Freedom and Idealism in Mary Whiton Calkins

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1. Introduction

Varieties of idealism and monism dominated the Anglophone philosophical scene during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is natural to wonder how finite human persons "fit" in the world depicted by these metaphysics, and unsurprising that the question of human freedom became especially pressing. My focus here is on the metaphysics of Mary Whiton Calkins, which is a version of "absolute idealism" according to which the Absolute is a person that has everything else that exists as either a part or a member.[1] Here, I assess whether her metaphysics, or her arguments for her metaphysics, are compatible with libertarian freedom.

This project is interesting for two reasons. The first reason is that, although Calkins is currently relatively unknown, this is not due to her unimportance in the recent history of our discipline. Far from it—her published work was acclaimed during her day. She earned but did not receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University—she wrote a Ph.D. thesis with William James, who, along with Josiah Royce, fought for her degree only to be defeated by institutionalized sexism.[2] Despite never receiving the Ph.D., she authored approximately forty articles on psychology and philosophy, and many books as well. She was regarded highly enough to serve as the first woman President of the American Philosophical Association.[3] If we want an accurate history of philosophy, attending to the views and arguments of forgotten philosophers who were important during the historical period in question is mandatory.[4]

The second reason this project is interesting is that it is probable that a wider class of theories that includes Calkins's metaphysics threaten libertarian freedom in the same way that Calkins's metaphysics threatens it. Perhaps any version of absolute idealism threatens libertarian freedom. Probably existence monism—the view that there is exactly one entity—does. Perhaps contemporary versions of "priority monism" do also.[5] I invite the reader to assess whether the arguments discussed here do suitably generalize, especially given the resurgent interest about

[1] See McDaniel (2017) for an overview of Calkins's version of absolute idealism.

[2] In the archives containing Calkins's literary remains, there is a clipping in which William James writes that, "All things considered, it was much the most brilliant Ph.D. that we have had at Harvard. It is a pity, in spite of this, that she still lacks a degree." I am grateful to Professor Dorothy Rogers, who shared hundreds of her photographs of archival material with me.

[3] For further biographical information, see McDaniel (2017), McDonald (2006, 2003: 113-114), Kersey (1989: 67-68), Rogers (2009: 168), and Seigfried (1993), Wentworth (1999), and Zedler (1995: 103-104, 111-112).

[4] When exactly Calkins exited the consciousness of the philosophical public is unclear. As late as 1969, Knudson (1969: 32-33) says of Calkins that because she has so prominently defended a form of personalism, "she may properly be regarded as the most conspicuous representative of personalism in the form of absolute idealism".

[5] See Schaffer (2010) for a contemporary defense of priority monism, which is the view that, although an all-encompassing whole and its parts all exist, this whole grounds or is ontologically prior to its parts. McDaniel (2017) argues that Calkins is properly classified as a priority monist.

monism and idealism.[6] I focus on Calkins's metaphysics since both the metaphysics and the arguments she offers for it are clear and well-developed, and accordingly we are well-positioned to assess their consequences, including their consequences for our freedom.

According to Calkins's version of personalistic absolute idealism, there is an entity, the Absolute, who is an immaterial person who contains, as either a part or a member, everything else that exists. Calkins (1930: 203) tells us that, "… the universe is through and through mental in character, that all that is real is ultimately mental in character, and accordingly personal, in nature". Calkins (1930: 209) writes that, "…the universe literally is one all-including (and accordingly complete) self of which all the lesser selves are genuine and identical parts, or members". Since an immaterial object contains nothing material, everything is an immaterial entity. We are immaterial persons who are parts of an all-encompassing absolute person.

Although we are immaterial, we have bodies. But our bodies are fundamentally mental entities—roughly, bodies are collections of experiences—as are all apparently material entities. Calkins (1927: 457) writes, "From the personalistic point of view, it will be remembered, a man's body as related to himself is no independently real thing of alien nature but a complex sensational experience, in great part shared with other selves to whom it serves as a sign of his existence".[7] The relevance of the metaphysics of human bodies to whether we enjoy libertarian freedom will be discussed in section 4.

Calkins (1927: 474) explicitly explored whether her metaphysics threatens libertarian freedom, but libertarian freedom isn't the only kind of freedom on the table for her or for us:

> Metaphysicians, as has become evident, use the term "freedom" with several distinguishable meanings. To be free is, in the first place and fundamentally, to be a self which wills as opposed to an inactive and impersonal being; to be free morally is, in the second place, to be master of one's impulses and emotions, and to "run the way" of the moral law with a "heart at liberty"; to be free is, finally, to be free to choose, to be genuinely able to will either this or that. Obviously the personal absolutist finds no difficulty in attributing to human selves freedom in either of the first two senses. But there is grave question concerning the freedom to choose. It is of capital importance to point out that personalism is not of necessity an indeterministic doctrine — in other words that it does not inevitably affirm freedom of choice. Yet the personalist unquestionably tends to conceive the human self as free to choose.

