

The Existence of Free-will

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Introduction

The concepts of free will is a central concept in Christianity. Almost all other concepts and doctrines in Christianity are based on the assumption that the concept of free will is true. Yet, as an important concept, free-will poses some difficulties with other basic concepts in Christianity. The compatibility between divine foreknowledge of God and free-will has been in discussion for a long time.

In this paper, it will be argued that there is such thing as free-will. The paper will base the argument for the existence of free-will in philosophical and scientific ground. The paper outline is as follows:

The notion of free-will

Here the notion of free-will will be explained. The notion explained here is be the basis of what we mean by free-will in the rest of the paper.

The necessity of free-will

Here it will be argued why the concept of free-will is necessary to be true. It will be argued also that the concepts of fatalism, the theological and logical one, is unintelligible and must be rejected. Since the argument for theological fatalism often used to argue the fact that free-will and Divine foreknowledge are incompatible, it will also be shown that there is a possible way to have a compatible solution for the problem of free-will and Divine foreknowledge.

The Physical Basis for free-will

Here it will be argued that a physical basis in the brain is needed if we want to seriously consider the phenomenon of free-will. It will be shown that choices are not made because they are causally determined only by the brain states.

The Notion of Free-will

A person is said to be free with regard to an action if that person can freely choose to perform that action and can freely choose to refrain from performing it. It is also required that there is no causal law and physical law that will cause that free person to either perform or refrain from performing an action. This means that the person has the power to make either choices. For example, a person who falls from a high building is no longer free since he is in the air, for he cannot choose not to fall. It is also required that the person is not coerced, with or without his knowing, to make one choice or the other. For example, if someone points a gun on my head and tells me to stop writing, then I am not free. However, if for example I choose to stop writing because I feel tired, then I am still free. This means internal causal such as body conditions, motivation, and emotional or rational reasoning cannot be used to deny freedom. If I choose to keep writing because this paper needs to be turned in, I am still free. This means social construct and law cannot be used as a way to deny free-will.

Free-will and Divine Foreknowledge

The counter concept of free-will is known as fatalism. The most influential contemporary argument for theological fatalism was put forward by Nelson Pike. Nelson Pike argues that Divine foreknowledge and free-will are not compatible. His argument asks us to consider a

hypothetical individual, named Jones, who mows his lawn on Saturday. Pike then proceeds the formulation of his argument as follows:

1. God's being omniscient necessarily implies that if Jones mows his lawn on Saturday afternoon, then God believed at an earlier time that Jones would mow his lawn on Saturday afternoon.
2. All God's belief are necessarily true since God is infallible.
3. No one has the power to make a contradiction true.
4. Someone's past beliefs cannot be erased. That is, no one have the power to make something believed in the past by someone was not believed in the past by that person.
5. No one can erase someone's existence in the past, that is, to bring it about that someone who existed in the past did not exist in the past.
6. So if God believed that Jones would mow his lawn on Saturday afternoon, Jones can refrain from mowing the lawn only if one of the following is true:
 - 6.1. Jones has the power to make God's belief false
 - 6.2. Jones has the power to erase God's past belief, or
 - 6.3. Jones has the power to erase God's past existence
7. From 2 and 3, alternative (6.1) is impossible
8. From 4, alternative 6.2 is impossible.
9. From 5, alternative 6.3 is impossible.
10. Therefore, if God exists and believes that Jones will mow his lawn on Saturday afternoon, Jones does not have the power to refrain from mowing the lawn on Saturday afternoon. This means, Jones is not free.

By extension then. no person is free with regard to any action he or she performs.

We can escape from this fatalistic argument if we can propose a fourth alternative other than the three already presented in the consequent of item 6. The alternative consequent is,

6.4. Jones has the power to act in a different way, and if Jones *were* to act in that way, since God is omniscient, He *would have* believed differently.

In fact, item 6 does not logically entail 6.1, rather, item 6 entails 6.4. Thus, we can escape from this argument of fatalism.

Taylor (1962) and Haack (1974) agreed that theological fatalism is nothing but the dressed up version of the old Greek logical fatalism. The logical fatalism basically said that certain future-tense statements are true. If the statement "Jones will mow his lawn on Saturday afternoon" is true tomorrow, the same statement must be true at any time in the past. Thus, on Saturday afternoon, Jones *must* mow the lawn, otherwise Jones would bring either (1) the statement "Jones will mow his lawn in Saturday afternoon" is false after having been true, or (2) the statement with contradiction "Jones will and will not mow his lawn on Saturday afternoon" is true. But this is completely unintelligible. How can the mere truth of certain future-tense statement determines our action?

