



Third event in a series of three on **Richer not happier: a 21st century search for the good life**

Freedom and Choice?

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NB

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Richard Reeves: This is the third of a three part series, the title is 'Richer not happier'. Last week we heard from Professor Richard Layard that the Government should be concerned about happiness and reposit from Phil Collins, of the Social Market Foundation that we should place more emphasis instead of misery. That misery was the great underrated virtue of our age, and a jolly interesting debate it was too.

As I mentioned, the board theme is happiness and whether we are, as a society, becoming richer not happier. Tonight's theme is 'choice'. The right to choose, of course, has a particular resonance, particularly in American political circles, and referring to a specific right to choose but the right to choose could also be seen as a fairly good summary of a key part of modern morality. The 500 doctors who wrote to *The Times* this morning arguing for more private insurance did so, mentioning the words 'patient choice' no less than three times in the course of a two paragraph summary of why they were so in favour of private insurance. Ralph Nader has just entered the US presidential election, in part because he wants to see greater choice, to be made available to the America voters and has been applauded by so doing by some British commentators, who use it (as Polly Toynbee in *The Guardian* has used it) as a peg for arguing for more PR and wider range of choice to British voters so that general elections feel a little bit less like the Oxford and Cambridge boat race and more like the Grand National. Of course in public services, it's impossible for a politician of any standing to talk about public service reform without talking about the importance of patient/parent/user choice. Choice is one of the most important words at the moment. One of the reasons why we're grateful that we're holding tonight's lecture.

It's very important that we remember that the ability to choose our spouses, jobs, lifestyles and hobbies is an important gift of modernity and I guess the animated quest for tonight's debate is whether or not choice, like many other commodities, is subject to diminishing returns. Whether in short it is possible to have too much of a good thing.

I guess finally what, if anything, can be done about it? It may be that choice is paradoxical, then the question is begged as to whether or not we can choose the degree to which we have choices.

We have three speakers, excellently qualified to lead the discussion. Professor Barry Schwartz, who you may have read on the front page of *The Times* on Saturday that Barry Schwartz is unveiling his theory tonight, so *The Times* gave us a taster of what he's going to talk about. He's a professor of Social Theory and Social Action at Swarthmore College in the United States and the author of *The costs of living*. He's a psychologist and his new book is called *The paradox of choice*. Those of use who enjoyed his earlier article, *The tyranny of choice* were somewhat disappointed by the final book title and I gather this was a publisher decision, rather than an author decision as *The tyranny of choice* was deemed to be too polemical.

Once Barry has given his main presentation, Sheila Lawlor will respond. Sheila Lawlor is a Director of Politeia and is currently writing a book on the politics of post war social policy and she will be followed by Ed Mayo. Ed Mayo is the Director of the National Consumer Council and was formerly the Director of the New Economics Foundation. So I think what we'll see is a range of attitudes to whether or not choice is always and everywhere a good thing. So I'd like first of all to invite Barry to address us. Thank you.

Professor Barry Schwartz: Thank you all very much. Thank you for coming. Let me apologise in advance for my accent. It's not something I usually have to do, but here I am, where people really speak English correctly, so I'm self-conscious.

So this is the book and the book is really mostly about the psychological consequences of having too much choice, and I'm going to talk some about that tonight but I orientated my remarks for tonight more around public policy implications of the psychological consequences of having too much choice rather than giving you a whole song and

dance about why too much choice makes people miserable. Another battle I lost with my publisher, aside from the title of the book, is I thought it would have been terrific to have the book come out with eight or nine different coloured book jackets, so that people could experience the content before they even bought the book, but they said it was too expensive to do that. Don't you think that would have been terrific? Send my publisher an angry letter.

Okay so, this is the title, 'Freedom, Choice, Wealth and Welfare'. It seems to me that the central aim (or a central aim) of public policy in a democratic society should be improving the welfare of its citizens. Even when resources are plentiful this is a very challenging task, because of the difficulty of determining exactly what welfare consists in. Beyond basic necessities, there's great individual variation in what people want out of life. This is true with respect to material goods, but it's also true with respect to what people want from their work, what they want from their medical care, from their educational opportunities, from their relationships with other people, from their public institutions, from the arts – from just about everything – so any specific commitment of public resources is likely to please some people and displease other people. The way to solve this problem, we are often told, is to provide a wide range of opportunities and let people choose for themselves whatever it is that promotes their personal welfare. Since each of use (each of you and I) is in the best position to judge what serves our welfare, putting resource allocation decisions into our hands is a solution to the social welfare problem that you can't improve upon. That's the kind of standard view. It's the standard dogma of neo-classical economics, from it's inception to improve welfare one must increase freedom of choice, not because increased choice is intrinsically good necessarily (although it probably is) but because it increases the chances that each individual will be able to find something that serves his or her interests uniquely well.

In the United States this central dogma is manifested nowadays in efforts to privatise a portion of social security, our retirement

pension, and if the Conservatives had their way the portion that would be privatised would probably be something like 100%. Privatising health insurance for senior citizens, offering American public school, children school choice and the sort of more general libertarian view that the best Government is the least Government. Provide some resources, get out of the way and let people choose the things they want.

Whatever else initiatives like this might accomplish, they each have the virtue of allowing each of us to pursue welfare as we see fit. We can choose risky retirement investments or safe ones, we can choose prescription drug plans with high deductible or low, we can choose schools for our children with open classrooms or highly structured ones. Each of us is in a position to make our own choices to serve our own welfare and arguably the real virtue of a competitive free market is precisely in what it gains individuals in opportunities to choose.

So most everyone kind of accepts this canonical view and if you think about it, the importance of choice to welfare casts a new light on the emphasis that developed and reasonably affluent societies place on increasing the material wealth of their citizens, and this is something that only recently occurred to me; it may have been obvious to other people. The value of material wealth I think, once you've passed subsistence, has more to do with the relation it has to freedom and choice than it does to its relation to luxurious standards of living. It is largely true that the wealthier a person is, the freer she/he is to live just exactly the life she/he wants and make just exactly the kinds of choices she/he wants, so wealth is liberating and it is because it's liberating – and not because it enables us to buy BMWs – that it's something that developed societies want to continue to pursue. Per capita GDP is a pretty decent proxy for the amount of freedom that is enjoyed by individuals in a society.

So to summarise the orthodoxy. Public policy should maximise welfare, not wealth. This means maximising individual freedom,

which means maximising choice. Markets maximise freedom, wealth enhances freedom. The more wealth we have as a society the more choice we have, the more choice we have the more freedom we have, the more freedom we have the more welfare we have. Who could possibly disagree with this?

I must admit that this sort of, I don't know quite what to call it, it's not quite a logical structure but it's a quasi logical structure, it seems very compelling and what makes it so reasonable is the assumption, previously essentially unchallenged, that if some choice is good (and who can deny that?) then more choice is better. After all people who aren't interested in the plethora of new options that the world is providing can ignore them. If you're satisfied alternating between two kinds of breakfast cereal you can simply ignore the 230 others that are now available, but somebody out there will find in those 230 additional breakfast cereals just exactly the one he or she has always been longing for. So as options get added, you are bound to make someone better off; you make no one worse off. This is what economists refer to a paradox-efficient and this is what we aspire to in any social policy and we certainly have added options.

