far, as we shall see, not dissimilar to the rubric of conventional philosophy). However, horoscopes leave open the possibility of employing reason in this projection or following your instincts or what your heart 'tells you'. The assumption is often that thinking too long and hard about an intractable situation just confuses us and the situation itself. He or she casting the horoscope usually reassures us that we will somehow 'know' which of reason or emotion to employ even though the whole rigmarole is predicated upon the kind of credulous person looking for a sense of direction in his life, if only in the short term or perhaps over only one issue. Being told to abandon doubts and just 'go with it' may not be all that sound advice, given our personal circumstances. The recommendation to 'follow your heart' on whatever road it takes will turn out to be a calamitous journey for some. Others, of course, will just read horoscopes for amusement ('just for a laugh' at the hokum, as they like to tell themselves) but will still perhaps wonder about their provenance and veracity. We, too, may be led to wonder – but not greatly within the bounds of these pages – though we will still be left to reflect on the prospect that the 'the fault' is in our stars.[3] However, the fault might actually lie in the specific choice-making context itself.

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The French logician of the High Middle Ages, Jean Buridan has given his name to an amusing paradox of choice making: Buridan's Ass. Although no doubt stemming from Aristotle, the background premise is that, faced with a choice of equal merit and advantage, the upshot would be decision making 'freezing solid'. In this most unlikely of all possible scenarios, the Ass, equidistant from two delectable bales of hay, is unable to choose and, in consequence, starves to death (note Hume's 'take' on this, 1975, VI, Pt. I, 192, 235). A human being faced with a similar impasse would look for a different (extrinsic) rationale to make the choice that we must assume would not be an option for the ass. Not to worry, no animals were actually harmed in the making of this logistical thought experiment but why there is such high-profile equine input in choice-making scenarios remains a mystery, because in short order we come across another one. 'Hobson's choice' is an adage going back centuries, the source being, allegedly, the Cambridge carrier who insisted his clientele had the privilege of the horse nearest the stable door or going without, i.e. either that one or none. Thus, in effect, offering no choice whatsoever. Or, perhaps, it is actually two choices: take it or leave it! We must assume that the horse had no choice in the matter either, further compounding an all-round *fait accompli*. It should not be forgotten that animals do choose in a rudimentary way; they can make clear what they want. They often show a preference, say, for warmth or certain food but it is difficult to ascertain whether or not this constitutes judgement. In the case of human beings, the defining moment is what the choosing is about – a quite different order of magnitude. As it were, we choose what to choose. At least that is the case in theory, for people are forever being presented with take-it-or-leave-it scenarios; often when and where they thought that they had a genuine choice of some description. The inhabitant of the modern world is presented with various kinds of 'Hobson's choice', willy-nilly, situations of systemically narrowed down options but, regardless, there will always remain the question of just how free those choices can ever be.

II

If Shakespeare was right in anticipating a new dawn of critical, self-conscious reflection, such an era was still to be beset by the hoary old problem of freedom of will versus necessity – in effect, the bogyman of determinism. However, as we shall see, we will find it hard to ever get down to the bottom line on the question of freedom and necessity, free will and determinism – the result, however many times we run it through, always ends up in a draw. If something happens as an apparent consequence of our choice, was it meant to be anyway? The answer to that is, we'll never know.

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There is no means of knowing; no intellectual apparatus up to the task. A necessary connection is not subject to proof by logical deduction or by empirical evidence; nor can a necessary connection be subject to proof by direct observation sourced by sensory data. There is just no way of telling; and convincing ourselves that 'it was meant to be' affirms something but actually nothing at all. It is choice if we want it to be and fate if we do not (or, we might let ourselves believe it's a little bit of both). We could, perhaps, turn around Hamlet's acute observation that:

> there is nothing either good or bad,
> But thinking makes it so.
> (*Hamlet*, II.ii)

into 'there is nothing either free will or destiny but thinking makes it so'. In fact, there is nothing given in experience that corresponds to choice and fate being alternative springs to what passes for reality. Perhaps it really is just a trick of the light: in one stream we are fated; in the other, we are free. We bathe ourselves in first one and then the other but remain at a loss as to which is which. Indeed, some practitioners in the field might be described as employing a 'double aspect' principle because of their penchant for seeing things in focus as first one thing (say mind) and then the other (the body, for example).[4] We have, however, been forewarned of being drawn into engaging with this issue:

> Anybody constructing, or reconstructing, a theory in which the central element in the explanation of human action is the exercise of this general power of choice, unfortunately puts himself in a position in which it would be discreditable to say nothing about the barren question: 'Are human beings free in exercising their power to choose?'. (Donagan 1987, 21-22)

Donagan reflected that, par for the course, no constituency would be persuaded of the veracity of his own position.

In a more recent foray into the area of freedom and freedom of will, the author chose as his opening gambit to play with a piece covering 'choice' (Baggini, 2016, 1). He supposes that the connection between free will and choice to be something like this:

> In order to make sense of free will we have to abandon the tendency to talk of choices being made by our brains, or our minds, or our rational or conscious selves. We have to think of the agents of

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> choice as being *us:* the whole people we are. These whole selves sometimes do things consciously, sometimes unconsciously; sometimes after thought, sometimes automatically; sometimes on the basis of reasons, sometimes on the basis of emotion or instinct. What makes us free is that, taken in the round, we have a sufficient amount of control over what we do. (Baggini 2016, 24-25)

Whilst wishing to concur in general terms with this evaluation, the very issue of the degree of control over what we do (at a macro level) needs to be considered further andthere is an attempt to do just that in subsequent chapters. Freedom is, nevertheless, another issue in the course of this discussion.

We must in what follows acknowledge the multi-accentuality of freedom taken just on its own terms. We cannot blandly and blithely generalise freedom into equating with personal liberty always and everywhere. The universal application of freedom as freedom from slavery and oppression, for example, can blind us to much more provisional and doubtful applications of freedom. Whilst we may recognise that one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist, the investment banker's freedom to take advantage of market conditions can compromise all our lives. In the struggle over the creation of material life, unfettered freedom of the unscrupulous exhibiting a disregard for life (our lives!) can be the worst possible scenario for our hopes for freedom. As we know, there is a difference between freedom *from* (say, hunger and want) and freedom *to* (lead a fulfilling life, for example). Even this can be turned on its head as in the following example: 'Freedom from scruple, from sympathy, honesty and regard for life, may, within fairly wide limits, be said to further the success of the individual in the pecuniary culture' (Veblen 1994, 137). This may well be a play on the word 'freedom', to transfer its positive connotation into something negative, but it serves to act as a timely warning. Indeed, the historical record is littered with instances of individual autonomy and freedom wilfully negating others' right to choose. Thus, in relation to the latitude for individual choice, we must move with caution as regards its bedfellow, freedom; sometimes it is not in the least bit desirable company, as we shall discover when we explore further the fortunes of choice in the modern world.