As indicated above, Calkins distinguishes three senses of "freedom". First, there is freedom in the sense of an ability to decide and will outcomes—an ability we enjoy but many other creatures lack.[8] Second, there is freedom in the sense of mastering one's impulses. The third sense of "freedom" she calls "the freedom to choose", which is the freedom "to be

[6] See Goldschmidt and Pearce (2017) for recent explorations of various forms of idealism.
[7] See also Calkins (1927: 433-434) and Calkins (1930: 214).
[8] See also Calkins (1910: 446-447, ft. 3), where Calkins indicates that there is a kind of freedom selves have simply in virtue of being selves rather than "phenomena". Green (1906: 85) suggests that, simply in virtue of being a knower, a person is in some sense a "free cause".

genuinely able to will *either* this *or* that."[9] Calkins (1910: 447) claims that this kind of freedom entails that the absolute uniformity of the causal relation must be denied, and the surrounding discussion suggests a rejection of causal determinism. Calkins (1918: 185) also says that this is the kind of freedom that "libertarians" accept.

An agent has libertarian freedom if and only if there was, is, or will be an action that she performs but could have performed otherwise, and which is not *antecedently determined* by a set of conditions outside of that agent's control. A set of conditions *antecedently determine* an agent's action if and only if those conditions *ground* that the agent performs that action. It is common in contemporary analytic philosophy to understand the "problem of determinism" in terms of necessitation rather than ground. But I take the heart of the issue, for Calkins at least, to be more about whether our actions are metaphysically explained by "external factors" rather than merely necessitated. I assume that grounding is a relation of metaphysical explanation, that is, when some facts ground a fact, the former facts metaphysically explain why the latter fact is the case. That said, I also assume that conditions are sets of facts, and that grounding is a transitive relation that implies *necessitation*, where one set of facts necessitates another if and only if there is no possible situation in which the first set of facts obtains without the second set of facts obtaining. So although the concerns I'll soon discuss are framed in terms of metaphysical explanation, since grounding induces necessitation, there are corresponding puzzles about necessitation.[10] Those suspicious of unreduced talk of grounding are invited to recast the problems in terms of necessitation.

Here is the plan for the rest of the paper. In section 2, we'll discuss the problem for libertarian freedom Calkins identified and the solution to it that she proposed. Calkins focuses on a problem stemming from the desires or wills of the Absolute. Her response to this problem is plausible. But other problems remain. In section 3, we'll discuss whether the beliefs or experiences of the Absolute generate a threat to freedom. And in section 4, we'll discuss whether the combinatorial activities of the Absolute's mind generate a threat for freedom. As we'll see, the arguments we'll explore aren't conclusive, although there is considerable internal pressure for Calkins to accept their premises, but it isn't clear which premise she should or can reject. We'll also explore whether there are responses to the problems that Calkins didn't explicitly consider that are analogous to the response to the problem she did consider. Finally, in section 5, we'll explore whether the three arguments that we lack libertarian freedom are independent of each other, and sketch some reasons to think that they are not.

What is at stake for Calkins if her metaphysics eliminates libertarian freedom? As noted earlier, Calkins recognizes other kinds of freedom that are compatible with the hardest of determinisms, and the surrounding discussion suggests that she thinks that these kinds of freedom are worth having. But she also seems to care about libertarian freedom. Calkins (1918: 184) tells us that "real obligation" would be impossible without libertarian freedom.[11] If we do not have the genuine power to choose what we do, our characters or character traits may still be

[9] See also Calkins (1918: 13-14, 183-185).
[10] Van Inwagen (1983) is the locus classicus of such arguments.
[11] See also Calkins (1910: 449-45).

assessable in terms of virtue or vice and the consequences of what we do assessable in terms of good or bad, but none of our actions is assessable as genuinely wrong or obligatory. We care about the legitimacy of assessing actions this way.

Calkins (1918: 11) claims that it seems to us that we have libertarian freedom, and that this appearance is strong even when we feel internally compelled to do our duty. Calkins (1918: 11-14) explains how it is that we can both feel free and internally compelled: each of us is a self who has many selves or at least self-like entities as parts (she calls these parts "partial selves"), and we can feel what they feel.[12] When we feel compulsion when we do our duty, we feel the compulsion felt by one of these parts, and when we feel free we feel the freedom to act in accordance with the compulsion felt by this part. Our feeling of libertarian freedom is the felt ability to act in accordance with the inclination of one of our partial selves rather than in accordance with the inclinations of the others.[13] However, Calkins (1918: 15, 183) also grants that this apparent awareness of libertarian freedom might be illusory.

