

IS FREEWILL FREE IN PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE?

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ABSTRACT: *Determinism, theological fatalism, and problem of evil all negate the existence of freewill. But belief in freewill persuades individuals to indulge in moral behavior. Also, one cannot hold a person morally responsible for an action without freewill. Subsequent developments to resolve the matter, mostly in the probabilistic predictions in quantum mechanics, have muddied the waters more than clarifying them. The study has proved the existence of freewill by providing arguments from Islamic thoughts. Using deductive method from logical reasoning, the study concludes compatibility of freewill with determinism and problem of evil. On the other hand, theological fatalism and indeterminism have been proved as only speculative beliefs on freewill. Both are concluded to be the logical fallacies based on false assumptions. Limitations on freewill emerging from the discussion have been capitalized to discuss how is will free and its implications for employer-employee relationship.*

Key words: *Determinism, choices, freewill, indeterminism, problem of evil, theological determinism.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The problem of freewill dates back to early human civilization. Before the advent of philosophy, religious scholars discussed at length the degree of freedom granted to man by gods within the confines of fate. The Greek philosophers, Socrates (470-399 BC), Plato (427-347 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC) claimed that humans are morally accountable only for those acts which they have caused. Christian dogma in the medieval period treated man suffering to be the result of the 'Original Sin' and perfect lack of freewill [1]. The European Renaissance thinkers like Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Rene' Descartes (1596-1650) and Leibniz (1646-1716) considered thinking to be a reasoning process free from any dogmas. They further added that human activity is restricted due to cosmic physical determinism [2].

Newtonian mechanics became Laplace muse in 1814. Based on which he presented the concept of vast intellect --- since dubbed Laplace's Demon --- equipped with the precise knowledge of the state of the universe particles and the underlying cosmic forces. If such an intellect possessed huge computational faculty, then it could both envisage the future events and reconstruct the past history with absolute precision [3]. The demon is inconsistent with the intuitive impression of freewill. Even if such demon doesn't exist, presumably there exists some state of the universe implying determination of future by the present. What room, then, is there for freewill? Philosophers converted the demon debate into theological fatalism. Human subjectivity is inescapable which gave rise to conflicting debates that if objective freewill is contingent upon God who grants or denies this agency freewill and who has predetermined everything then how is human a volitional creature. One still doesn't find any consensus solution to the problem. Subsequent developments, mostly in the probabilistic predictions in quantum mechanics, have muddied the waters more than clarifying them.

The present investigation seeks to resolve the debate by capitalizing on Islamic thoughts on freewill. Rational arguments favoring existence of freewill from leading journal publications have also been used to settle the debate. During the process, the conditions limiting human freewill emerge which are then used to apply the concept in business setting. Since there exists no agreed upon definition of freewill, hence

it is essential first to delimit the concept in the context of this study. Plantinga [4] defines freewill to be the agent's capacity at time t to perform an action X or to refrain from it equally. The people's notion of freewill characterizes it in terms of being able to make choices, acting consistent with one's desires, and being (reasonably) free of coercion [5]. The arguments on existence of freewill for this inquiry are in accord with these definitions.

2.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

After centuries of reflection, human freewill remains a significant topic primarily because it is linked with moral responsibility. Queries about moral responsibility associated with freewill are intimately connected to social policy and justice system. Therefore, free to select an action determines whether or not one is to be admired or blamed for the chosen act. Freewill is important because not only it dives deep into philosophy, theology, neuroscience, physics, and psychology but also because we have a direct stake in the answers.

Physical causality, theology, and philosophy related to freewill may appear the academic issues distant from daily behavior. However, belief or disbelief in freewill has direct impact on behavioral changes [6]. The study found that students induced to disbelieve in freewill were more likely to cheat on the test. Disbelief in freewill also increases aggressive behavior and decreases helpful, prosocial inclinations [7]. Studies also reveal belief in freewill to be associated with better job performance [8]. A personal stance on freewill is so persuasive that it changes the actual behavior of individuals. So, it is imperative to study that freewill actually exists or not, and if it does then in what way it is free? The study will also help to resolve the centuries prevailing dilemma of freewill.

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The inquiry adopts argumentative method versed in logical reasoning to address the criticism in negation of freewill. The most frequently appearing objections negating freewill are Determinism: at its base, is the thesis that future events are entailed by the conjunction of temporally prior events and the laws of nature. Prior causes determine everything so freewill does not exist.

Theological fatalism: demonstrates seemingly logical contradiction between an omniscient God and freewill.

Problem of evil: contradiction of God's omnipotent and benevolent nature with the existence of evil and hence with freewill.