It is undoubtedly the case that alongside freedom a veritable constellation of concepts sheds light on what we might take 'choice' to mean. Any attempt at a fine-grained analysis of choice will undoubtedly encounter overlapping concepts, concepts that are virtually synonymous, and the inevitable question of whether one facet or aspect will effect (cause) another. The imputation of a causal sequence being involved in any consideration of 'choice' immediately

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introduces what has proved a thorny problem in itself. It may be unwise, and virtually impossible, anyway, to completely separate closely related concepts that inform this area of concern. Moreover, nor is it judicious to pursue any of them so avidly to the extent of being drawn away from the primary focus of attention. However, it would seem to be the case that certain concepts demand our attention rather more than others because they are inextricably tied up with choice. We might also wish to draw a distinction between what constitutes choice and what decision. For example, decisions would appear to be 'weightier' than choice. Interestingly, there is an opposite in one case but not the other i.e. 'indecision' but no equivalent for choice. Whilst '[s]ome decisions in life are based on inductive inferences from past trends, or from past experience believed in some way to be dependable for the present' (Giddens 1991, 19), it would appear that a set number of choice options simplifies the decision-making process. For example, being asked 'would you prefer tea or coffee?' as opposed to 'what would you like to drink?' (that itself might elicit the response: 'what have you got?'). The response 'I don't mind' means you have no wish (at that moment) to express a preference but could be an indication to your host of you withholding from them what you would really like (perhaps something they would not be able to provide in the circumstances). Making decisions and exercising choice in various more complex social settings amplifies a great deal of this kind of second guessing on the part of the participants. Interestingly, within the Department of Psychology at the University of Cambridge, there is a 'Social Decision-Making Laboratory' and it is rather to be suspected that the experimentation will go well beyond the tea/coffee test!

Alongside decision, it is exceedingly difficult to hive off choice from judgement – both good and bad and, even, the further variant, misjudgement. Judgement is potentially enduring temporally and often construed as indicative of character. Just as being seen to be of good character, a person can be deemed to be someone of good, or sound, judgement (a connection that cannot be made with choice or, even, decision). In addition, the word 'discretion' also comes to mind in connection with prudent judgement. It is worth noting that the word that would most obviously appear to link judgement with choice is discrimination. This word now, however, has acquired a negative connotation. To be discriminating, to show good judgement, is not similarly tarnished. Indicating this, the word 'felicitous', for instance, means precisely well-chosen or an apt choice. We might be content to see choice as being able 'to exercise a preference'. All well and good! However, if we then interpret this as 'the power to choose', things at once start to get rather more complicated. It is the 'power' element, here, that appears to induce this effect. To actually deconstruct what

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'power' might mean in this context, or to identify its component parts, is a book-length task in its own right. Certainly, power has featured in high profile in the sociological canon since its inception as a discipline. Power can be exercised over someone and is, thus, testimony to his or her lack of power to choose, as will become evident in subsequent chapters. Michel Foucault (1977) saw power as a diffuse, de-centred network, all-pervasive and omnipresent, the capillaries and protuberances of which stretch out through every aspect of life. Power can also be taken to mean the actual ability or capacity to choose, which can be construed as a range of possibilities from a mental state to freedom from some kind of physical constraint. In our analysis, here, power might be assumed to approximate volition, for example, another variable in the lexicon of concepts in this area. The idea of volition has, itself, as we shall see, proved controversial as have many of the other closely related concepts we will encounter.

III

We are all aware of the nomenclature in business correspondence: the blank designation, 'To whom it may concern'. Well, as it turns out, this actually happens to be everybody in the instance we are considering. The world of 'human concern' as an expression has really not had much currency since its heyday in the medieval period, though it captures well the current hold on us of everyday life in modern times and the business in which we are engaged. A world of choice takes place in the world of 'human concern(s)' in which we are destined to take part. That world is one in which we have inevitable interest(s): it is that to which we have an organic connection, it becomes the source of the creation of our material life and a potential site of happiness – though also of unease, anxiety and worry. It is all of these things. It is of pressing importance and we are 'blessed' with a level of will and desire to deal with it. The world of 'human concern(s)', in effect, amounts to what you are about. In fact, the term 'concern' has been adapted in phenomenology (see Schutz 1967; 1982) in being presented as 'concernfulness', which denotes the tension of consciousness present with the world. However, 'concernfulness' can also be used to capture a moral orientation to a situation in the world (which is, in effect, a further tension of consciousness) over which difficult choices might have to be made. Not only this, but a succession of seemingly endless conflicted choices attends human life at every turn.

It is the making of choices that is the making, or breaking, of the world as we find it. The human condition is refashioned to order in this world as is the latitude for further choice making.

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Inevitably, the question of choice invites us into the realm of morality and ethics. Human beings require reasons for that which they do on moral grounds and, secondly, moral grounds, by their nature, are beset by choices. That said, reasons may be poor guardians of truth and choices may range beyond belief. Human beings may have become hard-wired to recognise a reason and to be challenged by choice but there the programming ends. To compute options, *en passant*, and project the nature of favourable and unfavourable outcomes, 'good' and 'bad' endings to states of affairs, is a peculiarly existential predicament (people are often said to have made 'good' or 'bad' life choices). This is all the more acute because there is a third premise that over-determines the former two: such situations are inherently social and are swayed in their conclusion accordingly. Just as Michael Oakeshot contended that the moral life is 'conduct to which there is an alternative' (cited in Winch 1963, 65), it would seem that we need to distinguish between two kinds of issues here. It is one thing to discern the ranges of choice in a given moral dilemma and quite another to know what the solution might be. Perhaps there isn't a black-and-white solution, as in right or wrong, but, rather, innumerable shades of grey where we weigh up the possibilities and maybe are then thus primed to act. Human beings are blind to the outcome of their courses of action a great deal of the time. It is, however, this projection into an uncertain future whilst wanting the best possible return that is the mark of a sophisticated mental economy. If we were to add to this the skill to ponder not only 'What good is this to me if it were to come to pass', but also 'What good am I if this were to come to pass?', then, perhaps, we should be content with the legion of evolutionary processes that have led us to the point of standing back to reflect on any given ethical problem.

When faced with the prospect of having to make the 'right choice', the word 'right' is as perplexing as its counterpart 'choice'. 'Right' could be taken to denote: true, correct, sound and both appropriate and suitable (to the situation) and definitely *not* wrong, mistaken or inappropriate (again, to the situation). An expression that comes to mind regarding the status of 'right' here, is, as people say, 'I just don't know what to do for the best', always predicated on the hope that things will turn out for 'the best'(i.e. turn out right). This gives us a clue for in certain contexts, in fact, in most, there is a temporal dimension at work. You would only know if things worked out for the best for you after a certain passage of time. That is to say, when it became clear that it had actually 'turned out that way'. The 'rightness' of the case is not immediately known at the time of the choice-cum-decision. What this discloses is that these two bedfellows 'right' and 'choice', often work on the basis of two quite different time-space coordinates. The choice

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in question is largely of the present moment; its 'rightness', so to speak, eventually comes to pass becoming evident at some unspecified time in the future. Perhaps, it is in the most momentous and serious cases (the moment of accidents notwithstanding) that 'right' and 'choice' are most separated in time and space. A characteristic feature of choice, then, is that consequences only become apparent over time, largely because the original choice begets a series of other, subsequent choices. Someone will make a choice and will be totally 'innocent' of what will turn out to be the consequences of that choice as that outcome was not what was intended at all.

