

Philosophy of the Human Person

Lecture #31

Determinism

(The Doctrine of Necessity)

the question of whether human choices are free from causal determination

it is a matter of ordinary experience that they are (as Searle admits)

though some argue that ordinary experience is misleading (cf. Freud)

still, there should be some *argument* from those who would reject it

three kinds of argument for of determinism

from metaphysics—universal causality

(1) Every event has a cause by which it is invariably determined

(2) Human actions are events

(3) So, human actions are invariably determined by their causes

(4) If human actions are invariably determined by their causes, then human agents are not free to do what they choose

(5) So, human agents are not free to do what they choose

from theology—God's foreknowledge

(1) If God knows everything then He knows everything that I will ever do

(2) If He knows everything I will do then I am not free to do otherwise than what He knows I will do

(3) God does know everything

(4) So, I am not free to do otherwise than what God knows I will do

from science

first, an image

“We may regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause of its future. An intelligence which at a given moment knew all the forces that animate nature, and the respective positions of the beings that compose it, and further possessing the scope to analyse these data, could condense into a single formula the movement of the greatest bodies of the universe and that of the least atom: for such an intelligence nothing could be uncertain, and past and future alike would be before its eyes.”—Marquis Pierre Simon de Laplace, *Essai philosophique sur les probabilités* (1820)

then a general argument

- (1) Every event is completely determined by laws
as science shows us
- (2) Human actions are events
- (3) So, human actions are completely determined by laws
or (also general)

(1) These cannot both be true:

- (1a) some human beings are capable of free action, and
- (1b) determinism [= every single event is completely
determined by past states of affairs and scientific law]

(2) Determinism is true [as science shows us]

So, (3) No human beings are capable of free action

Searle's version, with explicit appeal to reductionism

- (1) Anything that is nothing but a collection of elementary particles is
a thing whose motions are completely determined by law
since (2) Elementary particles are things whose motions are
completely determined by law
and (3) If so [i.e., [2]], then anything that is nothing but a
collection of elementary particles is a thing whose motions
are completely determined by law
- (4) Human beings are nothing but collections of elementary particles
So, (5) Human beings are things whose motions are completely
determined by law

Mill against Freedom in Choice

the question—does the law of causality apply in the same strict sense to human actions as to other phenomena?

two possible answers

doctrine of necessity

human volitions & actions are necessary & inevitable

doctrine of free will

volitions are not determined by antecedents

the will determines itself

(NB: distinguish the feeling of free will, which is compatible with necessity from the doctrine of free will, which is not)

the argument against freedom of the will

(1) From (i) the motives present to an individual's mind, & (ii) the character & disposition of the individual one can infer the manner in which he will act

(2) The best explanation of the possibility of prediction is that the motives and character cause the behavior

So, (3) they do.

the argument for the possibility of making predictions (i.e., for P1)

no one with complete knowledge would hesitate to make a prediction
= anyone who hesitated would appeal to incomplete knowledge

objections & replies

objection—necessity is not compatible with our feeling of freedom

reply #1

Whatever is compatible with our friends being able to predict our actions is compatible with our actions being unerringly inferred by anyone who knows our motives, character & dispositions.

The feeling of being free is compatible with our friends being able to predict our actions.

So, The feeling of being free is compatible with our actions being unerringly inferred by anyone who knows our motives, character & dispositions.

reply #2

Whatever is consistent with God's foreknowledge is consistent with any other foreknowledge.

The freedom of the will is consistent with God's foreknowledge.

So, The freedom of the will is consistent with any other foreknowledge.

objections to the replies

to reply #1—our really being free is not compatible with our friends' being able to predict with certainty (FW ↑ P)

so, if P2 is true ($F \supset P$)

then we have the feeling of freedom without being free ($F \supset \sim FW$)

to reply #2—God's foreknowledge may be different

perhaps God's foreknowledge is based on his timelessness; anyone else's would be based on knowledge of antecedents

then, other foreknowledge, depending on determination by antecedents, would be incompatible with freedom

God's, depending on all things being present to him, would be compatible with freedom

rejection of the doctrine of necessity is based on widespread misconception of the doctrine of necessity

the misconception—

causation not merely a matter of “invariable, certain, & unconditional sequence”

but “mysterious constraint exercised by the antecedent over the consequent”

the proper view of causation

no such mysterious constraint exists between any antecedent condition & volition or action

if one did, it would be contrary to consciousness, &c.

but then no such constraint exists between *any* cause & its effect

cf. Hume's analysis of causality