Moreover, she appeals to libertarian freedom when criticizing other philosophers. For example, Calkins (1927: 54, footnote 1) complains that Descartes fails to recognize the problem of reconciling human freedom with the infinite power of the divine. Since the other kinds of freedom she recognizes are clearly compatible with God's omnipotence, there is good reason to think she has libertarian freedom in mind. But why complain about Descartes' failure to render consistent libertarian freedom with his doctrines unless being incompatible with libertarian freedom constitutes an objection to the view?[14]

So it's tolerably clear that libertarian freedom matters to her. That said, I suspect that, were she to learn that her metaphysics rules out libertarian freedom, her considered position would be to maintain her metaphysics while granting that this incompatibility is a cost for it.[15] In what follows, we'll assess whether this is a cost she must pay.

Let's turn to the first argument for the incompatibility of her metaphysics with libertarian freedom.

2. Absolute Will and Finite Wills

The first argument we'll consider and Calkins's response to it have been briefly discussed in McDaniel (2017: 284-285). I further discuss them here since an understanding of both the argument and Calkins's responses to it will illuminate how Calkins should respond to the arguments that she does not explicitly discuss.

Here is the argument. Calkins's Absolute is a person who has absolute mastery over its proper parts. Accordingly, nothing happens within the Absolute unless the Absolute actively wills that it happen. Everything we do occurs within the Absolute, since everything is either a

[12] See also (1927: 450-451, 467).
[13] See McDonald (2003: 119) for further discussion.
[14] It is possible that Calkins's criticism of Descartes is meant purely internally. She notes that Descartes appeals to creaturely free-will to explain how it is that human persons, who are created by a non-deceiving God, nonetheless fall into cognitive error. See Descartes (1991: 38-42) for his presentation of this doctrine.
[15] Calkins (1927: 476) tells us that "metaphysics does not guarantee us the kind of universe we want".

part or a member of the Absolute. So nothing we do happens unless the Absolute wills that it happen. The existence of an act of will of the Absolute brings about what the Absolute wills. But no finite agent has control over what the Absolute wills to be. So for any finite agent and action done by that agent, there is an antecedent desire of the Absolute that grounds that the agent does that action. So no finite agent acts with libertarian freedom.[16]

Calkins wrestles with this argument, or arguments substantially like it, in several places. Calkins (1907: 452-453) entertains the idea, which she attributes to Royce, that whether an agent is free is relative to a standpoint. From the perspective of the Absolute, the world is eternal and all its aspects are necessarily the case, and hence, from this perspective, there is no freedom. From the perspective of the finite self, the part of that world that the self is in is temporal and open to change, and hence there can be freedom.[17] I find this solution implausible, and I suspect that Calkins must have as well, since by the 4th edition of *Persistent Problems* it is unmentioned. One internal reason to reject this solution is that even in the first edition, Calkins (1907: 425) claims that the Absolute, like finite selves, can imagine states of affairs, and she characterizes the products of imagination partially in terms imagining contrary-to-fact possibilities. It's hard to square the claim that the Absolute can entertain contrary-to-fact possibilities with the claim that, from the Absolute's perspective, everything is necessarily the case. I set aside further discussion of this view.

One premise that someone sympathetic to Calkins's metaphysics might reject is that finite agents do not have some control over what the Absolute wills; instead, they might have some control provided that they have some control over what they desire. For the Absolute is a person who has us as proper parts, and Calkins thinks that in virtue of the fact that we are parts of the Absolute, the Absolute can experience our mental states, including our desires. Perhaps the Absolute wills what it desires, and the Absolute desires that I do an action because the Absolute feels my desire that I do that action. If my desires are a partial ground of what the Absolute desires and the Absolute wills on the basis of its desire, then, perhaps, to some extent I freely do what I what I will even though the acts of will of the Absolute ensures what I do. Calkins (1927: 478) briefly considers this train of thought:

> … the following reply may be suggested: The finite self, it will be reasserted, does form an identical part of the absolute self. The absolute self, therefore, experiences all that the lesser self experiences in its rebellious will — all its sensational and affective consciousness, all its imperious and combative 'attitudes.'

That said, the premise that Calkins (1927: 478-479) settles on rejecting is that nothing happens within the Absolute unless the Absolute wills that it happens.[18] Instead, what's true is that nothing happens within the Absolute unless the Absolute either wills that it happens or

[16] See Calkins (1927: 477-479) for her discussion of this argument.

[17] Although Calkins does not explicitly mention him, there are antecedents to this view in Kant (2000: 272-274), who held that the distinction between the possible and the actual is valid only for human cognition. Kant's view also raises a puzzle about libertarian freedom, which I do not pursue here, but see Stang (2016: chapter 10), for an excellent treatment of it.

[18] I believe that this solution is first articulated in the third edition; see Calkins (1917: 452).

allows its happening.[19] In order to permit libertarian freedom, the Absolute allows things within it to occur that it has no (intrinsic) desire for, and doesn't actively will. In short, Calkins preserves the freedom to choose by denying that in each case in which I will something, there is an antecedent desire or act of will of the Absolute that grounds that I do what I will. The Absolute still has absolute mastery over its proper parts, and so it *could* exert its will should it so desire to. But it refrains from exercising its Absolute mastery absolutely.