The word 'right' in the above sense coincides with a different connotation of 'right', though each informs the other ethically in certain set situations. This latter 'right' has to do with natural justice and what should be someone's self-evident or proper entitlement morally or legally. However, having the 'right' to make a certain choice and having been 'right' to do so may live with someone for their rest of their life. One type of 'right' played off against the other is often characteristic of the most agonising predicaments and only time will tell of the consequences. A woman's right to choose, for example, has become a political slogan with regard to the right to abortion (and, more recently, the right to access the 'morning after' pill) with the opposed parties on this question being the progressive-liberal stance versus the pro-life lobby. The divisions on this question run deep with the fault line, ironically, apparently not moving any ground whatsoever. This ethical issue turns out to be not just a question of the right to choose, per se, but the actual moral status of what is actually being chosen. The hegemony of one view or the other is swayed by the stages of socio-economic development and the cultural and religious context. Whilst this is a supremely earthly problem, religion, itself, has had much to do with choice – often, in a quite metaphysical manner. Derived from the Greek, the word *ecclesiastic* has a connotation of being 'chosen' or 'called' and most religions have adopted such a suggestive principle. Every form of belief system frames the choices of its followers, defining what is acceptable, often, embodied in codes of conduct. This may appear as a collective imperative. In the wider society, we are held to be personally responsible for the choices we make, unless there is some other explanation for our (in) action. Yet, how we ourselves account for this is often a quite different matter. Depending upon the gravity of the situation, this dissonance may have to be resolved (for example, through the courts). Choice, then, is an inherent and inescapable component of social life, although its effective presence often remains implicit. It is the aim of the present study to review both the historical record and the relevant literature to make more explicit the significance of 'choice' in human affairs.

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IV

So, of all that might be adduced to further the discussion of the issues raised above, the focus of attention, here, has come to settle on the decisive role of choice. Choice is the star! The choice of 'choice' as the pivotal concept in this monograph came not from an academic interest primarily but, rather, from the incessant going over of old ground, in reliving life-changing personal experiences – playing the game of 'what might have been'. Why did it turn out like that? Why did it go this way and not that? Why was that course of action chosen rather than some other possible option? Choice after choice at every turn; some turning out well, some extremely badly. Bergson says the past is 'that which acts no longer' (Bergson 2004, 74). The past is not for changing and 'in vain does the man already determined by it batter it with dreams of how it could have been different' (Dilthey 1979, 209). Merleau-Ponty describes this fateful situation rather more precisely by introducing historicity into life-course experience. He proposes that:

> Theoretical and practical decisions of personal life may well lay hold, from a distance, upon my past and my future, and bestow upon my past, with all its fortuitous events, a definite significance, by following it up with a future which will be seen after the event as foreshadowed by it, thus introducing historicity into my life. (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 346)

However, what on earth is this business of 'choice' anyway and what is our relation to it? Can we ever help it or is it just always beyond our control? Certainly, we can never give it up as we might alcohol or smoking but it can be equally damaging to our health and prospects. Some poor, benighted souls, even without an identifiable medical condition (perhaps it could be 'Hamlet Syndrome'), seem to be actually paralysed by the prospect of choice. There are pathological states in which the individual is totally immobilised by doubt in 'the form of paranoia or paralysis of the will so complete that the individual effectively withdraws altogether from ordinary social intercourse' (Giddens 1991, 196). Schopenhauer concludes that it is man's very faculty for deliberation, subjecting him to tormenting thoughts, that makes his existence so much more harrowing than that of animals (Schopenhauer 1969, 298).

So, facing up to this sorry state of affairs, the 'academic interest' did start to kick in finally as is evident from what follows. That said, this book does not aspire to be a self-help manual, a primer for how to make the right life choices ('felicitous' ones, we might say), or, even, a 'page-turning' substitute

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for a life-coach. What it does aspire to be is a source of some interesting and intriguing insights into the most curious of human capacities – the ability to make choices and to act on them. This question, as it might be imagined, is not easy or straightforward; it is perplexing at the best of times and the literature reflects that fact. Nevertheless, it is possible to make available some of the most significant ideas in this area in a sufficiently accessible fashion to get us thinking. Familiarising ourselves with perhaps the most enduring contributions from philosophy and social thought, more generally, should not do us any permanent harm. What good it might do, much like choice itself, depends on how we make up our minds to handle it. If the material featured in this discussion occasionally appears inordinately difficult, that is because it actually is; that, in turn, is because the subject matter itself is a bit on the tricky side. Ironically, the very word 'choice' suffers somewhat from appearing too commonplace; seeming insufficiently technical and conceptual. Often it finds application in the textual account of a publication but fails to pass muster sufficiently for the Index – no doubt, having been deemed to possess insufficient substantive gravitas.[5]

With the above reservations on record how, then, are we going to proceed? One option is to take the time to reflect on exactly what choice itself has been taken to denote in the various reaches of philosophy and social thought (in particular, sociology). There are a range of positions and perspectives on the question of choice each with their very own constellation of concepts, which most of the time are worlds apart remaining completely unaware of each other's orbit. They could, in fact, be arranged along a continuum with 'the mind' at one extreme and material reality (social and historical) at the other. Whilst choice straddles the mental and the material, 'choosing' is an active capacity of the individual human person and, in effect, comes to involve action on his or her part. Choice is located along the interface between states of mind and states of affairs and is a complex, emergent property. From childhood onwards we are very often urged to 'make up our minds'. This is a very different kind of injunction from, say, 'mind the step', 'mind the dog' or, even, 'mind your manners'. There is only one step, one dog (whether we fall over it or look after it) and, even, only one set of good manners; making up our minds, however, could involve a range of oracular options and perplexing propositions that need resolution (in both major senses of the word). If we were so minded, it would be quite possible to develop a typology of various situational dilemmas and to chart systematically the evolution over an historical time frame different ranges and types of choices as some decline and others emerge to take their place. Scouring the historical record will reveal a quite obvious catalogue

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of eventful choices, though many of them may not have seemed so at the time. In addition to this, there can also be informed, considered choice which can be of two main varieties: firstly, as a function of previous trial and error learning throughout life experience or, secondly, as a result of purely knowledge/information based 'intelligence'. There can be habitual choice or an impulsive, offhand kind of choice, which may or may not build on the first two instances indicated above. Though most choices may be inconsequential, the remaining balance can be life-changing; events, beyond our control, often determine our choices.