In writing the book I spent a little time in my supermarket counting rather than shopping and in the States, which is of course in a different universe from every place else, there were 285 varieties and brands of cookies, 75 iced tea drinks, 40 toothpastes, 230 soups, 175 salad dressings and if none of them suited you, there were maybe a dozen virgin olive oils and another half dozen balsamic vinegars so that you could make your own and 275 cereals. I went to a consumer electronic store and discovered that by taking the set of speakers I wanted from what they had to offer, the tuner I wanted from what they had to offer, the CD player and the tape player, in that one store I could construct 6.5 million different stereo systems. So there's a lot of choice.

In addition to these areas of choice where we've always had choice and now we have a lot of it, again in the States, there are whole new domains in which significant choices are

available to people, and these are not as trivial as deciding what cereal to buy or what suite to buy. There's choice in the States with respect to health care in a way that there never was before and it's most clearly reflected in the direct marketing of both prescription drugs and procedures to consumers. What's the point of marketing prescription drugs on network television to people like me if I can't go buy them? The point is to tell me that I'm in charge of my healthcare, it's up to me to decide what kind of healthcare to get, what kind of drugs to get, what kind of surgery or not to get and then to lobby my doctor as an aggressive consumer so that my doctor will meet my needs. So there is this new sense in which choice in healthcare is available in the States.

Choice in retirement plans. In most companies there was one pension plan, maybe two. What has happened in recent years in the United States is the proliferation of different retirement options. There are firms that offer their employees hundred of different mutual funds in which to invest their retirement savings. We'll see that this had a paradoxical and perverse effect in a minute.

In the university, there is almost unconstrained opportunity to study whatever the hell you want, in whatever order you want. Again in the service of satisfying the unique interests of all of our wonderfully talented and curious under graduate students, which again has the perverse effect that none of them know what the hell they want either when they come in or worse when they leave. At work, thanks to the electronic, digital revolution, we are now many of use among the educated classes, free to choose where we're going to work, where we're going to work. We can work, each of use, 24 hours of the day, seven days of the week, 365 days of a year no matter where we are, so in a real sense, every minute of every day we are able to choose whether to work or not. Marital and family arrangements in the States are wide open. Do I marry or don't I? Do I marry now or later? Do I have children or don't I? Do I have children now or do I have them later? These were always choices that were

available in principle but they were choices that virtually no one exercised. In fact nowadays these loom as real decisions that people have to make.

What flavour of religion do you want? 'Maybe it's time you started getting some religious instruction: there's Catholic, Protestant or Jewish, any of these sound good to you?' I'm embarrassed to say that we sort of had this view when we were raising our children, that we would simply let them choose whether or not to be religious, that's when they were wise enough to make this choice, whenever that is.

You can even choose your identify. In my talks I show cartoons for two reasons. One is that they're data, instead of doing experiments you can show cartoons. What they demonstrate is that there's at least one person in the world other than me who has these thoughts. I've never talked to any of these cartoonists, so if more than one person is thinking this, it must be true.

So, it would seem in the United States, that we have at this moment in our history created the best of all possible worlds. All this choice, all this wealth, everyone pursuing his or her own welfare exactly as he or she sees fit and so what the book is about is an extended argument that while the logic of choice may be compelling, the 'psychologic' is not. There's growing evidence that for many people increased choice produces decreases in satisfaction, sometimes even misery. That it sometimes produces paralysis rather than liberation and so to this nice logical structure I gave you before, there's a resounding last line, and that is that this logical structure is psychologically false.

I'll just give you a couple of small pieces of evidence. The first empirical demonstration of this that I know about involved giving people an opportunity to buy jams in a gourmet food store and one week there were six jams on display, at a special table and one week there were 24 jams on display at a special table. People could sample as many as they wanted and if they came to the table they would get a coupon and if they bought a jar of jam they

would get a dollar off with the coupon. When there were 24 jams on the table more people were attracted to the table than when there were six. However, when there were 24 jams on the table one tenth as many people bought anything. It's a very attractive display, I want to go look at it but then how the hell am I going to decide which one of these to buy? In both cases, both when there were six or 24 on display, people could in fact buy from all 24 it's just that they weren't that salient because they were sitting on a table.

I did some research with collaborators, I just did it last year with college seniors, looking for jobs and we found that the more job possibilities are available to college graduates, the more their satisfaction with the job search process goes down. We find that this is especially true of people who want the best possible job. People who are driven to find the best possible job get better jobs than people who are less driven, and feel worse about them. They get better jobs in more prestigious places, with higher salaries and they are full of doubt, regret, anxiety, second guessing, they get no joy out of their success.

The third piece of information comes from an actual study of whether people put money into their pensions. Sheni Engar got access to records from Vanguard, the largest I think mutual fund company in the United States, and she looked at 850,000 investment records from I don't remember now how many different companies, and what she found is that the more funds a firm makes available to its employees, the less likely they are to invest in any of them and you must understand that in many cases this means not only not taking care of your future (your old age), it means passing up a matching contribution from your employers. Employers match up to \$5,000 maybe \$10,000 of what you put into your retirement, so if you put nothing in, you're just burning \$5,000 or \$10,000. People are so overwhelmed when they see 150 funds that they say 'none of the above' and sabotage their futures. It's quite an extraordinary thing. Now if you were to tell an investment counsellor, "You know I have a problem. I want to take care of my employees,

they're not putting enough money away for retirement, what should I do?", what virtually any investment counsellor tell you is, give them more choices, then they're bound to find one, each of them, that's just what they're looking for. Of course the data say just the opposite.

And finally, in the medical domain, there's this doctrine of patient autonomy in the United States where the presumption is that you lay the options on the table, and it's the patients responsibility to choose and if the patient doesn't want to choose, then you just insist. If the patient says, "If this were you, what would you do?", you say, "Well it's not me, it's you. You can have surgery or you can have radiation. Grow up! Take charge of your life". It's this very serious ethical view now in the medical community, the problem is that the overwhelming majority of patients don't want to choose, they want somebody who knows something (that is to say not them) to tell them what to do. They want doctors who are competent and compassionate to make choices for them. Not every patient, but the majority of patients, and the result is that patients are less and less satisfied with the medical cure they get because of the burden of choice that it puts on them, and this is especially acute for women, because women are usually making medical decisions not just for themselves but for their entire family, and they'd much rather have the doctor making the decision.

So increased choice often enables people to do better by some objective measure. Better quality of jam, better rate of return on investment, better suitability of a job to your ultimate career objectives and so on. It enables people to do better, and it makes people feel worse. In fact it may make them feel badly enough (I argue in the book that it does make them feel badly enough) that it is a significant contributor to the three-fold increase in clinical depression that we have seen in the United States and other developed countries in the last 25 years. In the best of all possible worlds, clinical depression is an epidemic, it's striking more and more people at younger and younger ages and this is true of suicide as well, not just depression.

So the question we should be thinking about is, do we care about objective results or subjective results when we are out to improve welfare? I think that once peoples standard of living is above subsistence it is usually the subjective quality of experience that really matters. What good does it do you to buy the best car made if you feel crappy having bought it? What's the gain? Who gains? It's not clear that anyone gains and so we ought to be paying an enormous amount of attention not to objective results but to subjective results. We need to be asking ourselves what affect the policies that we are implementing have, because they logically have to be making people better off; what affect it has on their actual psychological wellbeing?

