

Read Your Way to Truth, Knowledge, and Freedom

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"Girl Reading," by Vera Alabaster, 20th Century, Harbour Cottage Trust (Art UK, 2021)

There is an absolute contradiction between the freedom we all presuppose in practice and the implications of ideas that are widely accepted as established scientific fact. Philosophy has no higher calling than to try to resolve this contradiction at the heart of contemporary culture. (Griffin, 1998: p. 171)

As per the epigraph directly above, in the late 20th century D.R. Griffin correctly pointed out that "[p]hilosophy has no higher calling" than "to try to resolve [the] absolute contradiction" that on the one hand, (i) we presuppose the existence of real free will in all our everyday choices, actions, morality, and sociopolitics, yet on the other hand, (ii)

our contemporary formal-&-natural sciences and the scientific¹ philosophy that apes these, all tell us that we're really nothing but deterministic or indeterministic machines and therefore not really free. In order to resolve that paradox, in this essay I'll argue that *just by virtue of your reading a certain sentence*, it necessarily follows that you possess real free will. From that, it also necessarily follows that contemporary formal-&-natural sciences and philosophy must explicitly incorporate the primitive fact of our real free will into their conception of the natural universe.

As per (Hanna, 2023a: p. 6, 2023b: p. 2), let's call any sentence that is (i) specifically about the act or process of *reading*, and that is also (ii) *self-referring* by means of the 2nd person indexical description "you, the reader," and the indexical description "this very sentence," a *caveat lector sentence*. Such sentences are so-named by me after the Latin phrase "caveat lector," meaning *let the reader beware*; but I'm interpreting that phrase broadly enough so as *also* to include the meaning *let the reader be self-consciously aware*. Here is a paradigmatic example of a caveat lector sentence:

You, the reader of this very sentence, are consciously reading this very sentence from left to right here and now.

For convenience, I'll call the sentence I displayed in boldface text immediately above,

THE SENTENCE

and for the purposes of this essay, it won't matter whether THE SENTENCE is a universal *sentence-type* or a particular *sentence-token*.

Dear Reader, please now read THE SENTENCE again, this time (even) more slowly and carefully.

Obviously, insofar as you read THE SENTENCE, it's *true*. What do I mean by "true"? **First**, by a *veridical appearance* I mean anything X that appears as F, or appears F-ly, or appears to be F, to any or all rational human animals, *just insofar as, and precisely because, X is F*. **Second**, by the *manifestly real world*, I mean the world as it can veridically appear, or does veridically appear, to any or all rational human animals. Then, **third**, a statement (judgment, belief, proposition, meaningful sentence, etc.) is true if and only if what it states (means, says, etc.) is manifestly real.

¹ Scientism is the dogmatic valorization, especially by philosophers, of the formal-&-natural sciences and their methods. See, e.g., (Haack, 2017; Hanna, 2021: ch XVII).

Moreover, your belief that THE SENTENCE is true is sufficiently justified by *the intrinsically compelling evidence* that is yielded by the phenomenology—i.e., the subjectively experienced intentional performance, intentional content, and specific qualitative characters—of your conscious act or process of reading it. THE SENTENCE cannot read itself, because it's not conscious; and nobody else but you consciously read that very sentence in the same way, at the same time, and in the same place, that you did. On the contrary to both of those, because THE SENTENCE is in English you consciously read it from left to right, and you also consciously read it right here and now, just as the sentence says. Even if nothing *else* in the world had existed but that sentence and your consciously reading it from left to right here and now; even if you had consciously read that sentence in a *dream*; or even if an evil scientist had somehow produced in you a *hallucination* of your consciously reading that sentence: it would still be true, and your belief in its truth would still be sufficiently justified by the intrinsically compelling evidence yielded by the phenomenology of your conscious act or process of reading it. Thus there are no epistemic gaps between you, the reader of THE SENTENCE, and your consciously reading that very sentence. Or otherwise put, the connection between (i) the evidence for your belief in THE SENTENCE and (ii) the truth of your belief in THE SENTENCE, is not *accidental* or *contingent*, and *extrinsic*, but at the very least fully *reliable* or even strictly *necessary*, and *intrinsic*: thus that evidential process is inherently *truth-tracking*. So you have authentic, skepticism-proof, empirical or a posteriori knowledge of THE SENTENCE (see also Hanna, 2015: esp. section 1.7). Or in René Descartes's technical terminology, you have clear, distinct, and certain intuitive knowledge of it (Descartes, 1984-1985a, 1984-1985b, 1984-1985d, 1984-1985e).

Granting all that, then what I want to argue is that just by virtue of your reading THE SENTENCE and thereby having authentic knowledge of it, it necessarily follows that you possess *real free will*.