Indeterminism: the thesis that events cannot be determined by prior causes. Chance, probability, or mere luck makes things happening. Critiques argue that man cannot act freely if chance is to determine everything.

Deductive reasoning to draw inferences from given premises has been employed while addressing these criticisms. The Islamic arguments favoring freewill were searched in the Quran, books from Islamic scholars, and internet articles. In the end, implications of freewill in the organizational context have been delineated.

4.0 DISCUSSION

4.1 Objection from determinism

First the paper addresses some immediate criticism to the existence of freewill. To begin with, determinism proposes that the idea of freewill is at odds with the law of causality i.e. every effect is determined by a prior cause. The widely held condition for freewill to exist is, it must be uncaused --- which means essentially "chosen for no reason." We can plainly reject this because volitional choices are based on reasons, compelling reasons. The deliberate choices we make are contingent upon values, evidence, and anticipation of their consequences. According to Frankfurt [9], a person acts freely when the desire on which he acts is one that he desires to be effective. It requires careful reflection on a person's desires in the process of which he may form other desires and judgments concerning them. So, freewill by no means suggests uncaused thinking or non-logical choices. It is antecedently determined by bio-evolutionary and physical processes. However, humans act freely insofar as they act in a way that confers to them an advantage. To act freely, Banja [10] holds, is to act smartly. And to act smartly is to act adaptively and hence evolutionary. So, freewill is totally compatible with determinism. The space of actions, that is, the totality of possible actions that are available to an agent, is thoroughly social, embodied, and practical [11,12]. For example, hackers perceive computers and networks as tools for exploitation, computer novices or computer illiterates do not.

This highlights the fact that our interactions with the world in terms of getting knowledge and skills, impact our perceptions. Stated otherwise, the action possibilities that situations afford us are a function of how such situations are perceived by us. A hacker is both freer and restrained to act than someone who knows very little about computer programming. Both have the freedom to turn on a computer, but only the former has the freedom to uncover security vulnerabilities a freedom that depends upon conformity to certain rules [13]. Rule conformance suggests that the ability to act ethically and be held morally, and even legally, responsible is also contingent upon cultural bindings, the cultural notion of freewill [14].

Freewill is also free in a sense that the universe though is deterministic, but it is so computationally difficult to predict what a human might do that the only way to determine this is by simulating the human. Then we have in effect freewill because we cannot in any meaningful sense predict what a

human can do. We can only watch and observe what they (or a simulation of this human) can do. *So, Human thoughts and choices are deterministic, but not determinable.*

4.2 Objection from theological fatalism

The second objection determinists like Huyssteen [15] and VanArragon [16] raise in negation of freewill is

- a. Ali having freewill, with choices A and B, can freely select between A and B.
- b. God is omniscient (all-knowing).
- c. God knows Ali will opt A.
- d. God's knowledge is perfect because an omniscient being cannot possess false knowledge.
- e. From c and d, Ali will choose A and cannot pick B.
- f. From a and e, Ali does not possibly have freewill.

Theological determinism, as these philosophers note, prevails in all the events of the world which is embedded in an ultimate cause. This ultimate cause has been attributed to God [17]. The postulates of the foregoing argument are also based upon theological determinism. Addressing the critique, some like Cicero [18] even denied the Divine power of having any foreknowledge, and some like Luther [19] and Calvin [20] denied human freewill, out of their beliefs that Divine omniscience and freewill cannot coexist. However, to remain faithful to the Islamic experience and to rationalize the justice system of the world hereafter, it is unconditionally evident that the God foreseeing and genuine human responsibility associated with freewill must sustain at one and the same time. This is how we can settle the problem in accordance with our religious tradition. The premises presented above suggest that seeing the future negates freewill, which is not necessarily the case. The premises a and b to the argument outlined here are not disputed as some Western scholars themselves acknowledge the familiarity of God about future events [21]. So, premise a is accepted. Regarding premise b Islam stresses that individuals are free moral agents capable of choosing among alternatives simply by exercising their will. As the Quran on several occasions indicates:

"We have shown man the path of truth and the path of falsehood; he may choose either the path of guidance and offer the thanks, or choose the path of ingratitude." (The Quran 76:3)

"Say: The truth from your Lord. Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject (it)." (The Quran 18:29)

So, Man under instinct or any foreign compulsion isn't bound to accept guidance or to fall in evil. On the contrary, God assists the individual in acting upon what he has chosen for himself. The Quran therefore condemns the behavior of individuals attributing volitional acts to God. Also, it is established doctrine of Islam that nothing can escape God's attention. It is only He who knows the end from the beginning. Hence, premise c is also in accordance with these Quranic verses

