

Free Will

Summary:

In this book we are talking about the free will problem. The belief that we can CONTROL something in our life seems so natural. But the problem is this belief hasn't been confirmed. Free will problem is about the control, about what is required for the control and what the control involves, about whether the control matters and why.

Being in control of how we act is the core of our moral thinking. That's to say we have the executive ability swiftness something determined by our instinct. There's two opposing theories around the problem, incompatibilism and compatibilism. The middle-age free will problem has been discussed for a long time, especially from the perspective of reason.

After Hobbes, the free will becomes its modern version. If free will exists, how does it assimilate to the material world? It's about world-views. Kant argues that freedom is a characteristic of people, or the world. There's no direct experience. That inspires us to examine all the relations of freedom and other things (ex. moral responsibility). But several examples raised have proved that freedom can be isolated from morality, which means self-determination must be a form of freedom.

Now believers of compatibilism try to find examples that are truly causal instead of determined by something before and is controlled. However, after arguments we concluded that freedom, or true controlling won't be derived from purposeless happening. So we compromised to talk about examples determined by large amount of reasons and can be controlled, which is really incoherent but helpful to order our thoughts.

Our answer is Libertarianism. We no longer characterize action as a kind of effect, but a mode of exercising reason. What discriminates action is not a kind of cause, but a kind of rationality. Every goal of what we do is not from the fate's landing passive desire but from our own doing. What we're pursuing is generated by ourselves. That's our world view and philosophy based on it.

Question:

1. Having read the book, what impressed me most is the author's research method. He raises core questions at the beginning of the book, which gives readers clear veins to solve the problem. He explains the problem on word dimension, and discusses some terms related to "free" and "will". It impresses me that he can talk about the problem through such a well-organized way.

The most impressive example to me is his explanation to the middle-age version of free will problem. His use of Fred's helping his mother involves all circumstances and almost every term we met with in discussion of free will problem. For example, assumption of his not helping his mother leads out discussion about purpose and interest of action. This example can help the readers to review all the issues we have encountered so far.

Another impressive item is his separating "exercise" from "action", aiming to distinguish purposeful action from "jerks and spasms". Certain definition of what we are talking about is rather important and necessary, avoiding us from vain efforts.

Not only a brief introduction, the author raised a new theory, the practical reason-based theory. The theory claims we are capable of deliberating or reasoning about which action to perform, and then of deciding how to act on the basis of this reasoning. From my perspective, this is not only the sublation of various theories discussed before, but also the foundation of the Libertarianism of the problem of free will.

Book Report

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2. If you are just a student who never reads books of Philosophy before I do want to recommend this book to you. As you can see from the title it's a brief introduction. The free will problem involved in this book can easily inspire a person who has never known it to start thinking. The vivid circumstances derived from our daily life may inspire you to view your life in a more thoughtful way.

If you have read several books or booklets about free will problem, to be honest I don't want to make a recommendation because although this book raised several theories, it has few differences with other books alike. If you insist, I only recommend you to read the fifth and sixth chapter of the book because you probably have read the contents of the first four chapters in other books.

What deserves our attention is the author doesn't approve of incompatibilism. If you already have your own view of the problem, you should read the book in a critical way.

3. **Additional Question** : Is determinism incompatible with quantum mechanics?

We know that the determinism is derived from the Newtonian mechanics. However, with the development of quantum mechanics, several basic principles in it shows us a certain undefinition in quantum world. For example, Heisenberg put forward that the position and momentum of a particle can't be determined at the same time.

There must be something wrong. From my investigation, there's a term "wave function" describing the world, from particles to the whole universe. There're several states included in it, and each state has it probability. From this perspective, although the state of a particle is uncertain, once observed, it will take on a certain state to us. So we can't describe uncertain as undetermined. Uncertainty is not undeterminism. In fact, quantum mechanics isn't isolated from determinism. Because the vector in Hilbert space describing the state of micro particles can be determined by the initial conditions and Schrödinger equation. There're many more neutral statements. For example, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy says the final word in dispute on whether a measurement uncertainty principle holds has not been reached.

In my conclusion, the quantum mechanics doesn't be incompatible with determinism. On the contrary, it may affirms determinism to a certain degree (Many problems about quantum mechanics have not been studied well. I haven't studied quantum mechanics in a systematic way so I can only provide the conclusion of what I've searched on the Internet).

Investigation bibliography:

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2. The Uncertainty Principle.
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