There are several reasons why all of this choice makes people feel worse. First it puts an enormous burden on people together information so that they can make a good decision. Who has the time to find the best digital camera, the best cell phone plan, the best retirement plan, the best job, the best spouse and the best school for your kids? Nobody has that kind of time.

Second, plentiful choices increase the chances that people will regret the decisions they make, because they will have passed up many alternatives that had attractive features and that might have turned out better than the one that they ended up choosing and the amount that you regret your choice, even if it's a good choice, the amount you regret it is going to subtract from the total satisfaction that you experience.

Third, increased choice will increase the sense that people have missed opportunities with respect to all the options that they have passed up. The economists refer to these things as 'opportunity costs', and if you're doing your thinking correctly, there's only one opportunity costs that matters, and that's the option that finished second. If you choose Cambridge rather than Oxford, it doesn't matter that the University of London came in third, because you wouldn't have gone there anyway. If Cambridge burned you'd have gone to Oxford, so we shouldn't be thinking about all of the options we've thought about

and passed up, only about the one that finished second, but that's not how people operate. They think about all of them, because each option may have some special thing that makes it uniquely attractive.

Another reason why all this choice makes people feel worse is that it raises peoples expectations about how good the option they actually choose is going to turn out to be with the result that the object of quality of the choice gets lost because it's compared with these unrealistically high expectations that are generated by this host of possibilities.

There's a cartoon with a caption, 'Would it be possible for you to totally exaggerate how much it will be cost and how long it will take so that we'll pleasantly surprised at the end?' What psychologists have known for a long time is that the subject of quality of experience has to do with how it relates to our expectations. If we have very high expectations about the experience then even if the experience is good we'll end up disappointed. The secret to happiness I say in my book (and it makes young people very angry with me) is to have low expectations, but the proliferation of options means that you don't have to settle with things that are mediocre because there's bound to be something out there that's not mediocre, that's superb, that's perhaps even perfect and the result is you do better objectively. You come closer to perfection but because you're expectations are so high you end up dissatisfied.

This has happened to me many times, but my family was vacationing in this little town on the West Coast. It had a tiny general store and I was making dinner and I had to go buy wine and I went to the general store and they had five different kinds of wine – I mean a total of five different vintages/brands – so I picked one and I bought it home and no one expected it to be very good and it wasn't very good and no one was disappointed. I mean you know the world simply wasn't going to let me bring home a good bottle of wine and it didn't bother anybody. Now imagine if I'd gone to a liquor store that has two or three or 10,000 different bottles to choose from and a buy one and it's much better than any I could have got at the

general store, but it's not as good as we were hoping. Now not only are you disappointed, because you've had high expectations, but in addition whose fault is it that there's a bad bottle of wine? It's not the world's fault, it's not the general stores fault, it's my fault and that I think actually contributes to the rise in clinical depression that we are seeing.

So I can summarise this pattern of the psychological story about why choice makes people less satisfied with some cartoons. The sad truth is that this is true. Now let me make it clear, I don't want to romanticise poverty here, but one of the things that has struck me is that you know my book is really about the problems of the affluent, the upper-middle class. Wealth is what enables people to make all these choices, if you don't have wealth, this is not your problem, why the hell should anyone care about the problems of the people who are already well taken care of? Well the extraordinary thing is that here we have one society after another allowing affluent people to get more affluent, neglecting the needs of people who can barely pay their rent. Now that's bad enough from my point of view as a social justice matter, but what makes it even worse is that it doesn't do the affluent any good. They would be no less happy if we took, I don't know, 30% of their income away and gave it to people who need it. So there's this mal-distribution of income not only is unjust to people who don't have enough but it doesn't even serve the interests of the people who have more than enough, and that's galling.

So what my colleagues and I also did is we identified a dimension of personality that really exasperates the choice problem, and I'll be very quick about this. If you are after the very best, what we call 'maximising', you want the best stereo, the best cell phone plan, the best retirement plan and so on, then all of this choice becomes an unmitigated nightmare because the only way to know that you've got the best is by examining all the alternatives, and you can't really examine all of the alternatives, so what happens? Eventually you decide and you are perpetually nagged with doubt that if you'd looked a little harder,

looked differently, taken someone else's advice you'd have done better. If you are satisfied with 'good enough' ('satisfying' if a term invented by Herb Simon, a psychologist who won the Noble Prize in Economics some years ago – *The Economist* thought he was an economist), then it's not quite as bad because you search you know, you have standards and as soon as you find something that meets those standards, you stop searching, you choose it and you don't worry that if you'd looked longer and harder you'd have found something better so the choice problem is a problem for everyone but it is an especially acute problem for people who are out to get the best. Being out to get the best is a problem for everyone, but it is an especially acute problem in a world in which there is all this choice. So in the modern world, these two things – a personality trait of maximising and this overwhelming array of choice – just contributes to massive, massive unhappiness. We find that extreme maximisers (people who score very high on our scale) are border line clinically depressed, even though they may not be taking anti-depressant medications, they may not be having psycho-therapy, they score as border line clinically depressed on standard paper and pencil measures of depression.

Now I think the students I teach at Swarthmore College, a very elite institution with very smart kids, are absolutely plagued by what I've just described. They are flocking to counselling centres, all of the elite institutions in the United States find that they cannot meet student demand for psychological services. Why? One significant reason I believe is that we do students this incredible disservice of telling them that they are so good that they can be and do anything and then expect them to figure out which thing is the thing that they should devote the rest of their lives to. They don't know how to make this decision and so we have the most highly educated, coffee servers at Starbucks you could possibly imagine. They do it for a few months, they do it for a year, they do it for a second year, they do it for five years hoping that out of the sky will emerge the answer to the question, 'What should I do when I grow up?' and it creates real pain, real misery. I never ask students the question, "What are you doing when you

graduate?" and it's not because I'm uninterested.

Now there's no question that people value freedom and I certainly can't imagine eliminating choice completely from parts of life where we've gotten used to it, so the question is what can one do and an answer to that has recently been proposed by the law professor Cass Sunstein and the behavioural economist Richard Thaler. What they suggest is that you structure choice in a way that takes advantage of the foibles and imperfections of human decision making that psychologists have uncovered in the last 25 or 30 years, so you behave in a kind of paternalistic way to protect people from making the worst mistakes but you give them a way out. They refer to this as 'libertarian paternalism', and I'll just give a couple of examples.

People are incredibly influenced by the default option, by what happens if you make no choice, so in the United States when you get a driver's licence, you have the opportunity to become an organ donor and in order to do that, it's hard, you need to check a box. 20% of Americans are organ donors. In many European countries, when you get your driver's licence, you have the opportunity not to be an organ donor, and in order to do that it's also very hard, you have to check a box. If you don't check the box you're an organ donor, and in these countries 90% of drivers are organ donors and so if you think that having a population of organ donors serves public welfare you design the choice so that the default is that you're an organ donor. That's the paternalism part, however, you allow people to opt out by checking a box, that's the libertarian part and they have many, many examples like this, where the choice set is dramatically reduced and it is structured in such a way that if people don't act, what ends up happening to them is what's in almost all of their best interests. 401K, retirement plan participation. Virtually universally you have to elect to participate. You have to sign something that says take some a percentage of my page and put it into a retirement account and you get something like 45% participation. If you simply switch that so that there will be

money taken out of your pay and put into a retirement account unless you elect not to have that happen, you get 90% participation and we know that this really is what people want since eventually even the most inertia governed people will sign up and have money taken out of their pay to go into retirement accounts. So what they're suggesting is that you reduce the amount of choice that you give people, and you structure choices so that when people get it wrong, they get it wrong in a way that actually serves their interests. I think this is something that is worth looking very seriously at (both in the private sector and in the public sector) as a way of enabling people still to be free, to make important decisions in their lives, but not to be free to such a degree that they are completely overwhelmed.