"He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days and then Istawa (rose over) the Throne (in a manner that suits His Majesty). He knows what goes into the earth and what comes forth from it, what descends from the heaven and what ascends thereto. And He is with you wheresoever you may be. And Allah is the All-Seer of what you do." (The Quran 57:4)

"And indeed We have created man, and We know what his

ownself whispers to him. And We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.” (The Quran 50:16)

Premise d cannot be refuted on the basis that if omniscience is truly knowledgeable, His knowledge must be flawless and most accurate. However, these are premises e and f where the logic falters. Arguing in this manner, these philosophers erroneously think that because God possesses knowledge of any future event, He has influenced the matter as well. This doesn't follow at all. Though He has the power to influence, but He has not done so. A human is free to feel, desire, and think; it is entirely his initiative arising from his inner self. God's intervention takes place at a later stage and accords with humans' intentions. So, Islam rejects the assumption behind premise c that because God knows Ali will select A somehow denies him any other choice.

Although all those choices of human act cannot also escape God's foreknowledge [22]. Now the question arises how perfect divine knowledge and human freewill interrelate to create human actions.

Human actions are created by God (the creator). Man (the acquirer) being His creature cannot create his own actions. Acquisition means happening of an action or event owing to the derived power [23]. Power is categorized into original and derived power. The original power rests with God and man has the power derived from God. God grants man this derived power to act and also bestows him with the faculty to choose freely (*ikhtiyar*) between good and evil. The free choice is ineffectual regarding performance of action by man because only God's nature (*sunnat al-Allah*) can do so corresponding to man's choice [24]. Man becomes acquirer (*mukhtasib*) when he intends to act upon the choice made by his freewill. Thus, actions of human beings are in fact created and completed by God but concurrent to their own freewill [25]. God does not have predestined human beings to harbor evil intentions nor has He created them as robots to always go for the righteous path. It was obviously not God who made Satan sin. Satan sinned out of his own freewill by choosing not to prostrate before Adam. Hence, *theological fatalism is wrong because foreknowledge does not imply determining actions or choices.*

4.3 Objection from problem of evil

Edwards [26] and Pruss [27], following Mackie's principle (1955/1998) [28] aggravate the problem of evil arising out of freewill and theological determinism to conclude nonexistence of freewill. They claim that

- a. God's nature being omnipotent and benevolent is morally obliged to create a creature that does not do anything immoral
- b. If it is logical necessity that every contingent being is God's creature, then it becomes logically impossible that the creature does immoral acts. In Edwards' [29] words, God could have predetermined the exact manner of exercising will i.e. He could have predetermined that freewill exercise would be sinless, and so
- c. No contingent individual is significantly free.

Now this argument does indeed conflict with everyday observation. One observes and experiences evil acts during every waking moment, whenever one contemplates his own choices. Then, how can one discard this observation in favor of formulating a hypothetical argument based on

theological determinism, however plausible that may be? This existence of evil along with good in the universe is an evidence of presenting human beings with different choices while acting. Thus, allowing mankind to exercise freewill. We can also refute the above conclusion with the help of logical inference.

There is no apparent contradiction in the statements a, b, and c and the premises are also logically consistent with the conclusion. The atheists question God's existence from the very same argument that since evil exists, so God who is omnipotent and benevolent does not. However, arriving at the conclusion that freewill doesn't exist or a good God who is omnipotent is non-existent is unwarranted unless someone has assumed, in the words of Moreland and Craig [30], "some hidden premises" (p. 538).

These hidden premises are,

- d. God being omnipotent entity can create any world He wants.
- e. If God is benevolent, then He prefers a world which is evil free.

Statement d concludes since God can create and do anything, it is also in His powers to create such free humans who always choose the right thing and do not fall prey to evil. The inference from statement e is that God is all benevolent to such a degree that if He could create a world free of evil He would. Or else He Himself prefers for humans to suffer and experience evil.

Underlying these hidden premises are daring assumptions. First assumption is about God who is just benevolent and omnipotent, a Christian view of God. Second assumption is that God is unjustified to permit suffering and evil in the world.