What is real free will? Real free will is *an objective fact about the natural universe*, and not merely something *psychological*—for example, a *belief in* free will or a *consciousness of* free will. In principle, those could exist even if real free will didn't. Nevertheless, real free will does *also* include a rich psychological aspect: namely, capacities for consciousness, self-consciousness, desires, and choices. And if the capacity for rationality is added to those capacities, then it's also possible to believe in free will. Fully explicitly now, something X has real free will if and only if (i) X is a certain kind of complex living organism, namely an animal, and *not* a machine, whether this machine is a *deterministic* automaton, whose behaviors are necessitated by all the settled facts about the past, together with the laws of nature, or an *indeterministic* automaton, whose behaviors occur according to probabilistic or statistical laws, and are always more or less random, (ii) X is conscious, i.e., X has a capacity for subjective experiences, that is also at least sometimes

actualized, (iii) X is self-conscious, i.e., X has a capacity for being conscious of its own subjectively experiential acts, processes, or states, that is also at least sometimes actualized, (iv) X really can consciously &/or self-consciously choose and do what X desires to choose and do, or consciously &/or self-consciously refrain from so choosing and so doing, without being in any way compelled or prevented by irresistible inner or outer forces, and (v) X has a *live option* LO, which means that (v.1) X can commit themselves to choosing or doing LO, or not, (or: X could have committed themselves to choosing or doing LO, or not), (v.2) LO would never actually happen unless X were to choose it or do it, (or: LO would never have actually happened unless X had chosen it or done it), and (v.3) X actually chooses and does LO, or not (or: X actually chose and did LO, or not).

In short, X is an *intentional agent*, and according to my view, intentional agency is equally non-deterministic and non-indeterministic, precisely because it's *purposive* and *self-organizing*, or internally and spontaneously goal-oriented and organismic or non-mechanical, and also includes a live option. In the jargon of contemporary metaphysics of free will, this collectively yields a *neo-organicist* version of *source incompatibilism without alternative possibilities* (Hanna, 2018: ch. 5). This means that it's metaphysically impossible for any agent to have real free will *and* also to be either a deterministic or indeterministic automaton (incompatibilism). Moreover, if X *also* has a capacity for rationality—namely, a complex capacity for logical inference, for practical decision-making, and for formulating, recognizing, and being guided by rules, principles, and instrumental or non-instrumental ideals, standards, and values (see, e.g., Hanna, 2006, 2015)—then by virtue of having rationality + free will, not only is X an intentional agent, non-deterministic, non-indeterministic, purposive, organismic or non-mechanical, and the possessor of a live option, but also X is a *rational agent*, who is *the ultimate source*—against the metaphysical backdrop of source incompatibilism without alternative possibilities—of their really free choices and actions, for which they are *causally and morally responsible*. For a detailed and extended argument that the preceding analysis of real free will is not only conceptually intelligible but also rationally defensible and correct, see (Hanna and Maiese, 2009; Hanna, 2018: chs. 1-5, 2020, 2023c, 2024a, 2024b: esp. chs. 1, 3, 5 and 15).

Now, I'll prove that just by virtue of your reading THE SENTENCE and thereby having authentic knowledge of it, it necessarily follows that you possess real free will, in seven steps.

1. If a true belief were brought about by a *deterministic* evidential process, then that belief could just as easily have been false: given all the settled facts about the past together with the laws of nature, the belief would have come about in any case, whether

it were true or false; hence a deterministic evidential process is never inherently truth-tracking.

2. If a true belief were brought about an *indeterministic* evidential process, then that true belief's existence is or more or less random, and there's a definite probability that it could have been a false belief; hence an indeterministic evidential process is also never inherently truth-tracking.

3. So if your true belief were brought about by either a deterministic or indeterministic evidential process, then the connection between the evidence for your belief and the truth of your belief is always more or less accidental or contingent, and extrinsic, and not inherently truth-tracking, and therefore that belief is not a sufficiently justified belief, and not authentic knowledge.

4. Therefore, for your authentic knowledge, the evidential process leading to your belief must be *neither* deterministic *nor* indeterministic, but instead inherently truth-tracking and caused by your real free will.

5. Just by virtue of your reading THE SENTENCE, you have authentic knowledge of it.

6. Because your knowledge of THE SENTENCE is authentic knowledge, therefore your belief in it is inherently truth-tracking and caused by your real free will.

7. Therefore, just by virtue of your reading THE SENTENCE and thereby having authentic knowledge of it, it necessarily follows that you have real free will. **QED**

In other words, without any epistemic or metaphysical fanfare or hullabaloo, you can read your way to truth, knowledge, and freedom. Reading caveat lector sentences is a paradigmatic expression of your capacity for real free will.

As I pointed out at the outset, echoing D.R. Griffin, the fact that we possess real free will has many fundamental consequences for us—existential, moral, and sociopolitical. One of the most important of these is that because, as I've just proved, we do indeed possess real free will, then when contemporary formal-&-natural sciences and scientific philosophy tell us that we're really nothing but deterministic or indeterministic machines, they're making a profound mistake. Indeed, in light of my seven-step proof, if either universal natural determinism, or universal natural indeterminism, or the mechanistic worldview more generally, *were true, then the holders of those doctrines wouldn't actually be able to have authentic knowledge of any of those doctrines.* And that is of course is

self-stultifying, since all of these doctrines are asserted by the holders of those doctrines as knowledge claims.

Therefore, in order to avoid their profound mistake and their self-stultification, and inherently track truth instead, contemporary formal-&-natural sciences and philosophy *had better get their acts together*, and explicitly incorporate the primitive fact of real free will into their conception of the natural universe (Hanna, 2023c, 2024a, 2024b). You read it here first.

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