Questions raised by 'choice' do not admit of one unified solution. It is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon subject to treatment from a range of perspectives.[6] In engaging with such material a complex picture emerges so that the coverage, here, by its nature, is inevitably partial and selective and what follows is only ever intended as a rudimentary sketch. Tracing the story of the ascendancy of 'choice' in human affairs is convoluted and far from straightforward. All we can do to produce anything like a meaningful interpretation is to attempt some rough and ready modelling. The backdrop to the story of 'choice' would appear to be set out in terms of, on the one hand, processes of expansion and, on the other, processes of contraction. There have been expansive changes effective in the individual and in society, taken over a significant historical time frame. Dialectical changes need to have occurred between the individual and society, in all its social, economic and cultural complexity, to have brought about transformation in the prospects for 'choice'. Speculation or not, it is probable that some kind of expansion in capacity of the mental economy of human beings has taken place and, less speculatively, expansion in the capacity and reach of societies as progressed apace. However, just to complement and complete such processes, certain other variables have, in turn, noticeably contracted. If reason expands, then belief in the influence of the stars contracts accordingly ('the disenchantment' of the world); if material affluence expands in a society, then levels of poverty and destitution contract (at least in theory – so much for modelling!). The action on the stage framing the play of choice needs this 'up and down', expansion-contraction, backdrop to set the scene sufficiently realistically. The chances for choice are limited if the society in question does not possess the wherewithal to produce realistic material options for its population which, in any case, would always be stratified in terms of class, status and power. Things need to have happened to make this dynamic stand a chance of working at all. We are now called upon to make our way in this novel open-ended world; we bustle along with our fellows, who, unaccountably, have the same choice invitation.

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When considering what a more sociological conception of choice might actually look like, its freedoms and constraints, it is also important not to overlook the consequences of the social and historical expansion of opportunities for choice. Prerequisites to the arrival of individual choice would have to be: a fully developed sense of individuality and selfhood; a conscious living out of a life of freedom (legal and actual); the projection of a life-course for which the individual feels, and is held, responsible; a track record of personal decision-making (solicited and unsolicited); a sense of triumph and defeat in attaining goals as a result of choice selection; and a feeling that, whilst making judgements, the individual is also being judged, together with the constant feeling that, had choices and decisions gone one way rather than another, a substantive difference would have been made in the individual's life. That, itself, brings into play the wider society, the prerequisites of which would need to be: a free and open class structure (notwithstanding, evidence of a rigid status hierarchy); a surplus in material and cultural production; a burgeoning occupational structure with extended opportunities for individual progression; and a societal recognition of both success and failure in terms of acclaim and material advancement. Paradoxically, alongside this expansion of opportunities for choice there has been an exponential expansion of spheres over which the individual has no direct control or say. Often people are presented with a fait accompli without ever having been in a position to exercise choice. We know from research in the sociology of education, for example, that, whilst some people are being 'warmed up' for their future 'elite' role, others are being systematically 'cooled-out' to see themselves in more 'realistic' occupations. People always seem to be bumping up against some kind of reality check, but exactly whose reality is it? We shall go some way towards finding out.

In Plato's *Republic* Socrates says: 'we are concerned with the most important issue in life, the choice of good and evil, and guessing isn't good enough; we must see what the arguments are' (Plato 1955, 352). Sound advice for this project, too, it would seem.

Chapter One, then, forms the introduction. Chapter Two considers a strange episode in the history of western religiosity, impacting on social thought more widely, until it all but peters out in intensity – the doctrine of predestination. The significance of predestination lies in its paradoxical effect on the apparent latitude of human freedom and choice. The related idea of providentialism is also briefly rehearsed. Chapter Three raises the question of the role of freedom in relation to choice: are men and women free and free to choose or is there necessitation in play over which nothing is to be done? This contentious notion has at some point exercised the

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minds of all the great philosophers, as we shall see, to rather inconclusive effect. The account ranges from Plato and Aristotle to the contributions of Hume and Kant. Chapter Four continues the discussion of the previous chapter by examining the way Kant introduces new levels of complexity with his duality of *phenomena* and *noumena* that immediately confounds our understanding of freedom and choice. The discussion picks up on how that legacy came to be accommodated or rejected by Hegel, by Schopenhauer and, then, by Nietzsche. Chapter Five traces developments in the ongoing journey of the concept of choice arriving first at the door of Søren Kierkegaard with whose name it is so closely associated. Moving on through the Pragmatists in the United States, where choice begins to warrant a substantive and systematic treatment, we arrive at twentieth-century European philosophy characteristically in the shape of phenomenology and existentialism and typified by the thought of Heidegger and Sartre. Chapter Six sets out a different kind of agenda to that outlined in the previous chapter by considering the account of choice exemplified by analytic philosophy (including the work of Wittgenstein and Ryle), before introducing, in turn, a further quite different rendition of choice to be found ranged across the fields of philosophy, psychology and cognitive science. The second part of this monograph raises the kinds of questions more familiar in the perspectives of sociology and, to some extent, history.

Chapter Seven considers the contribution of classical sociology to the theorisation of choice. Social action is an integral component of traditional sociological theory and choice comes to be seen precisely through that particular prism. Yet, Weber's notion of 'the disenchantment of the world' having undergone a shape-shift from former times still haunts the recesses of the modern mind. We find that it is in the work of Parsons, and, subsequently, Habermas, that choice comes most closely into focus. The themes featured in Chapter Eight explore how the future that appeared to offer individual freedom has actually ushered in a subtle range of captive moments as the order of the day, with culturally embedded, lives and life choices being interminably precarious and risky. Choices are fateful in a quite different sense to that supposed hitherto; they are seen to be material, mundane and determinative. The chapter proceeds to consider how choice has been viewed in terms of the rationality of decision-making directed by self-interest, which features as one specific aspect of 'exchange theory', 'game theory' and 'rational-choice theory'. A radical alternative stemming from Bourdieu, however, holds that, if choice is rational, then it is grounded in historically specific milieux where choices are systematically culturally constrained. In its level of abstraction Chapter Nine is something of a departure from the rest of the book, being taken up with the macro-level

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context of choice. By exploring the views of its defenders and detractors we encounter the role of liberal democracy as the facilitator of choice. The split-decision amongst commentators regarding the place of choice in liberal society is not about whether it is or is not the case but about whether or not it is actually a good or bad thing, though the criteria for establishing this vary widely. The scene attempts to capture the *fairground* of liberalism with its whirring carousels of enticing choice – the tout 'All set up just for you!' being the barker's call of choice. Chapter Ten comprises the conclusion to the arguments rehearsed throughout the text.

Thus, in the next chapter we return to what a certain star in the sky at first purported to, so called, 'wise men'.

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Chapter Two

Divine Determination – Having No Choice in the Matter

I

> [T]he soul is so easily ensnared by one expression or another of the theory of predestination. You hold many false doctrines; this is nearly the worst.
>
> (Kierkegaard 1959, Vol. 2, 237)

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will.
>
> (*Hamlet*, V, ii)

We need to take the opportunity at this point to consider how the supersession of the authority of the stars initially produced a very particular dilemma for the working out of human freedom and choice – in fact, in established doctrine such a prospect seemed entirely misconceived. Albeit fitfully, over a millennium and a half Christianity had finally made an end of magic, superstition and 'the stars' – it had, as it turned out, patent and copyright on its own exclusive version. Indeed, heavenly portent would be subject to transformation and come to sit alongside, as we shall see, a different kind of cosmology. Yet, the idea of a fated future would still come to feature. People were left to agonise over their own, very personal, prospects in a life to come. Had they been chosen for salvation or not? Le Roy Ladurie (1980) confirms that, with one or two proto-Protestant exceptions (335), salvation and the means to it preoccupied the minds of both Catholics and Cathars in the Ariège of the early fourteenth century. This is suggestive of the redeeming force of Christ who was routinely referred to *as* God. Not only looking to

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the heavens for evidence, medieval minds surmised that in dreams the future was being revealed to them – or, so they thought. Now, however, that was just not good enough. Too much was hanging on it for that. Let's have a think about how choice, or, in effect, having no choice, played out in the day by considering the doctrine of predestination.

