

FREEDOM AND DETERMINISM

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Abstract

'Freedom and Determinism' is a conflicting postulate with reference to the nature of human conduct. Is man free or is everything determined? Freedom is a matter of choice based on rationality, intelligence and knowledge. Moral freedom implies both choice and responsibility. – Man is morally good because, he enjoys freedom which makes life meaningful. So, freedom and social responsibility go hand in hand. Determinists argue that free will is impossible and preceding causes necessitate everything. Naturalistic determinists consider man a part of causal chain. His actions are determined by antecedent causes. Hence, man is an 'instrumental cause. Theistic Determinists trace man's actions to God's controlling hand. Hard-determinists believe that determinism is true and moral responsibility is an illusion. So, determinism is incompatible with free will and moral responsibility. They interpret freedom as the 'Liberty of indifference.' In the opinion of soft determinists, determinism is true but man can make choices, which are the effects of certain antecedent events. So, freedom and determinism are compatible and interpret freedom as the 'Liberty of Spontaneity'. According to libertarians, determinism is false, freedom is possible and man is morally responsible for his actions. Freedom and determinism, being an ethical problem sometimes seems to deny each other and some other times seem to co-inhere in our life. The paper argues that freedom, however limited it may be, is a 'fact' of experience while, determinism is mostly a matter of 'faith', and whether to accept the fact or the faith, depends on one's individual choice and belief. Both represent different attitudes of man. So, the key is more 'attitudinal' than 'conceptual'.

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Man being the apex in the ladder of evolution, has the quality to think rationally, will freely and act deliberately. This rationality signifies the natural and necessary urge in human beings to know themselves and the world in which they live, move and have their being. Rationality in him led to the intellectual inquiry, which in turn resulted in the accumulation of facts, its classifications, generalisation, interpretation, etc., and so the scientific growth. But philosophy, which claims to be at the vertex of the whole process of intellectual inquiry, cannot rest satisfied with these things, but try to penetrate into the ultimate meaning of facts. This intellectual quest for truth is the basis of philosophical enquiry. Thus the etymological meaning of the word 'philosophy' is "Love of Learning" or "Love of Wisdom".

Philosophy makes an attempt to understand the world as a whole – particularly its meaning, purpose and value. The purpose of philosophy is not to solve the social, economic or the political problems, but to think carefully and systematically about certain fundamental questions which concern us viz., the origin of the world, man, concept of soul, immortality, space, time, matter, mind, causal law, existence of evil, freedom, determinism, etc.

Issues of Freedom and Determinism

Rousseau says, "Man is born free, but bound by chains." Then the question arises – is this man really free? If so, in what way is he free? This is a conflicting issue, which attracts the attention of the common man, since each individual has to face it and answer it for himself in his day-to-day life. But, this concept of 'freedom' was considered to be a metaphysical issue by the philosophers. Hence the concepts – 'Freedom' and 'Determinism' worried the philosophers very much and attracted the attention of all leading philosophical systems of past and present.

The two intricate issues – 'Freedom' and 'Determinism' are considered to be the conflicting postulates as to the nature of human conduct. The answers for this debatable issue vary from individual to individual and in the same individual, at different stages and at different moments. Hence the varied doctrines and the varied theories. But the main focus of these varied theories was in answering the following certain questions from their own standpoints:

1. Is man free?
2. If so, in what sense is he free?

3. Can he choose freely?
4. Are human choices and actions causally determined?
5. If there is a cause, is it a natural cause or a physical cause or a psychological cause or a religious one?
6. If there is a 'God' who has the foreknowledge of what man will do, can man have free choice?
7. Is man solely responsible for his decisions, actions and behaviors? Or are they determined by external factors?
8. If determinism is true, then what about our free actions?
9. Can we consider "our will" as free? Or is this free will a myth?

The freedom with which I'm dealing, is not either the social freedom or the civil or the political freedom but the ethical freedom - in relation to the concept free will. The conditions of free will are:

1. There must be two or more possibilities genuinely open to us when we have a choice.
2. It should not be a forced one.
3. Choices should be in the context of reasons, purposes, deliberations and the like.

So, when a man chooses freely, he will be held responsible for his choice and his force of conduct. The concept 'free will' plays a central role in our thinking about the world outside and in the introspection of our own actions, i.e. in our finding persons morally responsible for the things that they have done.