A brief comparison with how other absolute idealists confronted concerns about freedom might be illuminating. I'll briefly discuss T.H. Green and Josiah Royce, two figures whose work influenced Calkins's philosophical development.

Green (1906: 107-108) argues that having one's actions caused by one's character suffices for those actions to be morally imputable, that is, blameworthy or praiseworthy; it is irrelevant if there are antecedent grounds for the actor to have that character, and the idea of an "unmotived" free act is unintelligible. (I take it that by "unmotived", Green intends to refer to putative actions that are not determined by the character of the actor.) In short, Green firmly takes on board a kind of compatibilism.[20]

Royce (1916: 466-470) also embraces a kind of compatibilism when he attempts to square free agency with his version of absolute personalism. As I understand Royce, at least in this stage of his career, he appears to give up fully libertarian free agency, while maintaining that nonetheless individual persons have a kind of attenuated quasi-libertarian freedom worth having. This kind of freedom however is richer than the kind of freedom one has when one's character causes ones actions. Royce (1916: 458) affirms that every fact is willed by the Absolute, and holds that this is a consequence of the unity of "the divine consciousness". So Royce's Absolute does not merely allow that certain states of affairs are brought about. However, Royce (1916: 465-469) articulates a kind of freedom that we nonetheless must have because we are *individual* persons despite each of us being part of a larger all-encompassing whole. Our freedom as individual persons has two interdependent components: first, we are *active* in producing the effects of our actions even though those actions are nonetheless determined by the will of the Absolute as well. Second, our actions are not subsumable under general causal laws; that we are not subsumable under general causal laws is in fact constitutive of what it is for us to be active. Because our actions are not subsumable under general causal laws, a kind of indeterminism is true, since all the facts about the past in conjunction with the laws of nature do not entail all the facts about what presently occurs. And so in a weak sense we have a kind of attenuated quasi-libertarian freedom—although it is not the kind of absolute libertarian freedom that Calkins appears to want to fit into her world-view.

In this section, we discussed a problem stemming from considering the will of the Absolute. It appears though that the harder problems stem from the cognitive states and cognitive activities of the Absolute. Let's assess whether this is the case.

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[19] Calkins (1917: 452) suggests that, although the Absolute is "fundamentally active", it can will its own partial passivity in order to make room for creaturely freedom.

[20] See Brink (2003: 21-24, 95-96) for further discussion of Green's thoughts about freewill.

3. Absolute Experience as the Ground of Truth

The second argument we'll consider concerns how the Absolute serves as the ground of truth. One of Calkins's (1927: 451-452) arguments for the existence of an absolute person is that, if there were no such person, there would be no ground for the truth of ordinary judgments about our commonly experienced world.[21] This is an argument that presupposes idealism, but not absolute idealism or personalism. According to Calkins, given idealism without an absolute person, we would each have our own experiences but there would be no tables, chairs, human bodies, and so forth. Calkins rightfully believes that we frequently make false claims about reality. Calkins also claims that for a statement to be in error is for it to be inconsistent with someone's correct experience. But whose experience? And what makes an experience correct given idealism? Not some finite individual's experience, for any choice of an individual's experience is arbitrary absent some reason to treat that individual's experience as probative. Only the experiences of the Absolute person can serve as the standard for correctness.

There are two interpretations available of Calkins's claim about truth: a strong interpretation that seems to threaten libertarian free will and a weak interpretation that might not. On the weak interpretation, the experience of the Absolute is merely a *criterion* for truth, that is, agreement with the experience of the Absolute is both necessary and sufficient for truth, but such agreement is not *constitutive* of truth. Rather, it is merely an absolutely reliable sign of truth in virtue of its necessary correlation with truth. On the strong interpretation, what it is for a statement to be true is for it to agree with the experience of the Absolute. On this interpretation, agreement with the experience of the Absolute *constitutes* truth.

I suggest that we should favor the strong interpretation of Calkins. The main argument for preferring the strong interpretation is that, given the weak interpretation, it is not clear what theory of truth can be reasonably attributed to Calkins. It's hard to attribute to her a correspondence theory of truth. Given her idealism, it is hard to see how an experience could be veridical if and only if it corresponds to some facts, for what would those facts be like? If they are facts about the experiences of the Absolute, then it looks like we are forced back to the strong interpretation. Calkins (1927: 403-405) clearly and decisively rejects a pragmatist theory of truth, and there is no indication that she endorses the view that a proposition is true (for a person) if and only if it coheres with the experiences or beliefs of that person. Deflationist theories of truth were not on her radar, and I see no grounds for ascribing to her a theory of truth in which truth is a primitive property. It could be that she has no theory of the nature of truth—but setting aside deflationism or the primitive theory of truth, no other view of truth fits well with what she says about truth. The strong interpretation tells us what her theory of truth is.[22]

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[21] There are proximate antecedents to this argument in both Green (1906: 17-20) and Royce (1895: XI). The former is concerned with how to distinguish the domain of reality from sets of ideas that do not represent what is real, given that both what is real and what is not are systems of intra-related thought-contents. The latter is directly concerned with the possibility of error, that is, false judgments about how things are. Of course, there are earlier antecedents as well, such as in the philosophy of Berkeley (1975: 182-183, 185-186).

