

Does Determinism Eliminate Responsibility?

The Problem of Free Will

W.T. Stace

Intro to Philosophy

Professor Douglas Olena

The Problem of Free Will

- It is certain that if there is no free will there can be no morality.
- But if a man has no freedom to do what he will do, if whatever he does is done under compulsion, then it does not make sense to tell him that he ought not to have done what he did and that he ought to have done something different. 48

The Problem of Free Will

- If he acts always under compulsion, how can he be held morally responsible for his actions? How can he, for example, be punished for what he could not help doing?

48

The Problem of Free Will

- The dispute is merely verbal, and is due to nothing but a confusion about the meanings of words. It is...a semantic problem. 49

The Problem of Free Will

- The problem has been created by the fact that learned men, especially philosophers, have assumed an incorrect definition of free will, and then finding that there is nothing in the world which answers to their definition, have denied its existence. 49

The Problem of Free Will

- Determinism has been held to be inconsistent with free will. 49
- Free will has been defined as indeterminism. 49
- The true definition will dissolve the problem.

The Problem of Free Will

- Common usage is the criterion for deciding whether a definition is correct or not. 49
- Examples 50, 51
- The philosopher must be using the phrase “free will” in some peculiar way of his own which is not the way in which men usually use it when they wish to determine a question of moral responsibility. 51

The Problem of Free Will

- To find the correct definition of free will, we must discover what is common to all the acts we call free and missing from all the acts we call unfree. What is the defining characteristic. 52 (see chart of acts)
- The only reasonable view is that all human actions, both those which are freely done and those which are not, are either wholly determined by causes, or at least as much determined as other events in nature. 52

The Problem of Free Will

- The causes in the left hand column and the causes in the right hand column are different. It is not that they are uncaused. 52
- Acts freely done are those whose immediate causes are psychological states in the agent. Acts not freely done are those whose immediate causes are states of affairs external to the agent. 53

The Problem of Free Will

- Free will defined in this way certainly exists. Denials of free will by the philosopher are nonsense. 53

The Problem of Free Will

- There are mixed or borderline cases where it can't be determined whether an act was free or compelled. 53

The Problem of Free Will

- Since free will is a condition of moral responsibility, we must be sure that our theory of free will gives sufficient basis for it. 53

The Problem of Free Will

- Is determinism incompatible with moral responsibility? You do not excuse a man for doing a wrong act because, knowing his character, you felt certain beforehand that he would do it. 54

The Problem of Free Will

- Training requires determinism. Discipline depends on certain cause and effect to create change in behavior. 54

The Problem of Free Will

- Read last paragraph on 55.
- If there were no determinism of human beings at all, their actions would be completely unpredictable and capricious, and therefore irresponsible. 55