Ordinarily freedom is understood in the sense that, people are free when they are not prevented from doing what they want to do and conducting their lives as they deem fit. In politics and political philosophy, freedom usually means having civil or political liberty, i.e. having certain rights codified in the constitution. But, in the realm of metaphysics and ethics, the term 'freedom' refers to a very basic feature of decisions and actions. For e.g., a writer is free even under house arrest means he may not be enjoying the civil liberty, but he will be free in the ethical and metaphysical sense. Swami Vivekananda, in his lecture on freedom says that when a person is imprisoned, punished severely to obey the orders of the guards and given the orders for prosecution, even then, he feels a core of freedom within himself. Outwardly, he may not express his freedom, but inwardly, he has the freedom to curse his guards or wish their death. Therefore, it seems that at the centre of every thing man perceives or acts, there is an undeniable sense of freedom.

There may be a number of external limitations placed upon a man's activity. But these limitations, however strong they may be, cannot destroy the inner freedom which is structural to him. In fact, more the intensity of external limitations, greater will be the intensity of inner feeling and the urge for freedom on the part of man. So freedom cannot be taken away entirely from man. This shows that "freedom is the inner core of human existence and cannot be taken away from him except in death", says Jean Paul Sartre in his *Existentialism and Human Freedom*.

Every man has the free choice to do either good or bad. So, in order to claim that the agent has done something, he must be free in doing so. But in either case, the individual is responsible for his choice. To do what is 'right' means obviously to 'will' rightly. To say 'will' is to say 'free'. To 'will' is to choose one or the other possible alternative. Thus freedom is an essential condition of moral life and the first fundamental postulate of ethics.

Various Views on Freedom

According to Kant, "Man is free" [in his *Critique of Pure Reason*] in the sense that he is 'self determined'. To have freedom of will means that one is determined by nothing but oneself. Therefore, he says, each one is the shaper of his own destiny.

Free will is antecedent to choice. That means, freedom is a matter of how the choice is made and by whom. We are free when an integrated self, acting without compulsion, without being divided against it, makes choices. Hence the choices must also be 'rational' in some sense involving intelligence and knowledge. Hence, Sartre proclaims, "Man is free."

Moral freedom implies both choice and responsibility. Man is responsible not only for what he does but also for what he refuses to do, since both are basically matters of choice. So, to be responsible, he must be answerable for all his actions. This is called "free will", says Sartre.

Thomas Aquinas says that man has free will as he is a rational animal and it is necessary that he must have a free choice. He says, "Deliberations about what I shall do assumes that what I shall do, is up to me."

In the *Bhagavad Gita* [ch.18, v.63] Lord Krishna says to Arjuna, "You are having full freedom to choose any path. You can use your reason and do whatever you feel correct and best", supporting the view that he enjoys freedom.

Sartre disagrees with the traditional religions which accept the existence of God, possessing the attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience. Existentialists show that each of the attributes conflicts with human freedom.

God's omnipresence denies human freedom because: God is present in man, and controls and determines man's thought and actions. Therefore man cannot be free and in the interest of human freedom, God's omnipresence cannot be accepted.

Similarly, God cannot be said to be omnipotent because: If God is omnipotent, then he can deny to man all possibilities of action except one in which case, man feels compelled to act only in that particular way as determined by God. This amounts to the denial of freedom and therefore God's omnipotence cannot be accepted.

God's omniscience also cannot be accepted because: If God is omniscient, and then that means, He knows my future or what I will do tomorrow. This implies that I will do tomorrow what God already knows and that amounts to determinism. In other words, the thoughts and plans that are already present in God's mind are being executed through us. Thus, God's omniscience conflicts with human freedom and hence cannot be accepted.

Thus Existentialism denies the traditional conception of God and says if man wants freedom, he must be courageous enough to accept the responsibility for what he does. He must be prepared to accept the consequences of his acts and must feel responsible not only for himself but also for all others or to the entire humanity. In doing such an act, he will be creating a model to the society. Thus, Sartre combines individual freedom with 'social responsibility' and 'conscience', which are the touchstones of ethical life. One must act to satisfy one's own conscience. Hence, one must lead a moral life not with the hope of getting any type of salvation but because of the 'responsibility and conscience' that he has, as a member of the society. So, in his opinion, man is morally good because, he enjoys freedom.

