



Philosophical Review

The Ethical Implications of Determinism

Author(s): Julia H. Gulliver

Source: *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Jan., 1894), pp. 62-67

Published by: Duke University Press on behalf of Philosophical Review

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2175455>

Accessed: 14-11-2017 11:36 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Philosophical Review, *Duke University Press* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Philosophical Review*

be so eminently reasonable, Kant sets aside with an ill-concealed impatience that is somewhat difficult to understand. But if the metaphysical heterogeneity of the two sides is tacitly presupposed, then unquestionably the notion of a pre-established harmony does become no better than a *deus ex machina*, and you have no guarantee that any such friendly, and as it were miraculous, interposition has taken place. And in this way, it seems to me, Kant's contemptuous treatment of the idea may be understood. But the error lies in the original supposition of heterogeneity; it is this abstract dualism which necessitates the mechanical idea of a special interposition to establish correspondence. If the first unfounded supposition is dropped, then harmony does not require to be established by special decree; it has the presumption on its side. We may go further, and say that when the matter is duly considered, this is the necessary assumption of metaphysical thought. Epistemological investigation, therefore, if it is not to lead us back to the sceptical idealism, or to the *impasse* of an Unknown and Unknowable, must tacitly presuppose this metaphysical unity of the subjective and the objective, or, to put it more strictly, the harmony of the subjective function with the universe from which it springs. Starting from this basis, epistemology may afterwards return to prove its own assumption, so far as we can talk of proof in such a case. Epistemology supplies the indirect proof that this is the only hypothesis which can be consistently thought out without dissolving in absurdity or contradiction.

ANDREW SETH.

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF DETERMINISM.¹

Miss Ritchie's able article with the above title, in a recent number of this REVIEW, is typical of a class of writings which represent determinism as compatible with freedom and moral responsibility. The logical fallacy of equivocation, frequently observable in such discussions, has not been escaped by the author of the article in question.

I. There is an equivocation in her use of the word 'causation.'

a) Causation may mean physical causation, which is simply and solely the invariable sequence of consequent on antecedent. In the

¹ By Dr. Eliza Ritchie. THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW, No. II.

light of the principle of the correlation and conservation of forces, it means that one form of motion, called the antecedent, passes over, and is completely transformed into, another form of motion called the consequent.

b) Causation may mean the invariable sequence of consequent on antecedent, the antecedent being regarded as the essential condition, *conditio sine qua non*, of the consequent. Here the antecedent, although necessary to the consequent, is not *identical* with it. In this case the antecedent may be physical and the consequent psychical, or both antecedent and consequent may be psychical.

c) Causation may mean psychical, or efficient, causation. An efficient cause is something more than a condition essential to the effect. It denotes that which actually produces the effect, and still retains its own identity in the process, side by side with the effect.

Miss Ritchie, speaking of the weakness of present ethical discussion, says: "In no respect is this weakness more noticeable than in the vague and unsatisfactory treatment of determinism by many of our most brilliant writers, who, while they would never think of denying the necessity of reasoning from effects to causes in any other sphere of knowledge, yet hesitate to admit that natural antecedents alone are to be sought for in explanation of moral actions." Again she says: "It is a false antithesis which opposes liberty and determinism, as though a free action must be identical with an uncaused event. It is irrational to speak of any occurrence as though it sprang into existence of itself, unrelated to, and in independence of, all other physical and psychical phenomena." That Miss Ritchie regards this as a fair representation of the libertarian doctrine, must be inferred from the fact that the whole discussion is carried on with such an assumption as its basis. Fiske, who belongs to this same class of determinists, states the case more bluntly, but not differently, when he says: "Volitions, according to the opinion of the free-will philosophers, are the only phenomena that occur without a cause." On this ground, Miss Ritchie accuses libertarian writers of being unscientific. It is evident that she is using the term 'causation' in the sense of physical causation, at least so far as that means invariable sequence, and yet, as is usual with deterministic writers, the charge is made that libertarianism violates the law of causation. This is the spook that is always raised to order to drive timid souls from the camp of libertarianism back into that of determinism. Like the genie appearing from a small bottle in the Arabian Nights' stories, it rises into the heavens, *crescit eundo*, and