Muslims believe that the names of God corresponding to His attributes include "the Just", "the Wise", "the Severe in Punishment", "the Compassionate", and "the Avenger", amongst many others. Therefore, premises a, d and e are inaccurate because Muslims do not reduce God to parts. Muslims view God as one complete unique being in context of all His attributes. Inclusion of attributes like "the Wise" and "the Severe in Punishment" eliminates the problem of first assumption of benevolent God coexisting with evil. In response to the second assumption, "The Wise" design of God suggests that suffering and evil in the world can be part of

1. God's punishment due to sins and bad deeds of humans.
2. God's wisdom. Even if human beings cannot perceive God's wisdom, it would be a logical fallacy from the argument of ignorance [31] to argue that it doesn't exist. The story of Khidr (The Quran 18:60-82) is an eloquent account of how hidden wisdom of God whether perceived or not benefits the humanity.
3. God's method of putting people to test. As, it is stated in the Quran (67:2) "The One Who created death and life, so that He may put you to test, to find out which of you is best in deeds: He is the all-Almighty, the all-Forgiving." To differentiate good and bad people on the basis of their deeds, it is essential to test them. Part of this test includes testing with evil and suffering. This argument suggests that it is completely justified for God to permit evil and suffering in the world.

Because God, as a concept, represents all that humans idealize as 'good'. To blame a symbol of goodness for what is bad is like blaming mathematics for one's failure to understand algebra.

Mathematics is, by definition, the correct answer. If it's wrong, it isn't mathematics. In that sense mathematics is 'perfect'. Can mathematics explain why some people get their sums wrong? Is mathematics to blame for incorrect answers? Similarly, one cannot blame God for one's evil deeds.

After reconciling argument of evil with God's existence, now it can be argued that problem of freewill is logically posterior to the existence of evil. Evil exists to give a person variety of choices from which he opts. God grants us the ability to select the choice to like whether good or evil. This capacity for choice is what we call freewill which embraces choosing evil deeds as well. If God is always to ensure goodness in the world, then the prophet hood, life as test field, moral accountability, reward system all become meaningless. It is very much similar to point a loaded gun to someone's head for asking him to give charity. Surely, he will give charity, but does this act hold any moral value? No, it doesn't.

4.4 Objection on indeterminism

A further confusion identifies freewill with randomness, probabilism, and quantum mechanics. Problem arose when in the quantum vacuum sub-atomic particles were seen to behave spontaneously without prior causes. This behavior however, was observed by Born in 1926 to be probabilistic in nature. He established transition probabilities for quantum jumps [32]. Heisenberg in 1927 challenged the causality and the determination of the future behavior of an atomic particle with his quantum uncertainty principle [33]. Considering the uncaused movement of sub-atomic particles, philosophers like Ekstrom [34], Kane [35], and Balaguer [36] argue that freewill decisions are also non-deterministically caused by prior events or they are probabilistically caused by prior events. The notion of probabilistic freewill immediately met with criticism by deterministic school of thought. Objection raised is if randomness creates our thoughts then in what way are we free? A murderer may not have been predetermined to murder, but he still just ended up murdering by a 'roll of the dice'. Is he not fully a puppet dangling from the proverbial strings? Quantum physics assumes "no one can determine future events". No one includes the person himself. If the person can't determine his future events through his own choices, even to the next moment, then he obviously doesn't have freewill. To uphold freewill then, we must deny that the probabilistic theory of freewill describes the etiology of the mind.

Following arguments can be presented to contradict probabilistic explanation of freewill:

1. Indeterminism i.e. some events just come about for no reason at all is difficult to prove conclusively. Inability of humans to identify any cause does not necessarily mean the absence of cause.
2. Physicists adopt deterministic ways around their argument to rationalize the spontaneous movement of sub-atomic particles. For instance, Bohm and Hiley [37] formulated an alternative explanation of quantum uncertainty theory that is entirely deterministic in its fundamental structure. Commenting on Bohm's and Hiley's theory, Polkinghorne

[38] explained that the particles showed deterministic behavior to the degree as Newton might have expected them to behave. However, an indirectly observable hidden wave encoded information of the entire environment. This wave influenced the movement of the particles in a subtle and extremely sensitive manner to induce the experimentally visible probabilistic behavior.

From this we can conclude that the apparent indeterminism exhibited at the quantum level is deterministically caused by a hidden wave. And the study has already confirmed compatibility of freewill with determinism. Without causality or determinism, a person does not have the intellectual framework to understand observations and evaluate choices. To be more precise, causality is termed as a-priori in philosophical terms.

Indeterminism also fails to answer the problem of moral responsibility and autonomy associated with freewill. For example, both the sunflower's angle of turning towards the Sun and human action are probabilistic in nature. So what is to make the human action free and the sunflower action not free? Or what is to make human morally responsible for his actions and sunflower not? Obviously, man is not responsible for random actions caused by chance because decisions are just a matter of random "luck". We would need some kind of mechanism or "deus ex machina" that will enable us to be the ones who choose between the different probabilities.