Though, according to Sartre, it is only freedom that makes life meaningful, he also feels that he is 'not completely free' and has limited freedom. He says,

"Just as I am not free to cease being free, I am not free to die." It implies that freedom has meaning so long as one lives, but there is no freedom to choose one's death.

According to Kant, man is a rational being and it is this 'reason' which informs the law of our action. This, he considers the 'categorical imperative'. He is of the opinion that "a will is free, if it is governed entirely by its own law. i.e. the rational law." It is an obligation on our part to be moral and to do moral acts. So, man is morally free.

Influenced by Newton, Kant also puts forth his view that the laws of physical nature govern this world as a whole. That means anything that occurs in nature will be according to the laws of physical nature and completely governed by it. Hence, in nature, there is no scope of being something else. Man being a part of nature cannot be free. So, there is no place for freedom to man in nature. That means man is not free as a natural being, and according to Kant, 'phenomenal man' is not free. If man is not free, then the questions that arise may be: how can we say that he can be morally free? How could freedom be present in the world?

Thus according to Kant, his natural self or the phenomenal self is not allowing him to be free while his rational self dictates him to consider that he is free and allows him to be a moral person bound by morality. Thus, for Kant, "Man is not free as a part of natural phenomena while he is free as a part of noumenal self."

To sum up, we can come to the conclusion that we should be careful in being free with respect to our own actions because,

1. We just do them as we think that we are in control of our actions. Hence, freedom is not an illusion. It is true that some actions are freely performed.
2. Freedom is needed for moral responsibility. In the absence of freedom it seems that no one would ever be truly responsible for one's actions.
3. Freedom seems necessary from the point of view of reasoning. In the absence of freedom it seems that it would be futile to even deliberate about what to do or what to believe.

Views on Determinism

Opposite to the theory of Freedom is the Deterministic theory, which is based on the thesis that all our actions, mental status, choices and decisions are the effects necessitated by preceding causes. Thus our future is in fact fixed and unalterable in much the same way that the past is. Thus, determinism argues that the concept of free will is impossible to define meaningfully. If free will means that objects and events occur without cause or determinants, then events and actions of people become unpredictable and chaos reigns. However, this is not clearly the case as there is no rational or scientific basis for that conception. Determinism is the theory that all human actions are caused entirely by preceding events and not by the exercise of the 'will'. This theory is based on the metaphysical principle that 'uncaused event is impossible'.

It is argued by some other philosophers that there is no real freedom of will, since men are determined by circumstances and external influences. E.g., A person may not wish to sell poison, but he may be forced to sell it, because of external circumstances.

Some are of the opinion that belief in free will is grounded in ignorance rather than in knowledge. Spinoza argues with reference to free will that, "Men are deceived, because they think themselves free. The sole reason for thinking so is that, they are conscious of their own actions and ignorant of the causes by which those actions are determined." Further, he says, "freedom is an illusion based on ignorance. Consequently, those who believe that they do anything from a free decree of mind, dream with their eyes open." Thus, in his opinion, we are not free, as we do not have the eternal perspective – the eyes of God. This eternal perspective only determines whether we are free or not.

Euripides says, "Among mortals, there is no man free. He is slave to riches or else to fortune." Aristotle also quotes this statement to illustrate a certain logical form of argument. It also emphasises that we are slaves to external circumstances only, so far as our hopes and fears are concerned.

One of the most widespread doctrines denying human freedom is 'Fatalism'. There is cosmic power, 'fate', which ordains the course of each man's life, his destiny. Supporting Fatalism, the Koran says, "All things move towards a determined end." Marcus Aurelius in his '*Meditations*' explains the fatalistic

theory as, "Whatever befalls you, was preordained for you from eternity." The Greek tragedians gave fate dominance even over God's favour, which means to say that even His favour on man is not enough to exempt him from Fate's decrees. Hence Homer's saying, "No one has ever escaped his destiny." Even the modern period writers support fatalism. This is reflected clearly in O'Henry's 'Thousand and One Nights' from his collection, "*Roads of Destiny*". Hindu doctrine – Law of Karma supports the same.