Fatalism also falls into a logical fallacy, if we observe it more carefully. The argument can be simplified as follows:

- i Necessarily, if God foreknows x, then x will happen.
- ii God foreknows x.
- iii Therefore, x will necessarily happen.

But this argument is logically wrong. The conclusion (iii) does not follow from the premises (i) and (ii). The conclusion (iii) should say "Therefore, x will happen". There is no necessity attached to the occurrence of x (Plantinga, 1974., Craig, 2000).

In this case, the burden of proof is on the side of the proposer of fatalism and the incompatibility of free will and Divine foreknowledge. So far, they have not proof anything conclusive. Thus, based on these arguments, we rejects fatalism. On the other hand, if we can show that there is a possible way that Divine foreknowledge and free-will are compatible, then we can to accept that the concept of free-will is true. All we need to do is to show at least one possible argument. The argument, known as Middle Knowledge, is as the following.

Middle knowledge argument make use the concept about the subtle differences between logical order and chronological order. Something that is logically prior to something else has nothing to do with the order of occurrence temporally, or chronologically. As an example, premises are logically prior to conclusion, although chronologically the truth value of the premises and the conclusion can happen at the same time. Thus, logical priority means something that serves to explain something else. Using this concepts, God's foreknowledge can be explain in the following logical order:

1. Certain events occur.
2. Statement about these events are true or false.
3. Of these statements, God knows only and all those that are true.

However, chronologically, the order can be explained as follows:

1. Statement about certain future events are true or false, and of these statements God knows only and all that are true.

2. The events occur.

This argument thus retain the concept of free-will, since no event necessarily happens due to God's foreknowledge.

Physical Basis for Free-will

In addition to the philosophical argument for free-will as described above, a physical basis is needed to give a more complete account for the defense of the concept of free-will. This physical basis can probably be found in the structure of our brain. It is important that a known lower level phenomena of the brain has to at least permit the possibility of a higher level phenomena, free-will, to occur. Otherwise, we will have an inconsistency which implies something is wrong. It needs to be mentioned that I will base the argument on the concept of *physicalism*. The concept of *physicalism* differs from *dualism*. In dualism, there is a notion of the separation between the mind and the body, or the brain. In physicalism, the mind is embodied in the brain, and cannot be separated from the brain. This also extends further that the soul and consciousness are embodied in the body. The argument for physicalism is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that recent neurological findings seem to support this concept.

The account given here follows the argument by Murphy and Ellis (1996). The problem in this level can be basically stated as the following:

1. Mental events, such as the decisions to perform an action, must be identical with or caused by the brain events.
2. Brain events are purely physical events and therefore are determined by the law of physics.

3. Thus, all mental events must be determined by the law of physics.

We need to examine more closely the first premise. Are mental events reducible to be identical with or caused by the brain events only? A well known experiment disproves this. In the experiment, subjects are injected with adrenalin. However, each subject experiences different effects, either as anger or as fear, depending on the social context of the subject. There is a factor of events that are non-reducible to brain events that contribute to mental events. Therefore, mental events cannot be simply identical with or caused by the brain events. Mental events "supervene" on brain and are on a higher level of complexities than brain events, because mental events consist also of the relation between the brain events and the non-reducible environmental variables.

One might argue that this is *environmental determinism*, not free-will. But if we use the consensus I established in section I, we do not have this problem. However, let us explore a little further to see if we can come up with a solution for a *genuine* free-will. Suppose I am going to choose whether I am going to perform or refrain from performing an action *x*. Suppose also there is no social construct, law, or any other environmental variables that either encourage or discourage me in performing this action. Suppose there are also no conscious or unconscious internal motives regarding this action in my mental state. This situation indeed sometimes happens in reality, where there is no real reason to choose one action over the other. However, we still choose. Why is that? There are mental states involved here, one is the need to make a choice, the other are probably higher mental states that incorporate this and finally result in making the decision. "That sense that *I* who chooses seems to amount simply to the fact that I

associate myself with the global, transcendent state, rather than with any of its various components."

It has been proposed also that the openness of quantum indeterminacy of microscopic system provides a mechanism that allow an event to not be causally determined (Penrose, 1996). It has also been proposed that the uncertainty of quantum measurement does not necessarily mean it is ontologically undetermined, but somehow the determination is linked to the phenomenon of consciousness, which may or may not be understood in the domain of physics. Although none of these speculations however has been confirmed, they give us insight of the possibility of a genuine free-will.

Conclusion

It has been shown that the concept of free-will has theological, philosophical and scientific grounds. It has been argued also that fatalism, the counter concept of free-will must be rejected. Thus, we must accept that free-will exist in this world. Free-will is important if our existence is to have meaning at all. As Plantinga (1974) put it, "a world containing creatures who are (significantly) free, and freely perform more good than evil actions, is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all."

References

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