

Tutorial 7
Free Will and Determinism

In the first section of his extract, Halvorsen outlines the three camps in the free will/determinism debate.

Firstly, there is 'hard determinism' which goes: Free will is not possible if determinism is true; determinism is true; therefore there is no such thing as free will.

The other extreme is 'indeterminism' which goes: Free will is not possible if determinism is true; Free will is the case; therefore determinism is not true.

In the middle is 'soft determinism'; Free will can be compatible with determinism, therefore, since determinism is true, free will may still be possible.

It seems to me that the major difference between these positions is the level of importance attached to these seemingly contradictory concepts. If you believe in free will above all else, you lean towards indeterminism, or if determinism is also important, soft determinism. However, if the scientific assumption of determinism is more important, then you will lean towards hard determinism.

Personally, I lean towards indeterminism if anything. I know, I know, this is very strange. However, I feel that, given quantum indeterminism, the determinism axiom should at least be questioned.

With respect to that, though, my theory is that apparent physical determinism is only part of the picture. I guess this is because I am a bit of a dualist. I really like the enmattered formulable essences of Aristotle, but it seems to me that some of the properties which make formulable essences such a good picture of the nature of mind appear to imply a sort of separate existence.

I'll try to clarify this. If the essence can be enmattered in various substrates, it seems that the only thing in common these substrates would have is in enmattering the essence. This would seem to imply that the essences can have some sort of existence other than as a specific pattern of physical elements. The word 'specific' is the key word here. If enmattering is possible in a variety of substrates, this seems to imply that a variety of structures can produce the same enmattered essence. Does this not suggest some sort of existence other than what we call 'physical'?

I'm not suggesting using a Platonic-type form, but rather attempting to explain what I see as a problem that the arguments mentioned in lectures seem to create. To attempt to be more clear: How can a number of patterns of arrangement of different physical things create the same phenomenon without there being something else, not physical, some sort of super-pattern? I am aware of the problems with the doctrine of Forms, and this is just a problem I am considering.

To return to the point, however, I guess part of my point is, that if you allow existence that is not what we call 'physical', then you are in dualism country, and in that country, the free will problem is not as much of a problem, as then other causes other than purely physical are introduced, eliminating the discrepancy between determinism and free will.