obscures the whole horizon of thought. It is possible that the analogy goes a little farther, and that the apparition is largely dependent on its vagueness for its size. It is and must be true that the libertarian doctrine denies the application of the law of physical causation to volitions. It is not necessarily true that it denies the application of the law of causation to volitions. The particular form of the libertarian doctrine which holds to the so-called 'liberty of indifference,' *i. e.*, that a man chooses independently of, and without reference to, motives, has justified, to a degree, the wholesale charge that libertarianism denies that volitions are, in any sense, caused. But this extremely radical, not to say effete, form of libertarianism cannot be said to be the only, or even the prevailing, form of libertarianism. It is possible for a man to be a libertarian and hold that volitions are subject to the law of causation in two senses: (1) that they are caused by motives as being their essential conditions (in the last analysis, motives are always what are chosen, and it is plain that a man cannot choose without something to choose); (2) that volitions are caused by the conscious, choosing *ego* as being their efficient cause. When such a libertarian doctrine is practically held and defended, though with great variety of treatment, by such writers as Wundt, Paulsen, Lotze, Janet, Martineau, Green, James, and Baldwin, I submit that it is an anachronism to go back to the scholastic figment of the liberty of indifference, to find a form of libertarianism that can be successfully coped with by the clever determinism of to-day. If it is urged that the popular metaphysics of the present still clings to the absurdities of this form of libertarianism, the liberty of indifference, I would say that it is the part of valor to seek a foemen worthy of one's steel and not a man of straw ready to topple over at the lightest finger-touch.

The fact of the matter is that libertarianism, *i. e.*, the modern and scientific form of libertarianism, does not deny that the law of causation is applicable to volitions, but simply denies that a particular form of the law of causation, namely, physical causation, applies to them. Whether it is scientific or unscientific in so doing, is a question naturally decided in relation, primarily, not to volitions but to sensations. If spiritualism is not unscientific, as over against materialism, in denying that the law of correlation and conservation of forms is applicable to psychical phenomena, then libertarianism is not unscientific, as over against determinism, in denying that the physical law of causation is applicable to volitions. Volitions, just as soon as

they, in their results, pass into effects in the physical universe, are *in this form* subject to the physical law of cause and effect, as well as any other physical phenomena ; and this fact is very fruitful in its suggestiveness. But volitions, as volitions, so far from violating the physical law of cause and effect, as it is often said that they do, are superior to it. It is as absurd to say that the law of physical causation is violated unless volitions are subject to it, as to say that the law of gravitation is violated, because the love we bear our country or our kindred is not subject to it ; or that a circle violates the law of the parallelogram, because it has not opposite sides that are parallel to each other.

2. In the article in question there is a logical equivocation in the use of the word 'aim' or 'purpose.'

Miss Ritchie says that human character is the result of inheritance and environment, and that it is no more possible that a man, in given circumstances, should act otherwise than he does than that a lily should produce rosebuds. Man is, therefore, a mechanism, but a *conscious* mechanism, as the author explains, and this fact of consciousness makes the human mechanism free.

Now, it is clear that without the unity of self-consciousness, capable of experiencing two or more different motives and of comparing them together, there could be no choice between them. But the question is whether this is all that is necessary to constitute freedom. Miss Ritchie explains further that a knowledge of an *end* in view is the essential differentia of free activity. This sounds like an echo of Professor Green, but it is Professor Green with Professor Green's saving clause left out. He holds (*Prolegomena to Ethics*, p. 158) that the will is not to be distinguished from desire and thought, and is one as much as the other ; but he carefully explains that desire means here, not desire as it affects the man, but desire that *proceeds from the man*, not thoughts that occur to us, but thoughts to the realization of which *we direct ourselves*. Whether it is not darkening counsel unnecessarily to refuse to give an independent name to so distinct an activity as self-direction, we cannot stop here to discuss. It is true that Miss Ritchie also goes on to state, when she is reconciling determinism with freedom, that a man is free when the act is his own, — an outcome of his essential personality. And yet this essential personality is formed for him and not by him : "it is no more possible he should act otherwise than that the lily should produce rosebuds."