Whilst the Christian problem with predestination undoubtedly had a precursor in Stoicism's stalemate with fate, the theological schisms of the Early Christian Church and the reactions against them were rehearsed over a thousand years later in very different circumstances. The 'heresies' of Gnosticism and Manichaeism, with their stark contrast of a good God and an evil counterpart, were present in the solution to the problems of God and man identified by Catharism and Lollardy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This dualism seemed, of itself, to account for individual fortunes – good or bad. The more orthodox legacy from Catholic theologians leading on from Augustine was that God had predestined man, individual men and women, in effect, to heaven or hell because of original sin. Human will had no power to predict or overturn divine election; as original sin was beyond control so, too, was redemption through divine grace. This doctrine was an integral part of the teaching of both Catholicism (from Augustine to Ignatius Loyola) and Protestantism (both Luther and Calvin); the proto-protestant Wycliffe, too, had argued that only those predestined by God for salvation could be members of the true Church. However, there is also evidence of an emphasis on free will, too, in the Catholic world of the High Middle Ages, whereby the sinner could be saved by his or her own efforts and, although needing His support, he/she had the freedom to decline God's grace. Whilst Thomas Aquinas had somewhat prevaricated on the question of predestination, for Duns Scotus the will was free and through the exercise of will man realised his individual self with such self-realisation being regarded as a supreme satisfaction to the individual. William of Ockham, too, saw man's will as free from natural or external forces. In contrast, not only did the Protestant reformers of the early sixteenth century propose that mankind could not be brought closer to salvation by anything they did of their own volition, but also that human freedom 'was so bound to evil that it consisted merely in the ability to choose among different degrees of sin' (Tarnas 1996, 238). Erasmus, on the eve of the Reformation, published a pamphlet in defence of the freedom of the will and, incidentally, in so doing brought down upon himself the ire of Martin Luther.

For Luther, men and women should not dream that salvation can be obtained through virtue and good works as the only prospect of salvation comes with faith. Though humankind's natural evilness will not entirely

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disappear men and women are, as it were, given a second chance. Once faith has become an indubitable subjective experience the certitude of salvation is within reach: 'The individual is essentially receptive in this relationship to God. Once man receives God's grace in the experience of faith his nature becomes changed, since in the act of faith he unites himself with Christ, and Christ's justice replaces his own which was lost by Adam's fall' (Fromm 1991 65). This provides a solution to the compulsive quest for certainty and a means to conquer unbearable doubt.[1] Such an irrational doubt, however, is never cured by rational answers but is driven underground. Horkheimer's view is that Luther dubbed reason a beast and a whore simply because reason at this time could not of itself lead the individual to suppress his appetites (Horkheimer, in Arato and Gebhardt [eds] 1982). Neither Fromm nor Horkheimer would demur at Marx's objection that Luther had 'destroyed faith in authority only by restoring the authority of faith. He freed the body from its chains, but only by putting the heart in chains' (Marx 1992, 251). However, there is something of a paradox involved here because for Luther human happiness and earthly pleasures were to be promoted as a celebration of God's will and melancholy and despair (ironically enough, given the import of predestination) were to be shunned (McMahon 2007, 164-75).

Calvin, for once concurring with Luther, agreed that man should not consider himself his own master; instead, he emphasised unceasing human effort to live according to God's word and never to lapse in the aspiration. Moral effort and living a virtuous life was stressed by Calvin and the litany is one of piety, justice, modesty and moderation. Not that this will guarantee salvation for the doctrine of predestination forms the absolute cornerstone of Calvin's teaching 'with its iron conception of predestination and grace' (Gramsci 1971, 338). Yet, the doctrine of predestination could conceivably be construed as a source of pastoral comfort for those who (along with Calvin) assume they are truly redeemed. Freed of that concern, they can then devote themselves to active 'works' demonstrating their faith, by which he means, we must assume, leading people into the path of righteousness – something they would not achieve of their own accord because of their sinful nature. Given a sinful humankind as a consequence of the Fall, Calvin sets himself a definite task as 'it now remains to be more clearly investigated, whether we are despoiled of all freedom, and, if any particle of it yet remain, how far its power extends' (Calvin, cited in Englander et al. [eds] 1990, 196). This is a very modern, philosophical question that he conspicuously fails to address satisfactorily. He issues a warning to the curious about predestination, for, inquiring into it, they will enter into a labyrinth from which they will find no escape remaining, only to be tortured by the continual anxiety of a prospect that can only excite

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dread: 'The discussion of predestination, a subject itself rather intricate, is made very perplexed, and therefore dangerous, by human curiosity, which no barriers can restrain from wandering into forbidden labyrinths and soaring beyond its sphere, as if determined to leave none of the divine secrets unscrutinized or unexplored' (200).

Fromm identifies a desperate escape from anxiety which manifested itself in the world of work: 'The inner compulsion was more effective in harnessing all energies to work than any outer compulsion can ever be' (Fromm 1991, 80). As is well known, predestination played a pivotal explanatory role in Max Weber's thesis of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1992). Faced by the prospect of predestination, working hard to avoid a spiritual paralysis and discerning signs of election when one's business prospers is as paradoxical as the doctrine itself. What is perhaps most significant about human beings racked by anxiety at the prospect of predestination is that by this time an individual has emerged who actually cares about their, very singular, fate. Being unable to sway the outcome in their favour with any level of certainty will become the attendant bugbear to strategic action in the modern world.

Ignatius Loyola's position on predestination in the 1530s seemed to be ambiguous or, at very least, in the throes of a radical re-evaluation. He recommends that the retreatant surrender to his Creator and Lord 'his freedom of will, so that His Divine Majesty may make use of his person and possessions which is in accordance with His most holy will' (Ignatius Loyola, cited in Englander et al. [eds] 1990, 238). Yet, he then begins to equivocate: 'Whilst it is absolutely true that no man can be saved without being predestined and without faith and grace, great care is called for in the way in which we talk and argue about all these matters.' 'Nor', he advises, 'should we make a habit of talking about predestination' (242). If we have to talk about it, language should be used so as not to lead ordinary people astray. Ignatius' position was largely advocating blissful ignorance: it was for the best that people should not know of the spectre of predestination so that they should not lose heart and fail spiritually in this life. In the next generation, the Jesuit theologians Molina and Suarez, quite ingeniously and apparently independently, developed the idea of a 'third way' between divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Unsurprisingly, this solution to the question of determinism and free will was quite obviously predicated on the existence of God and, as somewhat of a concession, stemmed directly from him. Yet, the Jesuits, founded by Ignatius, came with time to be dead set against the idea of predestination, thus, ironically, making themselves the enemies of the Augustinians and Jansenists (a doctrinal split having a direct effect on the life experience of, for one, Blaise Pascal [see Connor, 2007]).

