

PHIL 100: Paper 3

Freedom and the Problem of Free will and Determinism

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Most of us would agree that our world as it is now, is to the most part deterministic. On the other hand it seems that we also have free will, or at least we have come to believe, that is case. So how can these two seemingly contradictory ideas, that the world is deterministic and that we all have free will both be true? If the world that we live in is indeed deterministic then we should not have free will, since even our actions can be predetermined. In his essay *Of Liberty and Necessity*¹ Hume suggests a plausible solution to this problem. To Hume freedom and determinism (or liberty and necessity as he calls it) are indeed both. He says that the two seem to be incompatible due to the confusion involving causation. To him, causes do not compel effects but rather they merely always occur after them². Taylor – in his essay *Freedom and Determinism*³ seems to disagree with Hume. He says that Hume's argument fails.

Let us first outline the problem at hand. The doctrine of determinism says that for every event has a predetermined cause, and that every event is also the cause of something else. In this way we have what seems to be a causation chain. In other words, the future is completely determined by the present. The problem here is that, in that case how can we say that we have free will, in particular – no one can really be blamed for anything they did, since it was already predetermined and thus not their fault at all. But if that is true then the very fabric of our society seems to break down. But if we then discard determinism as false, we have no reason to perceive an endeavor such as the pursuit of scientific knowledge, since all science is built primarily on the basis of determinism⁴.

Hume's solution to this was to point out the apparent fact that there seems to be a mistake in people thinking about causation. He says that events do not occur due to the causes but are merely always followed by it. So in other words although someone else may be causing one to do harm its one's own decision to follow through with actually doing it. Although there may be a causal sequence, one's own desire also seems to be a part of this sequence. His definition of Liberty is the power to act according to one's own will.

Richard Taylor on the other hand, in his essay *Freedom and Determinism*³, does not agree with Hume's point of view on this. Taylor says that what we do may be out of free will, but he thinks that the free will itself is what if deterministic also. Thus Hume's argument falls apart. Taylor gives an example of a man who acts according to his inner volitions and is thus seemingly free. But unknown to him there is someone controlling his inner voice. According to Hume this man is still free. But there seems to be a problem here, Taylor points out. This man is obviously not really free to do what he wants, since his voice is itself being controlled and he listen to his inner voice.

So to conclude Taylor seems to have a point. Although Hume's argument gives a very good solution to the problem at hand, as Taylor pointed out there is an obvious flaw in the argument.

References:

1. Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings, pg. 426 – 436.
2. Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings, pg. 312c,d.
3. Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings, pg. 437 – 449.
4. The Structure and Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics, by R.I.G.Hughes, pg. 74c - 75b