But, Miss Ritchie replies, though acts are determined by ante-

cedent conditions, the immediate medium of determination is the self; to a very large extent, indeed, the 'I' of to-morrow is determined by the 'I' of to-day, and that by the 'I' of yesterday.

This is true; but if we trace back the 'I' of yesterday through all the preceding yesterdays, according to Miss Ritchie's premises, we reach an 'I' which is merely the result of inheritance and environment, determined for us and not by us, and as this, in turn, with the help of certain added increments of experience, determines every succeeding link in the chain, there is no room here for any essential personality, because there is no room for self-determination. The idea of the power of choice is, however, so wrapped up with the word 'purpose' or 'aim' that we unconsciously retain that idea even when by definition it is destroyed. Hence, when we are told that a man is free because he has an intelligent purpose, we readily assent, not realizing that the word 'purpose' is used in an equivocal sense that gives the statement a false plausibility.

3) There is a logical equivocation in the use of the words 'impulse' and 'freedom.' To quote once more: "Since human knowledge is extremely limited, and men's actions are usually the result, in part, at least, of impulse and habit as well as of reason, it follows that absolute freedom is an ideal rather than a reality. But if the view just suggested be a correct one, it is evident that the more rational a man's actions are the more they correspond to an intelligent survey of all the facts, — the more 'free' is the agent."

Now, impulsive action may mean what is done habitually and mechanically, and with which choice has nothing to do. It may also mean action in accordance with irrational desire, instead of in accordance with intelligent purpose, or, in general, the following of the lower rather than the higher motive, and with this choice may have everything to do.

'Freedom' must mean the power of choice — the power to choose the lower and irrational as well as the higher and rational. Were there freedom to choose but one alternative, there would be no freedom at all. This is the freedom that must belong to the human soul as such, if it is responsible. It is a distinct idea from freedom in the sense of the highest possible development of the human soul, which means a fixed habit of choosing the higher, rational motive rather than the lower and impulsive motive. Freedom in the former sense can be predicated of every man. Freedom in the latter sense can only be predicated of the choice souls of just men made perfect.

What right is there, asks Miss Ritchie in conclusion, in the universe

or its maker to inflict pain as a penalty for the sin which is itself an infliction ; and adds with Omar Khayyám :

“ For all the sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blackened — Man’s forgiveness give — and take ! ”

The test of an hypothesis is always its fact-explaining power—its unifying and harmonizing capacity. When, therefore, the hypothesis of determinism leads so thoughtful and earnest a spirit thus to postulate chaos in the moral universe, it tells mightily against the truth of the hypothesis.

The libertarian theory does not help us to any solution here, we are told, any more than does the theory of determinism. Yet for a theist who is also a determinist there is no possible course open but to make Deity ultimately responsible for human sin. For a theist who is also a libertarian such a course is logically impossible, so far as freedom, and hence so far as sin, can be predicated of man’s action. In other words, libertarianism, at least, leaves the question of the Divine goodness an open one. It does not, like determinism, shut the door and lock it against the possibility of any further discussion.

JULIA H. GULLIVER.

ROCKFORD COLLEGE,
ROCKFORD, ILL.

There are two points in Miss Gulliver’s criticism of my article which call for notice.

First, she accuses me of a fallacy of equivocation in the use of the word ‘causation’ ; asserting that I charge libertarians with denying the universality of causation, because they do not regard voluntary actions as subject to the law of *physical* causation. In the article referred to, I carefully avoided taking up the problem as to whether the necessary antecedent conditions to a volition were physical, or psychical, or both physical and psychical. This is a very interesting question, but it matters no whit to the determinist as such what answer is given to it. If my critic will admit that all psychical events, including those we call volitions, are the inevitable outcome of preceding psychical conditions, I shall welcome her as a convert to the ranks of determinism, even though she refuses to take account of any determining physical antecedents whatever. As to “an efficient cause as something more than a condition essential to the effect,” I frankly confess I am in a state of total ignorance. But if Miss Gulliver