Finally, this cartoon appeared in *The New Yorker* (they all did of course), 'You can be anything you want to be, no limits' and you know the reason that we're supposed to laugh at this cartoon is that we're much smarter than the parent fish and we see how myopic the parent fish. What can be more constraining than this little tiny bowl? No limits indeed, no limits within the unbelievable limits of this gold fish bowl – we know better.

If you really want to enable this kind of freedom and possibility, what you want to do is shatter the fish bowl, and we smarter than the parent fish know this. Well I think actually the parent fish is right. That people say they want a world in which everything is possible, that's how much they/we value freedom and especially young people – young and multi-talented people – but I think that in general people who say this don't understand something that is profoundly important, and that is what we really want is choice within limits. Choice within constraints. Freedom is not freedom when is unconstrained, freedom is chaos when it is unconstrained and we all need something like a fish bowl to enable the choices that we face in life to be expressions of our freedom rather than paralysing and tyrannising of our freedom. The result of unconstrained choices, not satisfaction but anxiety. It is not liberation, but tyranny.

Thank you very much.

Richard Reeves: Thank you Barry. I don't think you should apologise for your accent. From where we're all sitting, it's only a matter of time before we're all talking like you. I love your point about religion. I think Eisenhower said that 'America only worked if it had no religion, but I don't give a damn which one it is'.

I'm now faced with a dilemma, because I know that the next two speakers will take a different view, therefore you'll be faced with a range of options. So from the point of view of your own self interest, perhaps we should go for a drink now – but that would be unfair to our speakers, so as non-utilitarian I'll invite Sheila Lawlor to respond. Sheila, thank you.

Dr Sheila Lawlor: Barry Schwartz talks about the choice of problems. There is something surreal about the picture he describes in the United States. One shop with over 285 types of biscuits, another with 100 TVs from which to choose, but the position in the United States and the consequences it appears to bring should not prompt us to adopt his diagnosis or his solution to problems of a different order in this country.

Whereas in the United States the problem is one of rampant choice, and too often choice of really rather unimportant things, the problem we face in this country is of a very different order. Here we are talking about matters which are vital to daily life, in our discussion about choice. We're talking about a system of healthcare, education and pensions where we suffer not from too much choice but from virtually none at all.

The context of his very lucid critique is broader. It belongs to a more general response, often but not exclusively by the left, to the radical reappraisal of the role of Government, its size, its scope: that reappraisal which took place in the 1980s and culminated in the reforms of the Thatcher/Reagan administrations and one which was also reflected in the economic culture. So far that response has included such ideas as the themes of communitarianism in the 1990s, which spread throughout the United States and the UK. 'The Third Way',

which was very popular here and had a fling in Germany, I think it was, my Germany I can't pronounce but 'The Third Way' and a fresh emphasis in the new century on what we see today and what we've seen over the last few years, a new discussion of collectivism and its respectability.

Barry Schwartz's theme adds a further dimension to this approach in that it questions the very desirability of choice for the individual, himself or herself. He opened up this evening his discussion by saying that he would prefer particularly here and I think elsewhere too the question of welfare policy and he discusses the central aim of policy as, and I'm using Barry's words here, 'Improving the welfare of citizens where public resources are committed and where spending takes place on certain things', this is the theme which Barry discusses. He suggests that this leads in turn to different demands made by people (the electorate, voters, people in society) who have different wishes. This in turn leads I think to a further problem in this analysis, which is that with all these different wishes and different demands society or public policy must cater for different choices.

But, and here we come to one of the conclusions, these choices do not necessarily improve the welfare of the citizen, they rather confuse the citizen, way him or her down, depress them, so the solution is to be provided with a good enough basis for making decisions rather than the plethora of choices.

Now I hope I've summarised fairly what you say because I think it's a very important discussion, especially for public policy because underlying this presumption is that somebody must (your paternalist) must determine the good enough choices for people and present them. What is wrong with such a view?

First, I'm not quite sure that the premise is one which I would accept for this country. In the UK we are dealing with a system of very little choice on vital matters, not as in the United States on an abundance of choice on many unimportant matters.

Second, in the system here, which we are discussing in terms of public policy, there is

widespread agreement across the political spectrum that we should publicly fund healthcare and education, that we should redistribute support to those who are not well off or who are in need, but there is also a strong sense amongst all that the collect of us left, that public services should not be the monopoly of the State. That there should be a greater variety of choice, and I think our Chairman referred to the demand by the doctors for greater choice for patients and a different system for providing healthcare this morning in *The Times* along with the discussion of what you were going to propose.

Now you suggest that the reasons for this demand for greater choice owe more to the dogma of neo-classical economics or perhaps to irrational discontent with what is on offer. There are a mixture of reasons why this demand for choice has grown. In my view these are the main or the entire reasons for the demand for choice, especially not in the United Kingdom because here there has been a State provision, a monopoly provision of the services which really matter. Where it has been bad, people (ordinary people) have had to live with the consequences of being locked into failed systems in a way that they do not necessarily have to in neighbouring continental countries. For the Government of the United Kingdom has not restricted itself simply to funding public services or redistributing them, it has itself been the sole provider, pretty much for most of the public services. In healthcare it nationalised the hospitals, and runs them. In GP and specialist care it directs the doctors. The same is true, to a certain degree, of schooling and teachers. Not only is there little choice for parents and their children of the type of school or the curriculum, the very exams they have to sit, the times they have to sit them, but the choice on offer tends to be a very bad one. If ones in the wrong area it's very difficult sometimes to find a good school so we're talking in the United Kingdom of a demand for choice which has been fuelled not by too much money, a lot of money, lots of wealth but the very absence of the things which really matter.

So when people demand choice here they are reflecting discontent with a failed system. A failure by the State on two important counts. The State has failed to meet the individual needs of each person, and it has also failed to provide a system which aspires to excellence and which allows for it. Indeed, and this continuing to read more about, in other countries where you have state funded and often run system there is far greater diversity of provider in European countries than there is here. So those countries don't take this as a feature of dogmatic, economics but rather as essential as efficiency, standards and dignity.

Apart from the problems of a poor monopoly provider there is also the problem of freedom. In political culture in this country, there has been a long traditional of individual people taking responsibility for those decisions which affect their own lives, in such importance areas perhaps as education or healthcare, for choosing school, for the relationship between the doctor and the patient. In all of these areas, part of the framework of law has been designed to protect the relationship between the two parties to that decision so there is freedom between them, and that framework of law has rejected, until much more recently, interference by the State running it paternally or any other way.