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In the Europe of the first two decades of the seventeenth century, on the eve of the Thirty Years' War, the question of predestination was still disturbing Protestant peace of mind and, as it turned out, peace on the streets of Holland. At one juncture, the eminent jurist Hugo Grotius was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment; at another, a leading statesman was condemned to the gallows. Amid riotous disturbance it seemed the dissension over predestination would tip over into civil war. The polarisation of the two sides – supporters of the doctrines of predestination or free will – resulted in a general synod being called to debate and adjudicate on the issue. With the rest of Europe captivated by the prospect, the learned doctors found in favour of predestination and, in their terms, free will was to be outlawed. However, in his account of these events, Grayling (2004) is not strictly accurate in maintaining Catholics were largely in the free will camp rather than that of predestination. As we have seen, it was only in the previous century, with Ignatius Loyola, the founding of the Jesuits and the Counter-Reformation, that the contentious doctrine of predestination could be quietly kicked into the long grass. In England at this same time, during a large part of the seventeenth century, there were at least three separate directions from the crown (James I, Charles I, Charles II) to prohibit any factious preaching about predestination. Nevertheless, William Laud, Charles I's ill-fated Archbishop of Canterbury, was given leave to preach against the doctrine (such an anti-predestination position was associated at this time with the more general doctrine of Arminianism).

The debate between Thomas Hobbes and John Bramhall, former bishop of Derry (whom we assume to have been originally a placeman of Charles I), is instructive, here, if only to get a flavour of the intensity of the exchange and the trenchancy of their adopted positions (Hobbes 1999). In his chapter in *Leviathan* on 'What is Necessary to Salvation' only faith in Christ and obedience to God's laws get a mention. Hobbes still insists: 'when we ascribe to God a *will*, it is not to be understood, as that of man, for a *rational appetite*; but the power, by which he effecteth everything' (Hobbes 1962, 316). In the debate itself, however, whilst Hobbes challenges man's dominion over his own actions (i.e. free will) and his actual determination of himself, Bramhall asserts that there can be no deliberation over that which is inevitably determined by causes 'without ourselves' effective before any such deliberation. Hobbes, who asserts that God naturally or supernaturally works in us in every act of the will, rejects Bramhall's claim that there is a moral efficacy which is not natural. For Hobbes, the event and the means are equally necessitated; instead, Bramhall refers dismissively to being taken in by the prospect of

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a 'fatal destiny'. The exchanges, developing over years in the middle of the seventeenth century, at first face-to-face then in publication (reluctantly on Hobbes' part), became increasingly rancorous. The argumentation largely proceeds by the stating of animadversions to each other's interventions but often descends into arid disputation about who said what and when. The unfolding debate features incessant reference to scripture which becomes overblown; citing chapter and verse to bolster one's case is finally to very little purpose. Hobbes is most at fault here. Ironically, most modern critics cast Hobbes as a 'compatabilist', meaning he seeks to give house room to both freedom and necessity, given the terms of reference.

During this period a bewildering array of Protestant sects and movements had emerged in England and all took up a position on predestination. The Baptists, for instance, rejected it but then split, with the 'Particular' wing being in favour, and so it went on. If we wish to grasp how perplexing the question of predestination was to contemporaries of the great schismatic shifts in religion at this time, we could do a lot worse than to consult the noted reflections of Pierre Bayle. According to Hazard, a question that exercised Bayle's mind was whether God had endowed man with free will or, instead, rendered him the bondslave of ineluctable destiny (Hazard 1964, 135):

> Is man the captain, or the captive, of his fate? Argument about this question of freedom is never ending. The resources of either side are inexhaustible: 'So intricate is this question of free-will, so rich in ambiguities, that the deeper into it you go, the more you get involved in contradictions. As often as not, you find yourself echoing the words of your antagonist and forging weapons for your own discomfiture'. (Bayle, cited in Hazard 1964, 137)

If Bayle remained perplexed by the conundrum of free will, he was much more unequivocal and forthright about the idea of liberty of conscience. His fury was aroused at the prospect of turning Christians into pressed men, deeming it monstrous and horrible to use force in a matter of conscience. The reality of the inwardness of conscience is one for which the individual assumes responsibility and over which they exercise discipline. There is, here, evidence of the type of conscience as inward grace that will eventually be prepared, against all odds, to stand up and be counted. Indeed, in a wider context, the primary object of political institutions was coming to be recognised as the guaranteeing of freedom of conscience. In the generations following the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the liberty of conscience was to become part of the practice of both Puritan and

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Jesuit. Nevertheless, in these immediate post-Reformation years a fateful element of freedom of choice had been introduced: was one to remain as a practitioner of the 'old' faith or become a proponent of the 'new'?

In a wonderful vignette, Hazard describes for us how in the year 1678, in gladiatorial fashion, Bossuet, the Catholic, and Pastor Claude, the Protestant, contend in debate for the heart, mind and soul of Mme de Duras who had called them together for that express purpose with France and all Europe watching the progress of the duel:

> One [Claude] upholds a man's right to believe what he chooses without let or hindrance; the right of the individual conscience to hold what it believes to be true, no matter what the rest of the world may say. The other [Bossuet] puts forward the desire to share in a common belief, the austere joy of conforming to a rule of life once for all accepted, and, that life might continue its course, the need for recognizing a supreme authority. (Hazard 1964, 104)

Their differences of opinion on the merits of the rights of the individual conscience typify the respective cases of the antagonists. Claude's position is that conscience, in the clear understanding of God's word, is the authority and, in this form, one we would recognise in the mutual contempt of Tyndale and More a century and half earlier (see Greenblatt 1980).

The disinterred remains of the doctrine of predestination could turn out to be the grisliest skeleton in the cupboard of Western Christianity. The tension between original sin and salvation was reaffirmed in both the Reformation and Counter-Reformation and, though Catholic dogma had proclaimed the prospect of heaven, hell and purgatory, perhaps the doctrine of predestination is the most perplexing teaching. Its impact is paradoxical because it becomes something of an inverted ideology – do not press the case, as it would become counter-productive to the wider cause. As it turned out perhaps the Christian West eventually followed the lead, not of Calvin, but, of Ignatius Loyola. The irony of predestination is that its origins lie in a religion of fear, where the motivations are reward and punishment, yet no one in this case can do a blind thing about it one way or the other. So, then, unlike the open-endedness of modern experience, the horizons of both today and tomorrow were closed for the pre-modern 'individual' as not only was his or her position in life ordained but so, too, was his or her prospect of the hereafter. There is a movement away from this kind of determinism with Deism (Taylor 1992) but the paradox remains: predestination was a stumbling block to individuals becoming the architects of their own futures unless it prompted a reactive response as logged by Weber (1992)

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as we shall see. Yet, in theory, it focussed the mind wonderfully – the individual projecting into the future and speculating on his prospects. One source for this is an amusing anecdote from Jean-Jacques Rousseau who devised an ingenious means for the prognostication of his own personal salvation (Rousseau 1996, 235-36). Rousseau's contemporary and eventual antagonist, David Hume, whilst perhaps not being that concerned about his own prospects in the hereafter, castigated the 'predestinarian doctors' for copious vices they had introduced into Christianity (see Ayer 1980, 22). Yet, Hume did on occasion appear to have some sympathy for the 'Argument from Design' denoting an original author of the arrangement of nature (23). Perhaps they were still even tinkering with their creation and its final direction?[2] Significantly, Taylor observes that in modern American evangelical Protestantism, whether quietly or conveniently, 'predestination has been forgotten' (Taylor 1992, 497).