There are many kinds of determinists: Physical determinists like Democritus and Lucretius; Natural determinists like Thomas Hobbs and B.F. Skinner; Historical determinists like Karl Marx; Theological determinists like Jonathan Edwards; Metaphysical determinists like Spinoza, Leibnitze, etc.

Naturalistic determinists like Thomas Hobbes and B.F. Skinner argue that man's behavior can be fully explained in terms of natural causes. They consider human beings to be part of the machinery of the universe. In such a world, every event is caused by the preceding events, which in turn were caused by still earlier events, *ad infinitum*. Since man is a part of this causal chain, his actions are also determined by antecedent causes. Some of these causes are environmental and man's genetic make-up. These are so determinative that no one could rightly say that, a given action could have been performed otherwise, than in fact it was performed.

According to B.F. Skinner [in his *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*], all human behavior is controlled by the genetic and the environmental factors. These factors do not rule out the fact that human beings make choices, but they do rule out the possibility that these choices are true. For Skinner, all human choices are determined by antecedent physical choices. Hence, man is viewed as an 'instrumental cause' of his behavior. He is like a hammer in the grip of a carpenter. He does not originate action but is the instrument with which some other agent performs the action.

Thus, naturalistic determinists maintain that heredity and environment are the external causes of human action.

Theistic determinists like Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards trace man's actions to God's controlling hand. That means God determines all events including man's behavior. As God is sovereign, he is in control of all things, be it human or otherwise. No one could act contrary to his will. Jonathan

Edwards says in his book, *Freedom of the Will*, that, "Human freedom is not the power to do what one decides but rather, what one desires. The cause of man's desires is God and man always acts in accordance with Him. Thus freedom is not uncaused, which is nonsensical but caused by God."

In the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, [v. 33] Lord Krishna says, "O Arjuna, your enemies have already been killed by Me. Be you, but the apparent cause of their death." It explains that man is just an instrument in the hands of God and every thing has been determined by His plans.

Spinoza, Leibnitze, Ramanujacharya and others are great champions of Metaphysical determinism. According to them, we think of ourselves as independent and free but in fact everything really follows from God. Spinoza's theory of determinism and Leibnitze's theory of pre-established harmony affirm that God has determined everything; man acts according to His whims and fancies. For practical purposes, man may think that he is a free agent but actually the individual is carrying His instructions, only being a puppet in His hands.

Ramanujacharya also explains that souls are dependent on Brahman as the body is dependent on the soul, which controls, supports and utilises all for its own end. Being a subordinate element, they will be having no existence or purpose to serve apart from Him. This implies that He will determine everything.

Libertarians

Libertarians are those who believe that determinism is false and freedom and moral responsibility belongs to man. Hence, they are called incompatibilists. Reid, Kant, Campbell, Taylor uphold this view. They are of the opinion that determinism is incompatible with acting freely. Thus for the libertarians, determinism is false and that freedom is possible.

Libertarians agree with hard determinists that determinism is a fact with respect to events in the universe. Events are determined by antecedent causes. But they say that most events are strictly determined, but not all. So free will exists and is incompatible with determinism. The libertarian's argument is:

Some human actions are free.

If determinism is true, then no human actions are free.

Determinism is false.

As they are indeterminists, they insist that there is more scope to freedom of will than to mere determinism. If we are not free, there can be no sense of moral responsibility. But we need this concept of moral responsibility so much for the well functioning of our society that we must assume that this type of free will exists in the world. Though it is a pragmatic approach, it seems to be convincing. Thus, libertarians hold that freedom and determinism cannot both be true. Therefore, determinism is false and freedom is possible.

Hard Determinists

The philosophers who believe that determinism is true and moral responsibility an illusion, are called 'Hard Determinists'. Spinoza, Jonathan Edwards, Schopenhauer, Freud, Clarence Darrow, B.F. Skinner support this view. In their opinion:

1. Determinism is incompatible with free will and moral responsibility.
2. Man is governed by the physical, chemical and natural laws of the universe.
3. All actions are determined by antecedent causes. Given the antecedent cause, the actions cannot be what they are. Taylor says [in his *Action and Purpose*], "For every thing that exists, there are antecedent conditions, known or unknown, given which things could not be other than it is."
4. As there is no freedom, consequently there will be no such thing as moral responsibility. Even if there were a concept of moral responsibility, it would be incompatible with determinism. Hence determinism and moral responsibility are incompatible concepts.