I would suggest that if we move away from that ideal basis for decision making and responsibility, which must involve freedom in choice, we will continue to suffer as a Western democracy, finding it difficult to get half the electorate to the polls, partly because of almost the irrelevance of making decisions over our own lives.

A third and related problem with the premise is that where the State provides the services well as the funds it often tends to create a further problem and gets tied up in a web of knots. Nowadays for instance in education, because of this idea of parental choice, which we don't really have, parents may express a preference in this country for a school but expressing a preference is an illusory word for choice because you don't have the right to make a decision over the school, that is devolved to a series of admissions authorities,

appeals bodies, tribunals, adjudicators and you aren't guaranteed that your choice will be met, but because of popular demand for choice, it's written into the rules that you can express a preference. So every time we have this problem with choice in this country, because of the kind of system we have, lots and lots of new tiers are built up but they still deny the one thing that matters.

A fourth, and this is this is the last problem I'll refer to (and I've referred to it already), it's the problem of the absence now of the relationship between the individual and the professional. Now you referred to patients in America being urged to take control over the decisions effecting their health. I'm not sure that perhaps there is that culture here, but I think there's a much more different problem in the UK that because doctors are directed by the State, because hospitals are meeting the targets of the State, the doctors and hospitals are not accountable to the patient, they're accountable to their managers and when doctors and hospitals are accountable to their managers not their patients and patients can't therefore fully trust their doctors in a professional capacity they are going to start looking up the internet to make sure that the medication that they've been told to take isn't being prescribed simply because Whitehall says so but because it really is going to cure them. This is part of a problem with an absence of choice, because if the traditional of choice of a consultant or a GP was left to the patient and the role of responsibility between doctor and patient was maintained then I think patients in this country would be much more likely to put their trust in their doctors if they wanted. Of course there will always be people who want to search on the web for alternative treatments, but I think by and large if you can trust your professional person and know that the professional person is outside the orbit of the bureaucrat in Whitehall you're more likely not to fall into that trap, because here you don't have the culture of litigation, as much anyway, and I think that plays a part in the United States where doctors have to do all the tests and offer all the options rather than be taken to courts and sued for negligence.

So to conclude. What maybe true of the Unites States is not necessarily true of the United Kingdom. The problem here is not one of too much consumer choice, for things which don't matter but of none or too little choice for things which do. However, if the notion of choice, if that notion and its results are subject to challenge if not to ridicule, then the choices which matter may be treated with the same contempt as those which do not. My concern would be that our natural defences against too much collectivism, too much control, too much neglect of freedom will be eroded and if we don't pay sufficient respect to the importance of choosing and a system which allows for importance choices to be made on those important areas of life.

Thank you.

Richard Reeves: Thank you Sheila. I'd like to invite our last speaker Ed Mayo to respond.

Ed Mayo: Thank you and good evening. I'm glad we, as the Chief Exec of the National Consumer Council started off with some shopping stories, and I mean maybe that somebody in the audience actually has better information on this than I do. I don't believe actually there's any less items in the supermarkets here in the UK than there is in the States, certainly more choice of tea over here.

In fact I was reading your book in advance. I thought that was prudent to do and Barry you start off and you did the sort of the mobile phone and all those examples and you start off with the example of jeans. It took me back, it could have knocked me sideways because that was my very first memory of shopping and I've never told this story, so it's confession time.

Oh I was probably about 12 and I went into one of these jeans shops off Oxford Street and Barry tells the story of going in to kind of ask for a pair of jeans and they say do you want shrink fit or none fit or slim or tight or stone or blue or black and he just says well I wanted some regular and I was in something of the same situation. This was a fair while ago let me add. So I picked up these jeans which turned out to be far too thin, far too narrow for me

even then and I went to the back of this shop and they had these kinds of changing rooms that had these kind of cowboy gates that kind of swing open and close. So I went through and I got, I'm sure you don't need me to talk you through the detail, I took my trousers off (thank you Richard) and started to get these new ones and I got my feet in and got them to about you know half way up and completely lost by balance and fell forward through these cowboy gates into the shop for everyone to see and I had chosen the wrong ones. So I'm entirely sympathetic in ways to the thesis that Barry has outlined.

As part of the work that I've been doing looking at the issue of sustainable consumption, I've been looking back at the history of the telephone because I mean the mobile phone is a great love affair here in the UK. We've got 46 million mobile phones and we're kind of trading up all the time to smarter and smarter phones. I look back at the kind of the early history of the phone which is this sort of you know remarkable example of the way people thought it would be. When they started the phone, funny thing was with the phone actually they found that people didn't know what to say. They had these phone, well here's a phone can you try it and people did not know what to do with it. According to one early enthusiastic prediction 'Why the phone is so important? Every city would need one'. The idea was that everyone could gather round the phone to kind of hear the days news and in the early days the fire department actually kind of refused to accept phoned in reports of fires because (quotes) "It was not according to the official routine" (unquotes).

In fact the early telephone vendors kind of had struggles with the ways that the residential customers were actually choosing to use the phone. They call them kind of frivolous and an 1881 announcement complained (remember this is 400 years or whatever it is, into the founding of the RSA) '... the problems with subscribers have been free to use the wires as they please without incurring additional expenditure' (i.e. they were flat rates) 'and this has led to the

transmission of large numbers of communications of the most trivial nature'. According to one telephone manager at the time, the problem was that about 30% of the calls were purely idle gossip.

Actually it was Graham Bell who was the key who saw the great future potential of the way that we would choose to use the phone. Bell's prediction was that (quotes) "One day Mrs Smith would spend an hour on the telephone to Mrs Brown" (un-quotes) has in many ways become true.

I think I would like to say that we are on the foothills I think in many ways of a revolution in mass personalisation and we've yet to see this fully worked through. We've seen it in telephone but in other areas. In South Korea 4,000 paid journalists could be lined up alongside 25,000 unpaid journalist, web loggers and others, that now have been part of a process of even the media to beginning to fragment into personalise the delivery of news.

But is more choice less and do we end up with the paradox tyranny that Professor Schwartz has given us, with a new variant of private wealth but in some ways public squalor?

Now I think there are three critiques of choice that I've seen. One is the Fabian critique of choice. Roger Levitt's excellent report for the Fabian Society essentially saying that choice is a social construct and that choice is given to us in choice sets so that there is an illusion to way in which choices is constructed.

The second would be a kind of consequentialist critique which I think is very strong in the kind of the green or the sustainability field, looking at what the consequences of free choice are and climate change would be a great example of where you can fly to Carkison for £1 last week in France but what does that impact in terms of fossil fuel use have for future generations and also what impact does it have for other people around the world? It's a distribution of choice issue, which raises a question again of equity and whose choice are we really talking about?

In the third critique is the critique that Professor Schwartz gives us, which is really a claim on welfare and it's a psychological critique and as these quotes might suggest in many ways, this is of course true, that what he is echoing if timeless and enduring wisdom that goes right back 2,000 years or so more. We kind of all know it. It's like trying to park your car in a an empty car park, you're not quite sure where to go, it's kind of why we get tired in art galleries, it's why people have breakdowns after playing chess. That you can be the maximisor in the way the Professor Schwartz (can I call you Barry?) ... in the way the Barry suggests, but then you can live unhappily ever after and perhaps he's right, even if his students don't like it, but I want to come back to that, that the less may be better than the best.