II

It should not be overlooked that during this period, too, providentialism was a pervasive doctrine. Unlike predestination (from Augustine onwards), providentialism presumes a kind of 'goodness' abroad in the world most often construed as divine benevolence. In effect, this is things coming to pass by divine intervention or foresight; a kind of ongoing *deus ex machina* – a somewhat staged appearance by God. A point at which human knowledge was exhausted, in effect, could go no further, had been the common experience for every epoch. The cultural response to encountering such a barrier had been characteristic in each case. Something transcendent was posited as occupying the outer reaches of the unknown and unknowable. Something absolute like nature requiring acceptance and reverence, or God(s) demanding obedience and faith as a response, or something like the blind, irrational power of the wheel of fortune courting an abject fatalism. However, what did the great minds of the seventeenth century make of a world thus ordained? In the first instance, most affected a dialogue with Descartes who appears quite confirmed in his belief that the will is self-evidently free and self-determined. For him, the will is so free by its nature that it can never be constrained: 'That will should extend widely is in accordance with its nature, and it is the greatest perfection in man to be able to act by its means, that is freely, and by so doing we are in a peculiar way masters of our actions and thereby merit praise or blame' (Descartes 1997, 290). Yet, 'in a peculiar way' he is inevitably led to attempt to square the circle on freedom of the will, with such geometry required because goodness and truth are already determined by God. In fact, man

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can do no other than bear his will upon that divine state of affairs; the more clearly he knows the good and true, the more 'freely' he is drawn towards it. Spinoza holds that, whilst it is Descartes' principle that human will is free and more extensive than the intellect, he, himself, had undertaken to prove that volitions are not free but determined by external causes and in no sense by the will (Spinoza 1955, 279). He seems to be maintaining, not unlike Descartes, that God has endowed us with a determined intellect and an undetermined will which, in itself, 'is extremely necessary for us' (340). The immediate upshot of this contention is that we do not know the object for which God has created us. Spinoza claims that he is bringing misconceptions before the bar of reason and, in referring to those of whom he is critical, he announces that with them 'nature, the gods, and men are all mad together' (76).

Spinoza refers to many who think they can show that supreme intellect and free will, our supposed highest perfection, are also attributes of God's nature, whereas for him it is absurd to propose that God acts according to freedom of the will. God is the cause of all things and He alone exists by the sole necessity of his nature – God, then, is the sole free cause. Reflecting on how we should conduct ourselves in relation to matters not within our own power and when confronted with the 'gifts of fortune', Spinoza surmises: 'For it shows us, that we should await and endure fortune's smiles and frowns with an equal mind, seeing that all things follow from the eternal decree of God by the same necessity' (Spinoza 1955, 126). In further confronting the dilemma of what is necessary and what is contingent, Spinoza announces that: 'Wherefore all things are conditioned by the necessity of the divine nature, not only to exist, but also to exist and operate in a particular manner, and there is nothing that is contingent' (68). If men are conditioned by God, it is impossible that they should render themselves unconditioned; a fatal necessity presides over all things and that everything follows with inevitable necessity from the nature of God (301). It would seem that the nature of God, for Spinoza, *is* nature. This is not the time or place to delve into what Spinoza ultimately takes God to be, often it is assumed it is some form of pantheistic conception, but what is certain is that it has nothing to do with orthodox theology as manifested in established religion or conventional forms of worship. This is evident from his increasingly ill-tempered exchange with his former pupil, Albert Burgh, a recent convert to Catholicism (410-19). As regards free will, several of Spinoza's correspondents and interlocutors (for example, Oldenburg and de Blyenbergh, featured 275 onwards) have trouble following his logic and in the end are given short shrift. What troubles them perhaps more than anything is the question of moral

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responsibility should everything be necessitated and determined by God. It is an open question whether God's providence is being treated, here, as equivalent to His will.

According to Leibniz (1973, 107), it was Descartes' opinion that we should refrain from getting involved in the great difficulties of trying to harmonise God's preordination with freedom of the will – and abstain from discussing them. Faced with this dilemma, Descartes does appear to somewhat loses his nerve announcing that 'we should soon be involved in great difficulties if we undertook to make His pre-ordinances harmonise with the freedom of our will, and if we tried to comprehend them both at one time' (Descartes 1997, 292). This, indeed, becomes something of a default position for philosophers at this stage. Leibniz himself, with a degree of understatement, muses that the question of God's action on human will involves 'many very difficult considerations' (1973, 39). At one point he remarks that he was nearly persuaded of the view that all things are absolutely necessary but was dragged back from that particular precipice. In this way he comes to recognise the contingency of things; it would seem that we are determined in appearance only. He states that: 'God determines our will to the choice of that which appears the best, without necessitating it in the least' (39). Whilst thoughts apparently arise in us freely, God has decreed that the will always tends to the apparent good. Yet, the bottom line for Leibniz is that God determines human freedom. It is significant that for scientists of the early modern period providence often comes to mean 'intelligent design'. There is a connection here, for there is a suggestive link between the word 'intelligence' and the act of 'picking out' or 'making a choice' which may well stem from the Latin word '*legere*'. Intelligence, then, is displayed in choosing between things or from things. Leibniz wrestled with such issues over time but failed to reach any satisfactory conclusions.

Although we might doubt some of his attributions, Giambattista Vico is convinced that those who favour chance (amongst whom he numbers Epicurus and, surprisingly, Hobbes) and those who favour fate (noted amongst them Zeno and Spinoza) are refuted by what he calls 'fact'. Drawing on events of dubious historical provenance, he announces 'that which did all this was mind, for men did it with intelligence; it was not fate, for they did it by choice; nor was it chance, for, to the end of time, by their ever acting thus, the same things are born' (Vico 1982, 265). Concurring with Plato and Cicero, Vico insists on the idea of providence regulating the world of human things. Embarking on a description, and prescription, of God's eternal order being brought about by God's infinite wisdom, Vico identifies a plan of that super human wisdom working in a divine manner by actually utilising the wisdom of men whose practice is free from force

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as is the celebration of their own nature.[3] ('I think Thy thoughts after Thee', as Isaac Newton intoned to God, comes to mind here.) In effect, the architect of the world is divine providence, subservient to which is the artificer of human will. For Vico, the class of things which men make is identical with the things that providence makes, which, taken together, work towards man's continued existence. What we have, here, amounts to mind as providence materialised. In fact, he insists that 'free will is the home and abode of all virtues' (202). So, it would appear that there is a certain tension between Vico's apparent determinism and his claim that man has the power to make free choices. If there are laws of historical development, as Vico construes it, whence the power of free will and choice making? One possibility (as Pompa, Vico's editor, suggests [23]) is that, whilst the institutional structure or social system is determined, man has free will within the relative role of common constraints of that framework, assisted by the common sense he identifies as being shared amongst men in society. Even within Vico's proto-historicism there is an emphasis on both providence and the impact of unintended consequences.[4] It turns out that man's short-term decision making has unforeseen long-term consequences, as in human affairs original motives for creative activity are overtaken by unforeseen events.[5]