[22] Moreover, that agreement with the experience of the Absolute constitutes truth fits well with what she does say. For example, Calkins (1927: 452, footnote 2) writes that, "This argument presupposes the epistemologically monistic conception of knowledge as identity of knower with known." The argument in question is the argument for

However, it is the strong interpretation that seems to threaten libertarian freedom. Calkins seems to recognize this threat. Calkins (1927: 477) writes, "For, from the absolutist standpoint, a human purpose, like everything else, is real only by being object of the absolute experience and therefore, it may be urged, every human purpose is ipso facto a purpose of the Absolute, and there can be no will which is, in any sense, opposed to his. This is a very important objection and indeed many writers deny that it can really be met." That said, Calkins does not clearly distinguish this objection from the objection discussed in section 2. We'll assess whether the objections from libertarian freedom to absolute idealism really are distinct in section 5.

For now, we'll focus on more fully assessing the current threat. Suppose it's true that I perform some action A. The truth that I perform A is constituted by the experience of the Absolute. Trivially, necessarily, if it is true that I perform A, then I perform A. But I do not have any control over what the experience of the Absolute is like. So there are factors outside of my control that fully ground that I perform A. So I do not perform A freely.[23]

How might Calkins resist this argument? Recall that Calkins's view is not a theistic view in which the experience of God (if it even makes sense to speak in these terms) is completely distinct from the experiences of creaturely things. A theistic analogue of this argument—in which God's wholly separate experience ultimately grounds the sum total of what is true about the created world—definitely seems to threaten libertarian freedom. Consider, for example, Kant's claim that God has intellectual intuition, which is a singular representation that creates what it represents in the very act of representing it.[24] Perhaps Kant can square transcendental freedom with phenomenal causal determinism. But it is hard to see how to square transcendental freedom with noumenal intellectual intuition, which is God's way of representing objects in the world—a way that creates the very things it represents in those very acts of representing them.[25]

However, on Calkins's view, the Absolute's experience and my experience are not mereologically distinct. Instead, the Absolute's experience contains my experience as a part, just as I am a part of the Absolute. Does this difference in her view provide her a way out of that argument?

Suppose that it is partially up to me what my own experiences are. (We will examine whether some of my mental states are partially up to me in section 4.) Does it follow that it is partially up to me what the Absolute's experience is like? Not obviously. First, the Absolute's experience is not simply the lump sum of the experiences of its parts. A lump sum of experiences would, in a sense, be an inconsistent whole since different people can experience the same situation in different, and incompatible, ways. Instead, the Absolute's experience is a structured whole in which finite experiences are coordinated and subordinated parts. Even if it were up to me what my experiences are, whether those experiences are true might not be. I also need control

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the Absolute from the possibility of error that we have been discussing; the knower in question is the Absolute, who in turn is partially identical with what is known because the Absolute contains what is known as a part.

[23] This argument might be expressed in highly elliptical form by Calkins (1927: 477), but it is hard to tell, since the focus is clearly on the argument I discussed in the previous section.

[24] See Kant (1998: B72-73, pages 191-192, and B145, page 253).

[25] See Brewer and Watkins (2012), Ertl (2014), Hogan (2013, forthcoming), and Stang (2016: chapter 10) for discussion of the problems confronting Kant's attempts to reconcile divine omniscience with creaturely freedom.

over how my experiences are systematized in the experiences of the Absolute in order for me have some control over whether those experiences to represent truly that I act in a certain way.

The problem under discussion here is similar in some respects to the problem of reconciling divine foreknowledge and libertarian freedom. The problem of divine foreknowledge seems especially pressing when God is conceived as both omniscient and impassible, that is, essentially unaffected by created beings, for it seems that the only way to reconcile divine impassibility with omniscience is to have God's knowledge of creatures and their states be the full ground of the existence of creatures and their states. What the reflections on Calkins's Absolute show is that the same sort of problem can arise for a God—or an Absolute—that is receptive or sensitive to what finite creatures do.[26] What is central to the problem is not impassivity per se but whether the representations of the ultimate being are outside our control and suffice to fully ground our actions.

In the previous section, we discussed how, on Calkins's view, the Absolute refrains from desiring that certain states of affairs obtain in order to make room for libertarian freedom. Although Calkins does not explicitly discuss this possibility, we might wonder whether, in a similar manner, the Absolute can refrain from subordinating and coordinating some of the experiences that it contains. If the Absolute can refrain from subordinating and coordinating some of the experiences that it contains, then perhaps some of our actions might be free. Specifically, even if our public bodily movements are not performed with libertarian freedom, it might be that some of our private mental actions are free. Let's explore whether this is the case. To be clear, my attempt to see what options are in principle available to Calkins is in service of getting clearer on what exactly her metaphysics entails.