At the same time the critique that is offered also is nothing new I would suggest, although the psychological research and the behavioural work in terms of Richard Thaler and others I think genuinely does move things on, but this is stuff that I think in many ways Fred Hirsh was talking about in the 1970s. Philosophers like Dawkin were talking about, Eric Frome wrote the book in 1942, a kind of fear of freedom. I think the real question from stoics in some ways I see you as a modern stoic, just adjust to reality around and you'll be happier. Whatever happened to the stoics?

The real question is, so what's happened to this critique, so what? How do we use what I think is a genuine insight about the subjective side, and Sheila you didn't talk so much about the subjective side of this, while I agree with much of what you said about the limits of choice in collective and State provision. What do we do with this? Where does this really take us?

The painter Kandinsky said 'Both artists and cranks can take the world apart, but only artists can put it back together again', and I think it's that process of envisioning what do we do with choice, because if more choice in some cases is less, which I take to be true (I think we have something like 4,000 mortgage products here in the UK and actually we have a really crappy system for consumers, I think

you've got 400 in the States), and certainly more can be less, but does that mean that less is more, which is not necessarily a logical following?

Looking at that issue, the cartoon of 'You'll do'. There's something I find impossible that actually you're interpreting human nature as a psychologist but there's also something almost un-human, you're trying to re-invent – no that's unfair to say, but there's a suggestion of almost reinventing human nature in the way that one needs to respond. Maximisers, satisfysers yes but they're a terribly abstract construction. It's the kind of thing researchers do. Actually we're not maximisers, we're not satisfyers, we're blancmange, we're kind of someway in the middle. I don't think you could believe and sign up, however unromantic you were, to a 'you'll do' approach to marriage, so in some way of trying to unpick the metaphors, the narratives that we need to believe in, in terms of the best.

What would art ... where would we be in terms of art if we took the view around low expectations and that low expectations were good enough? We would not have some of the great art that we do. Maybe happiness is not everything.

So looking forward I can see three ways in which you could begin to take the insights that we've been offered this evening. I mean the first is a personal level, in the kind of self-help approach to psychology and there's a lot actually in the book which Professor Schwartz hasn't talked about, so you will have to buy it to get that kind of personal guidance, self-help guide to a world of excess choice.

The second would be a Fabian view (the State view) if you like and I think it's interesting to explore that. Another quote about living with less. This is a quote by Karl Papper, which looks exactly at this issue about freedom and choice as well, and I think there is this, that can be this positive relationship between some forms of collective action and State action, and an example from the consumer side is premium rate phone lines, they're a big issue in terms of customers being ripped off. There's a pretty strict regulatory system here that came out of

consumer campaigns, ICSTIS its called and they chased down the rogues and as a result we have a far larger market for premium rate phone lines in the UK than you do in the US, because you didn't regulate it. In Germany again they didn't regulate it, they de-regulated directory enquiries and then everyone ended up being put through to porn lines.

Actually that market, those choices for using those premium rate phone options don't exist because of a lack of trust and I'm a firm believer in actually quite close regulation in relation to information that paradoxically you sometimes need to be quite careful about the way that information is put out in order that people can then use that choice. I mean an example is credit cards and APR rates. We're arguing at the moment about the font size that APR rates should be shown. That may sound completely bizarre but in some way having a level playing field in terms of information can actually open up much, much wider choice that we have in the credit card field and in the credit card market.

Now that's obviously some areas for State action, then there's the market. Why should the market not actually also provide us solutions in this field? In a world of complexity there must also be an interest and a yearning and a market for simplicity. Again the increases in choices doesn't change human nature, if we can only deal with a certain amount of choices then ultimately people begin to see that and market stuff to us in more simple ways. The selling of broadband is a perfect example. The ones who've got it right are the ones who've made it simple and have been able to sell it through to us.

So I could imagine that if the thesis is right, that we can see a new generation of simplicity brokers emerging. I think in many ways it's not choice but convenience that we should be looking at, which is the costs of making a choice. Amazon offers huge choice in terms of books, more than the local book store, but actually it is a convenient way of managing your way through that. I also think there are many ways of organising some of the traditional ways that we have made

choices. Relying on gossip and emotion. We're in the process of promoting a project called 'Trading Information', which borrows on the Better Business Bureau from the States of actually helping people to get reputation information from other consumers and Trading Standards about builders and plumbers and the like, which is one of the worst areas of choice because we are all pissed off about it. Surveys have shown up time and time again it's very hard to tell whether actually is going to rip you off or not and to be able to build on that is an example of where we create formalised systems to mimic some of the ways we have in personal terms approached choice. The whole field of reputation systems, with social networking and the like, is an interesting area to watch.

I think the last side of it really is, because there's a world in between the personal side of it and the State side of it, is civil society and that seems to me to be perhaps the most important area to look at. Benedict Arnold the historian talked about the Nation State as being an imagined community and he said the amazing thing about nationalism in the 20th century was that people imagined this fraternity across all kinds of difference in terms of class and income and so on, and what was amazing was not that so many people were willing to live for that imagination of a nation, but that so many people were willing to die for it.

In the different ways I can always think of imagination as the most powerful tool we have for social change. Looking at the different ways in which we're beginning to choose the communities that we belong to, that we're no longer born into those communities, communities of cast or class or place. We're polygamists, we're loyal to different places and the emergence of some of the new social movements around international debt, environment and the like are in some ways us choosing to be part of a community. We're choosing to act in a collective way.

So I think this issue of whether we should have more choice or less choice is too generalised, it's not subtle enough, but I also think that the consumer movement, which has been at the forefront of arguing for wider freedom of choice can also play a role in

developing a new political economy and a new agenda around choice and we're beginning to do this in fields like food, where it's quite clear that actually consumers don't necessarily want the new wheezes that industry is busy thinking up, of kind of 'Sunny D' with fortified vitamins and the like. My son Frankie asks me, "Can I get Sunny D Dad" and I said, "No Frankie I love you". We don't really want these things, actually consumers want unadulterated food, so whether it's kind of BST, Bovine Somatotropin in milk or some of the modern varieties, there's a demand there for simplicity.

I think the key elements of the new agenda of choice, alongside wider freedom of choice in many cases, is informed choice, sustainable choice and then also I think the redistribution of choice – not the redistribution of money, but the redistribution of choice, because one thing that we haven't focused so much on tonight is that issue of whose choice it is. I love this quote because it seems to me a good quote for the back of your next book Barry.

Richard Reeves: Thanks Ed. I won't easily forget the vision that I now have of the man in charge of the National Consumer Council falling through a changing room door in Carnaby Street.

Who was it that said second marriages are the triumph of hope over experience? Oscar Wilde, I thought it probably was, but I tend to attribute everything to him, so I wasn't sure.

Professor Barry Schwartz: How would he know?

Richard Reeves: Well I don't know, it's a good question. It's the question of hope really and optimism. You know maybe we need more hope and optimism than is necessarily rational for us to want. There's that great movie *Clockwise* with John Cleese in it trying to get somewhere, and the best line in it is when he says, "It's not the despair, I can cope with the despair, it's the hope that's killing me". But nonetheless, the kind of

irrational hope is what keeps driving him towards his destination.

What I'll do is go straight to you and collect some questions and ask the panel to respond.