As sophisticated and apparently modern a philosopher as Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* held firmly to a providential view of nature. Through the exercise of our moral faculties, we cooperate with the Deity (as Smith would have it, the Great Author of nature) to advance the plan of providence (Smith 2009, 191-98). In discussing the moral philosophy of the Stoics, for whom one feels Smith had a sneaking admiration, entire passages hang on reviewing the Stoic's prioritisation of the ethical implication of the underlying basis of actually choosing and rejecting. With just and accurate discernment in choosing and rejecting, every object has bestowed upon it the precise attention it deserves, according to its place in the natural order of things, with the Stoics' own place in that domain being thereby itself confirmed. In effect, this situation came down to the propriety of conduct and the happiness that could be derived from it. Not, then, the successful obtaining of the objects of choice but the fitness and rightness of how the task of choosing or rejecting was undertaken. According to Smith, the Ancient Stoics set more store by the exact propriety of choosing than they ever did by the objects of choice; it was how well you played your cards in the game of life that counted, not the winning hand (330-32). The Stoics would then look to Jupiter, the determining influence on the consequences of their choice, and would give thanks to that guiding 'star' for the outcome. The Stoics thought that Jupiter had provided them with

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the rule of the propriety of action as the guide to their conduct. Moreover, when accounting for what actually befell them, they presumed it was up to Jupiter rather than to themselves. In trusting to providence, they were reconciled to their fate; submitting to its governance allowed them to be content with their destiny. Smith not only recognises the role of providence in the Stoic world view, but also the role of the fair and impartial spectator as judge of a person's moral propriety, with both ideas having come to feature in high profile in his own work.

Whilst consistently referring to the Stoic wise man in terms of 'he', 'him' or 'his', in the following passage Smith talks about 'us' and 'we', perhaps unintentionally indicating that this Stoic insight was universal and eternal, as it were, and could be passed down to us to make use of in our own time. Smith supposes that:

> This propriety of choosing and rejecting, though originally pointed out to us, and as it were recommended and introduced to our acquaintance by the things, and for the sake of the things, chosen and rejected; yet when we had once become thoroughly acquainted with it, the order, the grace, the beauty, which we discerned in this conduct, the happiness which we felt resulted from it, necessarily appeared to us of much greater value than the actual obtaining of all the different objects of choice, or the actual avoiding of all those of rejection. (Smith 2009, 328)

Happiness and glory stem from enacting this principle; misery and disgrace follow on from its neglect.

Kant in his pre-critical period had asserted quite trenchantly that 'a *deus ex machina* in the determination of the origin and validity of our knowledge is the most preposterous device that one can choose' (Kant, cited in Cassirer 1951, 97). Almost a decade later in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, he remarked that 'without a God and without a world, invisible to us now, but hoped for, the glorious ideas of morality are, indeed, objects of approbation and admiration, but cannot be the springs of purpose and action' (Kant 1952, 238). Yet, in his 'First Supplement' to his essay on *Perpetual Peace*, Kant states that, as a sentient being, man belongs to the mechanical system of nature, which, even against his will, exhibits a predetermined design to make harmony spring from discord. As the underlying ground for the existence of 'the great artist' nature there appears a certain *form* intelligible to us only by thinking into the physical world the idea that the author of the universe has preconceived an end, a predetermination of nature, to which we assign the name 'Divine Providence'. Providence is 'the deep-

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doubt the heretic felt he had no choice in the matter. No choice, just like choice, has a bewildering range of applications. In our own time, we never cease to hear from all and sundry that they 'had no choice' in whatever matter it happened to be. This is not, as it were, confirming instances of necessitation, determination or, even, predestination but indicating, rather, that, as far as the person in question was concerned, he or she could do no other (much as Luther claimed for himself). It could mean that, being largely powerless, that person had been presented with a fait accompli. Also, it could denote that he was given no choice in a situation where choices were conceivably possible. Or, maybe, it's all an excuse: a rationalisation for lack of action or lack of success. A further conundrum arising at this point is: is one ever actually making choices if one doesn't know, or is largely unaware, that one is making choices? Are we making choices if unapprised of the irresistible force of nature (determination) or, for that matter, of the irresistible force of society? What if it is not only the case that decisions are still being taken for us (or, about us) on a cosmic scale as identified in this chapter, but also, in a metaphysical sense, that the fashioning of freedom is in an unknown (or, unknowable) region that lies beyond our understanding? We need to look to see whether that is actually the case. So, the next chapter attempts to peer further into that elusive region of the unknown where choice making might appear to be forged.

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self-control and self-assertion (perhaps, even, how we think we are seen by others). This appears to be the 'Lord and Master' effect of (re)establishing control of ourselves. It is a rebuke and an angry and indignant assertion of one's self-respect after one's own failure of some sort. It would be stretching things somewhat to call it conscience but such an idea does seem a close approximation. In effect, this amounts to an identification of moral conflict in the processes of choice and decision-making to which different character types are subject given that they are endowed with different powers. For Plato, the life of the common man, for instance, is just one long series of desires; to paraphrase, mad desires bred in the hearts of fools (364). In contrast, the aristocracy, having better things to do, resist being beset by such desires. We associate Reason (with a capital 'R') with knowledge and truth and the pursuit thereof but it also has practical responsibilities which it cannot afford to shirk. Plato's plea was that man should be 'ruled by Reason' employing it to designate 'parts of the soul' where different types of desires are to be located and where a felicitous nature should come into play regarding choice and decision'. Nevertheless, Plato is always wary of this largely unknown region. It is a location an early cartographer might have designated as the realm befitting the description: 'Here Be Dragons!'[1]

Following on from this, Aristotle's *The Nicomachean Ethics* (1998) bears witness that moral virtue implies that action is done by choice which, itself, is the result of previous deliberation. For him, choice discriminates character better than actions and with choice always being within our power, by choosing, in a moral sense, what is either good or bad, we are men of a certain character. He seems to assume that deliberation always comes before choice but then speculates that some kinds of choices may not involve deliberation. In his discussion of choice, he is also plainly exercised by whether such choosing is always voluntary. In Book III the connection between deliberation and choice is established but Aristotle's contention would appear to be that deliberation focusses solely on means not ends. It is puzzling, as Paul Ricoeur (1994) observes, that Aristotle seems not to accommodate a situation where a person chooses an end point, in effect, an ultimate goal (say, to become a doctor). Ricoeur traces the movement from the virtues of character featured in Book III, where Aristotle is clear that choice is about means rather than ends, to Book VI which provides a more sophisticated model of deliberation and choice. Here, for instance, Aristotle's case is that desire aims at a good action which is deemed 'an end':

> The origin of action – its efficient, not its final cause – is choice, and that of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end.

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