First, a reminder: in this context, the role of the Absolute is to resolve conflicting partial perspectives on what is intuitively the same part of the common world, and that the Absolute's perspective serves as the ground of truth. Since my bodily actions are public entities belonging to our common world and hence can be subject to contrary perspectives, the Absolute's experience can and must dictate which perspectives of them are correct. However, in addition to the common public world, one might think that, in a sense, there are many private worlds as well. Each finite mind has her own thoughts, and even if a finite mind can be mistaken about what the common world is like, perhaps she cannot be mistaken in the same way about what her own thoughts are like.

Consider my experience of a particular red triangle, which is a partial perspective of the triangle; the partial perspectives of other finite minds can disagree with it. For example, the triangle might seem to me to be colored deeply red while to you it seems to be colored lightly red. Both of our experiences can't be correct, and the Absolute's experience serves as the criterion for which (if either) of them is correct. But now consider not my experience of that red triangle, but my experience of that experience. The experience of the red triangle is an experience of a putative public physical object, while my experience of my own experience is an

[26] See Calkins (1917: 424-425) for a discussion of whether the Absolute is "passive". One thing that she notes is that, unlike finite persons, the Absolute is not compelled to see or hear things. We have no choice over what we perceive, but the Absolute does, and so is in this respect *sensitive* but not clearly *passive*.

experience of a putative private mental object. I could express what this experience is like by saying that it seems to me that I am seeing a red triangle. My experience of my own experience is a perspective of my own mental life. It is tempting to think that there are no other partial perspectives to compete with my perspective of my own mental life. You, for example, don't have a perspective that competes with *my* higher-order experience of my experience of the red triangle. And so one might conclude that there is no need, in this sort of situation, for the Absolute to resolve potential conflict between your perspective and mine, since no such conflict is possible.

In short, at least initially, there seem to be some experiences for which the Absolute isn't needed to serve as a criterion of truth. Calkins (1927: 452) comes close to agreeing with this, when she writes, "For him to say "I see the shadow as blue or the oar as bent" involves no error. His statement is in error only when his experience is compared with somebody's true experience. Such a comparison, however, can be made only by a being who has or includes both experiences, the "erroneous" one and the 'true" one, in a word by an including self." My judgment that the oar is bent might be erroneous, but perhaps my judgment that it seems to me that the oar is bent is incorrigible. Since the Absolute is not needed to have an experience in this sort of context to serve as a criterion of truth, perhaps the Absolute refrains from having such an experience, except in the sense the Absolute has these experiences as proper parts. On this view, these privileged experiences are self-verifying and serve as their own criterion of truth; they are, so to speak, automatically true. Perhaps the Absolute might refrain from subordinating and coordinating these experiences in order to secure space for libertarian freedom.[27]

Let's shift now from putatively private experiences to putatively private actions. Perhaps even if bodily actions cannot be libertarian free, private mental actions might still be. Specifically, we'll consider *attempts*, which I assume are actions that can be either free or unfree. In order to understand what I mean by "attempts", momentarily bracket thoughts about absolute idealism and consider the following scenario. Suppose the Cartesian demon is fooling you into thinking you have a body and that there is an external world. The demon fools you but does not causally determine you. You deliberate what to do and you decide to push an annoying customer service representative in front of a bus. Loosely speaking, you "push this person in front of a bus". Of course, the customer service representative doesn't exist, buses don't exist, and your body doesn't exist. Nonetheless, you did something morally assessable. Even though you failed to push someone in front of a bus, you succeeded in doing something blameworthy—and therefore you did something freely. What you did freely is a mental act rather than a physical one. I'll call such acts "attempts". In this scenario, your *attempt* to push someone in front of a bus was free, and you are blameworthy for having so acted.[28]

[27] The Absolute must have an experience that corresponds to my finite higher-order experience. Either the Absolute has this experience simply in virtue of having my experience as a part or my experience is veridical in virtue of the Absolute's experience. On the view we are exploring, the former rather than the latter is the case.

[28] The literature on attempts is rather large, but see Albritton (1985) and O'Shaughnessy (1973) for good entry points into it.

Let's return to Calkins's idealism. Consider my attempt to raise my hand and the successful action of my raising my hand.[29] The latter action is a public bodily about which one can have false beliefs, and hence the experience of the Absolute is needed to determine which finite perspectives of it are correct. The former action is putatively private, and if the experience of the Absolute is not needed to make my experience of my own attempt veridical, then perhaps that attempt is free—because if the experience of the Absolute is not what grounds that I perform an attempt, then there aren't antecedent grounds outside of my control that ensure that I make that attempt.

Let me summarize this line of thought before we discuss whether Calkins could accept it. I first discussed higher-order experiences because it's initially plausible that they are incorrigible and hence do not require an Absolute to resolve conflicting perspectives of their objects. I then suggested that if our experiences of our own attempts are like this, we don't require an Absolute to resolve conflicting perspectives of these attempts—and so perhaps the experience of the Absolute does not antecedently ground the existence of an attempt. The driving idea is that attempts are private mental acts that are not the objects of competing finite perspectives, while bodily actions are public acts which competing perspectives can disagree about.