Elizabeth Hartley-Brewer [Fellow]: I'm a writer about child development, amongst other things and I think there's a couple of aspects of choice which haven't been mentioned yet. One is the kind of moral aspect and the other is another psychological aspect, and both of these aspects I see as containing a paradox and I'd just like to raise them.

First of all is the moral one. Government is particularly interested in the use of choice in order to kind of commit people to the consequences of their decisions, so for example part of the reason for wanting parents to have choice in schools was that then the parents would be more committed to the schools and get involved in their children's education and so on but that very choice can also be twisted and used by parents to ignore strictures that their children might be removed because it was so what, I've got the choice of another school if I want to. So the same is also true of children. If you give children lots and lots of choice they never actually have to face up to the consequences of their decision. The notion of responsibility following the act of choice actually gets totally undermined when people have the opportunity to say whoops sorry wrong choice, I meant this one after all and go successively from thing to thing. So that's the paradox. It's supposed to generate responsibility but actually used to excess, it undermines that responsibility.

The second issue is a question of a identity, and it's the psychological one, that the good thing about choice is thought to be that actually once you know yourself you can express yourself through the choice, but there's so much choice now and so little sense of identity, partly because of less responsibility, but that's an aspect I won't go into now, that people are beginning to identify themselves by the consequences of their choices. It's almost the choices, their choices define who they are and that can lead to considerable unhappiness.

So again choice is about identity but actually it undermines identity.

Look at fashion, which totally obliterates identity. I'll stop there, but I think these are interesting issues.

Daniel Ben-Ami [Journalist]: I'm writing a book in defence of economic growth, arguing we need more economic growth because there's still a lot to do.

I would just like to suggest that there's another paradox of choice which hasn't been investigated, which is that if you look at the consumer-sphere, which is relatively narrow, it's absolutely true that people have a very wide range of choices, as long as they have enough money, but if you look more generally in other spheres there's actually less choice than people have had for a very long time. In fact I would argue it's completely illegitimate to look at the narrow consumer-sphere and then draw very broad sweeping conclusions about societies. Obviously if we just look at consumption, but you have to see that that is just a limited sphere of society. For example if you take human beings a political animals rather than just as consumers, it seems to me that in Western societies like America and Britain there is less political choice than there has been for a long time. There aren't political parties and organisations and candidates with very broad and very different competing visions of society and how society should be organised. Even if you compare say Britain today to Britain 20 years ago/30 years ago, in the political sphere (which is a very important sphere of human activity) those choices are very limited.

Just one other example, and I think it's a related one, if you look at the sphere of individual behaviour, in many ways the individual behaviour is more regulated than before. If you want to smoke in a lot of bars, if you want to drink in a public place, if you want to say something that is offensive to people you'll often be told well you can't say that because it's offensive, so also in the sphere of individual behaviour, people are more restricted and have less choice I would argue than before.

So yes if you want to look at shopping you can look at shopping, and there's a place to look at consumption but that is a very limited sphere of human activity.

Dr Malcolm Aickin [Fellow]: I was reminded of some of the philosophical discussions about tragedy. We used to think that tragedy arose from making the wrong choice and lots of dramatic tragedies are based on that. Of course if the only choice you have, because of a monopoly supplier, is a bad choice that is that the tragedy is multiplied and therefore of course we choose to have more choice. I think Isaiah Berlin said that the real tragedy is in choice, because when you make a choice you actually exclude a whole lot of other things, and those experiences which you will not have is the nature of tragedy. Therefore I want you to think about whether it would be a good thing to approach the way we look at choice differently and let me give you an example of what I mean.

I was the Chairman who set up a panel that dispensed grants and when we were setting it up I said to my colleagues, what are we about? And you will think that we're about giving money to good causes to do good things with, but actually our major interaction with people is going to be to turn people down, because we will turn more people down than we give money to. If we approached choice not in terms of selecting which of the more cereals than we can count we're going to eat, but in terms of rejecting the ones that we're not going to eat would it ease the psychological pain?

Richard Reeves: Great questions. My feedback form will say great questions from the audience. Let's go in the same order that we spoke. Barry?

Professor Barry Schwartz: Well let me first say how much I appreciate the formal remarks that my fellow panellists made. It's clear that they take my arguments quite seriously, even though they disagree and I value very much having these things taken seriously. It's really not about having too many different kinds of jeans or cereals to buy and I value their comments and will think hard about them.

I want to say a few things. First in the book I make a distinction between picking and choosing. You know you can use whatever words you want but what I try to convey there is that when the number of options people face is overwhelming you're forced to passive sitting as the conveyer belt of the world goes by, and it doesn't just have to be consumer goods, and every now and again reaching out and grabbing something, because it's too daunting a task to be actively engaged in choice, by which I mean thinking about why it is you're even looking, what you care about, why it's important, whether there's a possibility that none of the options is adequate, in which case you'll create your own. The more we throw options at people the more difficult we make it for people to be active choosers rather than pickers. So my view, with respect to the political problem that speaker raised is indeed you're right, there's much less choice than there used to be and there isn't enough choice and I think this is part of the problem of having too much choice in the rest of life. People don't have the time and energy to devote to being active citizens. There will never be enough choice in the political sphere unless people are willing to put effort into creating an array of political possibilities that's worth considering. No one has the time to do it. All support is purchased, at least in the United States (virtually all support), people are too busy doing other things. So I agree with you about that, we are picking and not choosing.

I never say in the book, and didn't mean to say today that the ideal is to have no choice. The ideal is to have some amount of choice that's less than the amount we have and if there are certain areas in life in which we have none, then that's probably not good but a lot of what you described as the problem in Britain that strikes me is perhaps not because there's no choice, it's because services are being badly delivered. This will be a shock to you – you haven't cornered the market on poorly delivered Government services, and it doesn't have to be a Government service to be poorly delivered. In the United States HMOs are private for profit entities and patients are just as badly treated

there as they are here and it's not because of the indifferent bureaucracy of the State, it's because of the profit driven insanity of these HMOs that tell doctors they have seven minutes to spend with each patient. So you know there's all the choice in the world you want, you can choose one mistreating doctor or another one, what you can't do is choose a doctor who's going to get to know you well enough that you have an enduring relationship that will extend over time and that will include long office visits in which you're symptoms get located in the context of a life. That's an option that is no longer available to Americans in a privatised, lots of choice health system.

One last thing about choice and identity. I think that was a terrific, both comments about the development issues were really striking to me. It's not clear you can have an identity unless it's enduring and the problem with having all of this ability to flit in and out of things is that there isn't any one of those things that's you. Post-modernists think this is progress and I think it's a complete disaster. There is no 'you' anymore. There's the 'weekend you', the 'month of February you', it keeps changing. Partly because we admire all of this choice, partly because it's thrust upon us and so you're right, choice isn't a reflection of who you are, because there isn't any 'you' there and this is not a good thing. Similarly with respect to choosing community. Albert Hirschman made an important distinction many years ago in the ways people can respond to dissatisfaction, two in particular. One is exit and the other is voice. Exit is the response of choice when we are dissatisfied with things in the market, this store doesn't do the job you walk out and you go to that one. Voice is the response to dissatisfaction when you are talking about things like communities. You don't exit your community, you try to change it, so that it becomes the kind of community that you want to live in. Voluntary communities I think increasingly are viewed by people as like shopping malls, just like churches – you don't like that one, you leave it and you find one that you do like. What that will mean is that the only response to people have to dissatisfaction is exit and the result is that significant social institutions that enable people to live coherent

lives with others won't have any of the glue that's needed to keep them going for extended periods of time. So voluntary community is a very mixed blessing I would say.