Hard determinists' argument is:

Determinism is true.

If determinism is true, then no human action is free.

Therefore, no human action is free.

They interpret freedom as the 'Liberty of Indifference'. As they hold that freedom and determinism are not compatible with each other, they are called Incompatibilists. They are hard determinists because their position is very strict and they say that all events are strictly determined and consequently there is no moral responsibility on the part of man, since freedom is incompatible with determinism.

The Incompatibilists hold that there are two kinds of causation – Event causation (Natural Laws) and the Agent causation (God) operating in the world. Hence a person's decision can be 'reduced' to the sum total outcome of these causes. It turns a person into a sort of human-like Robot, so craftily constructed and so well guided by a superior computer program that, it acts as though it were making free choices. But in fact, the creator of the Robot and its software determine all of these choices in advance. Thus Robot cannot be morally responsible and be hardly thought of as creative agents.

Soft Determinists

There are philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, Hume, J.S Mill, G.E Moore, William James, A.J Ayer, Frankhurl, etc. who consider that freedom and determinism are compatible. They believe that, if we say that determinism is true, it does not mean that we are not free and responsible. The outcome of choice is determined by the criteria used by the agent, which belongs to him. So by this we can say that people are responsible for their actions. As they say that both freedom and determinism are compatible, they are called Compatibilists or Soft Determinists.

In their opinion, determinism is true. All events are determined. But man can make choices also. But these choices are the effects of certain antecedent events. That means they are determined by the way they are 'set-up'. Hence they would have done something differently, if the antecedent events were different. But because they are never different, the outcome is strictly determined. The outcome is always the same. Thus according to soft determinists,

1. Determinism is true. Everything is determined by antecedent causal events. What occurs now is determined by the past events.
2. Free will has meaning through reference to a type of deliberation that goes in the agent who does the action.
3. When a person does the action on his choice deliberately, then that means he is open to moral critique.
4. So even though determinism is true, there is moral responsibility.
5. Moral responsibility is a social concept, having social worth as a principle of regulating one's behaviour.

They interpret freedom as the "Liberty of Spontaneity", the power to do as we choose to act as we will. According to them, there is only one kind of causation in the world i.e., Event Causation.

These compatibilists think of freedom as being able to act in accord with one's desires and decisions even if these desires and decisions are themselves the influences of more remote causes, outside the agent. In other words, desires and decisions are the causes of one's actions, which in turn are caused by other things which lie at the end of the chain of cause and effect, that goes back to the time before the agent was born.

Thus soft determinists hold that freedom and determinism are compatible with one another and so freedom is possible. According to William James [in his *Pragmatism*], man deliberates, chooses and decides what he really wants. That means here the individual determines himself and he is the self with a 'definite content'. Therefore, here the individual's free will is responsible for all the good and evil consequences.

We can sum up the views of all the groups discussed above in the following table:

	Freedom (F)	Determinism(D)	Not both F&D
Libertarians	True	False	True
Hard determinists	False	True	True
Soft determinists	True	True	False

Thus, the paradoxical phases of freedom and determinism seem to be a persistent one in man's actual being. They sometime seem to deny each other, while at some other times, they seem to co-inhere our life. This is mainly an ethical problem though it has much wider philosophical implication. Moral life signifies freedom from the limits of logical necessity and elevates man to the status of moral being from that of purely 'logical' being because, 'life is deeper than logic'.

Freedom and Determinism: A Matter of Fact and Faith, and Attitudes

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan argues that our life is like a game of Bridge combining both the concepts: Freedom and Determinism. While giving the cards, we have no selection – that means determinism. But while playing, we are free to move as we think fit and lead. Till the end there is a choice. Hence we are free.

So we may say that 'freedom' however limited it may be, is a 'fact' of experience, while determinism is mostly a matter of 'faith'.

Whether we should accept the fact or the faith is a question of option and the answer to it depends on the individual's choice and belief because, both of them represent different attitudes of man himself. As Ted Honderich says, the controversy springs from the ambiguity of talk on freedom. The problem is more attitudinal than conceptual. Hence, it cannot bring ultimate conclusion. As B. Russell says, 'Let the people think'.