Unfortunately, I doubt whether Calkins could accept this attempt to make room for libertarian freedom. The central difficulty is that this attempt presupposes that persons don't overlap, and never literally share experiences. However, Calkins (1918: 12-13, 1927: 450-451, 467-468) believes in overlapping selves. As noted earlier, every finite person is a part of the Absolute. And as also noted earlier, every finite person overlaps other selves—or at least parts that are extremely person-like. Calkins (1927: 467), for example, distinguishes her past self from her present self, and takes these selves to be persons or at least entities close enough to being persons to be called "selves". Moreover, these selves can have differing perspectives of what one initially thought to be private unshared experiences. For example, presently my right hand hurts. I am experiencing pain of a particular intensity and duration. My present self can make judgments about these features of the pain. My future self might also make a judgment about the pain, namely that it wasn't as bad as my present self thinks that it is. In short, my future self's perspective on my current pain differs from my present self's perspective on that same experience. One of us is right; one of our perspectives on this pain is accurate. If all we have are the two different perspectives, what would make one of them accurate? Calkins can say, however, that the self with the correct experience is the one whose experience corresponds to the experience of the Absolute. My current self's experience of pain is not automatically true. Moreover, each of us can be mistaken about the nature of our current experience. I might wonder whether this is love that I am feeling, whether it is the love that I have been looking for, or just indigestion. There is a fact about the nature of what I am feeling, and the Absolute's experience is what ultimately constitutes this fact (among others).

For Calkins, there are no purely private experiences enjoyed by exactly one individual. Even in the case of experiences of inner states, there is a need for a standard of correctness to

[29] Here, I follow O'Shaughnessy (1973), who argues that the attempt to raise my hand and the actual raising of my hand are numerically distinct yet intimately related events.

resolve conflicting perspectives. This need arises even with attempts. Different selves can have disagreeing perspectives on what is pre-theoretically a single attempt. For Calkins, even attempts would not be private in the way one might have antecedently thought. This is why I worry that the attempt to secure space for libertarian freedom by isolating certain private experiences from the Absolute's subordination and coordination of its parts is unlikely to succeed.[30]

I will postpone further discussion of how Calkins might respond to this concern for now, but we will discuss it further in the final part of section 4 and in section 5.

4. Relations require Relaters

The third argument turns on the grounds of relations. Before stating the argument, I want to clarify why worries about the grounds of relations are relevant. Action is relational through and through. An act begins with a representation of a circumstance distinct from the agent. There is a relation between the representation and the circumstance, and a different but related relation between the agent and the circumstance. (It won't matter in what follows which relation is explanatorily prior.) At least partially on the basis of that representation, a decision is formed. If all goes well, the decision in turn causes a bodily movement, which in turn affects the surroundings of an agent.

Keep in mind that, even though Calkins is an idealist, in a sense she does believe in an external world in which her body moves and acts. Moreover, as noted earlier, Calkins is explicit that she is not her body; rather her body is a sign by which other finite creatures know of her existence. Her body is something like a series of experiences of herself and others that has been coordinated and subordinated by the Absolute, and so too are the non-personal objects in her external environment. Calkins is numerically distinct from her body and its actions, and since they are distinct, they must be related to one another in the manners mentioned above.[31]

Successful agency requires control over the exemplification of a chain of relations. To the extent that one's control over the links in the chain is compromised, one's agency is compromised. The argument that we will consider concludes that every link in this chain is compromised.

Strictly, what we'll consider isn't whether Calkins's metaphysics per se threatens libertarian freedom but whether one of the central arguments that Calkins makes for her metaphysics threatens libertarian freedom. This central argument begins with the premise that relations require relaters.

[30] I thank an anonymous referee for very helpful comments on this section.

[31] Since no self is identical with its body, there is a worry that Calkins might be led to a kind of "occasionalist" position in which all causation between bodies is brought about by the fiat of the Absolute. If so, there might be a further threat to freedom nascent in her view. But I will not pursue it here.

Here's the argument.[32] The idea that attributions of relations to things are borderline unintelligible was frequently endorsed by our philosophical predecessors. But, for Calkins, there is type of relational attribution that is intelligible because we have a direct experience of instances of it. When a conscious being brings together different mental acts into a unified thought, such as a judgment, there is thereby an intelligible (because experienced) relation between those mental episodes. Because this is the only kind of relation that is intelligible, it is the only kind of relation that we should believe exists. Assuming that we are permitted to believe in any relations at all, we should believe that all relations require a relater, that is, a conscious being who brings the relata to that relation. Moreover, what this conscious being brings into relation must itself be parts or aspects of that being, just as our mental acts are parts or aspects of ourselves. Since all finite beings stand in relations to each other, there is a conscious being that has these finite beings as parts or aspects of itself and brings those parts or aspects into relation. This conscious being is none other than the Absolute.