Dr Sheila Lawlor: I think in a way the ladies question and yours were quite linked, the relationship between choice and responsibility are your point. I was very interested in your view of why you encouraged choice in order to encourage responsibility and how despite this, people have less choice now than they had in the past. My own view is that I think in a sense both are true, but one of the reasons why as a society we are exercising this responsibility is that we're given less choice over the things that really matter and I think that people are sufficiently critical not to spend too much time worrying about unimportant things but they spend a great deal of time being concerned about what matters. A less responsible society is probably one which has too little choice over things which really matter and things of quality. So when you talked about the differences today by comparison with 20 or 30 years ago in voting, in patterns of what was on offer in politics and so on I think this is probably very true. Indeed there's a great deal less choice 20 years ago than there was 120 years ago but then on the other hand there were differences in society. I think that I would agree with the general premise that choice and responsibility go together and I think that if we don't have choice, even unimportant choices, we will in the end undermine the responsibility I think everybody wants.

Ed Mayo: Well just to say a word on politics and then this point about is an associational life where people will flit in and out of different communities, is that going to be a shallow life or is it something that will rebuild citizenship and solidarity possible at new levels, at global levels which are also required? I think that that challenge is a fair one. The associational life can be exclusive but it also seems to me that it is probably one of the major shows on the road, that at the moment you have on the one hand you have an attack on the State in many ways and many

forces and on the other hand you have kind of the authority of ethical descent of the anti-globalisation and global justice movement that talks about process values and accountability and the like. It seems to me that the positive signs of people choosing to engage in new communities, not in the way that we shop but in terms of things that we are prepared to put time into, that we care about such as the rise of the environmental movement. It seems to me that those are positive signs and I feel it's a bit like the middle of the 19th century where you had a huge ferment in terms of the rise of mutual groups, working men's clubs, trades unions, cooperatives and the like but something that was in no way reflected in the party politics of the day. I feel as if there is that same disjuncture that we have at the moment here in the UK as we do in the States, these two great broad churches of left and right that seek to add up all of these things and give us the Oxford versus Cambridge boat race that has been referred to.

I think beneath the surface there is a huge amount of contradictory, challenging, difficult but also I think potentially exciting models of new community and new associational life forming. The disjuncture with politics I think will heal over time, but it's partly that those people are organising around things that the State has failed on. Human rights issues, environmental issue, these are not areas of State concern and yet they are the kind of narratives ... David Markwins' recent book on the public realm talks about the apparent importance of these kinds of narratives of fairness being how you knit people together. I think you knit people together not by assuming that they're part of a community, not by assuming that they've got to put more time into a political system that they're maybe distrustful of and not assuming that the current parties will necessarily be the answer to that but actually giving them choice and reforming political systems and institutions around that in a new way.

Richard Reeves: Three quick questions please.

Javier Bajer [CEO of the Talent Foundation]: Barry you inspired my thinking

here and I was just thinking about the word decide. I think we got decide and choice kind of confused. Decide comes from the same family of words as homicide and suicide, that means to kill off and that's what hurts, you know when we have to decide, that's the energy that goes away and you get troubled by decisions. Choice is powerful. Choice puts you in the driving seat. I love to choose but I hate to decide.

Mike Bury [Fellow]: Can I just raise a different point very quickly, and that is your several references to depression. It used to be said that the rich and depressed ought to think a little bit more about the poor and depressed as they've got something to be depressed about. I think the epidemiology of depression doesn't really fit the kind of image you are giving. It is more prevalent among poorer people, particularly among poorer women. The epidemiology is quite clear, and I think you have to look very closely and be a bit careful, particularly in the States and in other countries, where the consumption of anti-depressants and tranquilisers is not the same as of course the question of whether these are really true clinical depressions. 48% of the pharmaceutical consumption in the world occurs in the US, nearly half of all consumption, so I think one has to be very careful if you're going to appeal part of your argument is that somehow this is productive of depression. I think that needs to be treated with a bit more caution I suggest.

Dr Karen Moloney [Fellow]: I got in the back of a taxi recently in Liverpool and the cab driver took me past Everton's football ground and then proceeded to moan for 20 minutes about how badly his team had done for the last few years. "Why don't you change you allegiance?" I suggested, he slammed the brakes on as if I was going through the windscreen and he turned round and said to me, "My wife asked me just before we married to become a Catholic and I changed my religion for her. If she had asked me to change my football team I would have called it all off". My point is this, we sometimes seem to make choices that cause us immeasurable suffering, why do we do this?

Richard Reeves: I'm sure you can knock all that on the head in 60 seconds Barry.

Barry Schwartz: Well on the depression you're right certainly that poor people suffer greater frequency of depression than affluent people, but the increase in depression is across all socio-economic groups and it's a huge magnitude increase. When you're comparing across different epochs you have to worry about whether people are more likely to report it now or whether the criteria for counting someone as depressed have gotten more lax and that's why I find telling that the evidence on suicide exactly matches the evidence on depression, there is very little ambiguity about whether people kill themselves. That's also a) increasing dramatically two or threefold and b) occurring in younger and younger people in virtually every developed society. Not all, but almost all (and I don't want to be reductionistic about this) so I certainly don't think that what I talked about is 'the' explanation, I think it contributes to the explanation and it's a paradox because one of the principle theories of the causes of depressions that's non-biochemical focused on how being able to make choices ought to inoculate people against depression. Choice and control are the antidote to depression and yet we're seeing in a world where people have more choice than ever before more depression. It's not so much why do people bad choices because there are a lot of reasons for that, why do they stick with them? Here too it seems to me that we shouldn't underestimate choice and it shouldn't be easy to give up your allegiance to your football team, just as it shouldn't be easy to give up your allegiance to your wife. You ought to feel that the right thing to do is to struggle to make the relationship between you and your team, you and your spouse, you and your church one that works. By changing yourself, by changing your partner rather than just giving it up and exiting and finding another one and I think that the dominate response of people in my country these days is that you, when you're dissatisfied, you leave and find another and since there are so many others out there, why would anyone put in the work? Rush Limbaugh attacked me on the radio after I published an up-ed piece in the *New York Times* and I didn't get to hear him because you'll be

shocked to know that I'm not a regular listener but the one piece of summary that I got was that yeah men are unhappy that they have so many women to choose from. So this to him was the knock-down demonstration that I had to be insane to be thinking that too much choice could possibly be a bad thing. With all those women to choose from, if your wife gets up on the wrong side of the bed, you just ditch her and find another one. This is not progress.

Richard Reeves: On Rush Limbaugh's marital advice would be a good moment on which to close.

It only remains for me to thank all of you, especially those of you who I can see have made it to all three lectures in this series, Oscar Wilde definitely said that there are not enough evenings in the week for socialism, but some of you have made three evenings to come to this series and I'm very grateful to all of you.

If you would join me in thanking the panel I'd be grateful. Thanks.