To resolve the entire preceding problem then, it must be first understood that the construct "free" is always relative --- relative in a sense that it either makes someone "free to do" something or something that someone is "free from". For instance, fish is free to swim, whereas criminals are freed from prison. "Free to" is used to express added ability, "free from" to express constraint. The word "free" always explains relationship among entities, and is always bound by some context. Free to do anything or absolute freedom from everything denies human identity. Both mental abilities and material entities follow this. The events in the world are not causeless, even if humans are unable to identify underlying causes. *The goal of will is then to free oneself from personal biases to manifest personal inventiveness and volitional preferences. It is an investment of the qualitative character of the self which is every bit as real and a part of the cosmos as a quark's charm or a waveform's collapse but orders of magnitude more significant to human being.*

5.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Foregoing discussion reveals freewill is not free from determinism. God's foreknowledge doesn't eliminate freewill as well. Indeterminism, the view that freewill may, at times, exert effects not in accord with known physical laws, is also a non-proven speculative belief. One's choices cannot escape the reality, nor can be free from one's values, knowledge, past thoughts and decisions, external influences, and perceptions of one's environment and oneself. One's choices are also unable to transcend the laws of nature, i.e. cannot make the impossible possible. Then how is one's freewill free? Comparing one's mind's faculties with non-volitional entities, one realizes that freewill is not free in the elimination of external influences, but the expansion of one's choices by his/her unique abilities to deal with abstract ideas; by one's

imagination, self-awareness, ability to search for knowledge and predict the future; and, above all, by one's awareness and monitoring of one's own thinking. This is the source of human freedom; this is what makes us self-determined. This is how true understanding of freewill can be developed: *Not free from influences, but free to make intelligent choices.*

"Intelligent" has been used here in a wider sense: these encompass choices made with conceptual understanding and conscious awareness. Employees also make "intelligent choices" when they align their expectations and performance standards in the workplace with those accepted by the employer. After all, employees themselves have willingly agreed to those employment terms at the first place. From this viewpoint, work can be conceptualized as an exercise of freewill. Baker [39] views employment as a contractual relationship between equals. Freedom in choosing contract terms gives employees opportunity to freely choose occupations, working conditions, union representation, and exit. Considering work a choice is an influential thought as it fits contentedly with our cultural norms: working hard rewards employees with economic prosperity, job security, making employees and their families self-sufficient, and help in advancing their economic stations in life [40].

However, sizable employees' activities benefiting the employers take place under compulsive employers' demands (from employees' viewpoint) in which jobs as a choice rather than a right or an obligation are left unregulated. For example, the employer's high-pressure productivity standards necessitate taking work home or working outside regular hours to meet them (and so, avoid termination). As the employers may also exercise their freewill of dismissing or disciplining employees, "for good cause, for no cause or even for cause morally wrong, without being thereby guilty of legal wrong" [41]. Concerning such work pressure, one may experience conflict between an immediate desire of doing something else and requests or demands upon one's time. Even then saying that someone is "compelled" to do work is inappropriate—because this work must have value in meeting financial needs and family obligations. One chooses to work hard or to laze around. The choice is entirely up to oneself. If someone fails to choose the course of action which would have most fulfilled his/her desires, this is a failure of judgment, not of will.

Let's take another example. Mass market retail clothing stores recruit their workforces off the sales floor, from their target consumer base. Because these firms rely on aesthetic labor—"look and feel" marketing—to sell their products, employees are required as a condition of their at-will employment to wear brand-appropriate clothing and to conform to "look policies" [42].

They thus perform triple duty as sales clerks, models in the store during working hours, and as walking billboards during off-work time as they model the clothing on the streets while the employer acquires a captive market for its products [43]. This off-the-clock marketing can be questioned as going against employees' freewill. If the prospective employer specifically, and openly, has linked off-the-clock personal appearance and attire to the job duties and the employees have knowingly entered into an employment relationship that they knew to be conditioned by limitations affecting their

behavior; then, there is no evidence of coercion to fulfill employer desires against employees' freewill. Hence, the employee—drawn by the allure of the brand – freely consents. The workplace culture may be such that some even see their jobs as part of a mission—albeit a mission directed by the firm's brand.

For employees, having been made explicit the expectations in the contract, it is their choice to accept or to reject them. If they accept them, then they should abide by them. Hence, compulsion or coercion should only refer to situations where there is a threat of physical force.

The study deliberately uses older connotation of "freewill" to avoid the semantic cognitive trap. "Free will" as some philosophers imply a will totally free from influencing conditions [44], which is wrong. One should concentrate on what one's will is free to do – human being's unique capabilities versus those of other living things. Human beings are free to reflect on and evaluate their desires and to choose one course of action over another. Only those with such ability can be morally responsible for what they do. "Free from" can always be improved to take the form of "free to"; however, the emphasis varies.

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