We now have the pieces in place to formulate an argument that we lack libertarian freedom. Premise 1: for any relation, the full ground of the exemplification of that relation is in each case the relating activities of the Absolute. Interim conclusion 2: so, for each of the relations that must be instantiated in order for an agent so successfully perform an action, the full grounds of the exemplifications of those relations is the relating activities of the Absolute person. Premise 3: An agent of an action does not have control over the relating activities of the Absolute person. Interim conclusion 4: So an agent does not have control over the full grounds of her doing an action. Premise 5: If an agent does not have control over the full grounds of her doing an action, then that agent does not perform that action freely. Conclusion: no finite agent performs any action freely.

Let's consider how Calkins might respond to this argument. Does the Absolute person decide what relations to bring about in light of decisions made by finite creatures? Does the Absolute person relate things to one another in light of our desires that they be so related? (Or at least in light of desires that are more apt to be satisfied if things are so related?) If this is the case, does this imply that premise 3 is false? (Or do we have control over the relating actions of the Absolute person only because the Absolute "gives us" this control?)

In the previous section, we discussed whether our attempts might be free mental acts. Let's revisit this discussion in light of the threat to libertarian freedom that we are currently discussing. When one makes an attempt, one unites disparate mental contents into a unified whole. Prior to making the attempt to walk my dog, I had representations of myself, of walking, and of my dog; the act of intending to walk my dog is a unified representation containing those others as constituents. Now consider what is required for that unity to exist. Someone must bring those representations into relation, but need that someone be the Absolute person? Can't I do it? In general, it seems that I have what it takes to unify my own mental content into mental acts like beliefs, desires, intentions, attempts, and so forth. The Absolute might do this as well,

[32] See Calkins (1927: 442-338), (1920: 683-884), and (1919: 603-605). See also (McDaniel 2017: section 5). In Calkins (1930: 209-211), there is a different argument for absolute personalism that appeals to relations, but since it does not as clearly seem to threaten libertarian freedom, I refrain from discussing it here.

but the Absolute isn't needed here. And perhaps since the Absolute's unificatory actions are not needed, the Absolute doesn't perform them itself, but rather permits us to perform them. We'll return to these questions momentarily.

5. Are These Arguments Independent?

We've assessed what initially appear to be three independent arguments for the conclusion that Calkins's metaphysics rules out libertarian free will. In this final section, I'll explore whether these arguments are in fact independent.

Let's consider the cognitive act of relating objects, which was central to the third argument we discussed. In order to relate objects, is an act of will required? Not obviously—but also not obviously not. One might wonder whether the cognitive activity of bringing objects into relation is the same activity as forming a judgment. And one might follow Descartes in holding that forming a judgment is an exercise of the faculty of will.[33] If the act of relating objects is an act of will, perhaps the first and third argument collapse into one, and so Calkins's response to the first argument would also serve as a response to the third argument. The idea would be that it's not the case that every part of the Absolute is brought into relation by the Absolute, but rather in some cases, the Absolute refrains from so-relating objects and allows us to do the relating. And in fact, this was the response to the third argument that we discussed.

Relatedly, is the Absolute's experience generated by the relations the Absolute chooses between its parts? Plausibly, the answer is yes. The Absolute's experience is the product of coordinating and subordinating parts of the Absolute. But if the answer is yes, then the second and third argument also collapse into one argument.

In what preceded, I presented these arguments as though they are independent threats to libertarian freedom. But it might be that these three arguments are interdependent threats that stand or fall together. If this is so, perhaps Calkins's response to the first argument suffices as a response to the other two—and this in turn might explain why Calkins doesn't appear to address or clearly distinguish what appeared to be different threats to libertarian freedom that are generated by her metaphysics.

I've also explored the extent to which one might enjoy libertarian freedom given Calkins's metaphysics. I've argued that the kind of freedom we might have would be limited. When we engage in bodily movements, our physical actions would not enjoy libertarian freedom. Rather, given Calkins's metaphysics, at most only our inward actions—our attempts, our tryings to act—have the best shot of enjoying libertarian freedom.[34] But I have not tried to

[33] Descartes (1991) defends this view in his fourth meditation (from *the Meditations on First Philosophy*). I do not claim that Calkins follows Descartes here; I have found no explicit statement of hers that constitutes either a rejection or an acceptance of Descartes's view.

[34]An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2017 New York University Conference on Idealism, where it was commented on by Dorothy Rogers; I thank her and the audience there for excellent comments and questions. As noted earlier, Prof. Rogers also shared with me her photographs of archival material, and I thank her again here. This paper was also presented at the Metaphysics Workshop at Notre Dame. Finally, I thank Joshua Barthuly, Sara Bernstein, Peter Finocchiaro, Daniel Nolan, David Pattillo, Mike Rea, and Father Philip Neri for their helpful comments. .

settle whether our having this kind of freedom would be sufficient for giving us all that we want from libertarian freedom.

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