

THE NEXUS OF FREEWILL THEODICY, MORAL EVIL AND THE DOCTRINE OF DETERMINISM

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ABSTRACT

In providing a solution to the problem of evil, Alvin Plantinga attributes evil to the consequences of freewill. Alvin Plantinga argues that it is logically impossible for God to create free persons and still determine their actions. The freewill argument asserts that it would be logically inconsistent for God to prevent evil by coercion and curtailing freewill, because that would no longer be freewill. This position seems to undermine the doctrine of determinism and the supremacy of God over the affairs of humans. Thus, it has generated a lot of controversies that posed a serious threat to the existence of the omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God. The theological question is: can free will be compatible with the doctrine of determinism? The objective of this research is to establish the nexus between freewill and the doctrine of determinism to reconcile the duo. It will take a step further in supporting the moral responsibility of man. The paper employs descriptive, historical, and phenomenological research methodologies. This paper concludes that though humans' behaviour could be determined, humans still have meaningful control over their decisions and actions. Freedom of will is compatible with determinism because there is a relationship between God's sovereignty and humans' responsibility.

KEYWORDS: Evil, Compatibilism, Determinism, Freewill, and Alternate Possibility.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the annals of human history, the contemplation of the origins of natural phenomena and the existence of evil in a world where good people suffer has sparked up some profound philosophical discourses. Countless learned individuals, among them the esteemed philosopher J.S. Mill, have posited that the coexistence of evil within the fabric of the natural world presents a compelling rationale for questioning the necessity of ascribing its existence to a benevolent, omnipotent deity (Ryan, 2012:3). Timothy Ryan emphasizes that according to thinkers like Thomas Aquinas, the presence of evil in the world does not necessarily pose a problem or conflict with the belief in an all-good and omnipotent deity as its origin (Ryan, 2012:4). Anthony Flew and John L. Mackie argue that a benevolent God would have created a

world without evil (Flew, 2010:91,117) This conception of the problem of evil challenges the belief in God and undermines faith in a theistic deity. Consequently, reconciling the existence of a benevolent God with the presence of evil poses a significant challenge to theism. Alvin Plantinga attempts to address this challenge by arguing that God permits evil because it serves a greater purpose. Plantinga argues that it is logically impossible for God to create free individuals and simultaneously control their actions. As a result, he attributes the problem of evil to the consequences of free will. However, Plantinga's view is contrary to the doctrine of determinism and necessity that denies moral responsibility of man. The enduring question that troubles the minds of many is: Where is the place of the supremacy of God? If God is all-powerful, then surely, He should be capable of preventing evil. If God is omnipotent and yet does not intervene in the presence of evil, then there arises a suspicion about the limits of God's goodness and power. It leads to the suggestion that either God is not all-powerful, or that God is not entirely good. If free will is accepted, how can it be reconciled with the doctrine of determinism? These and more questions are the issues this paper intends to address. The targeted population or group of people for this study is not limited to people with narcissistic tendencies, as it will, however, be of help to the general public on moral responsibility.

PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY INTO MORAL EVIL

God is a moral being from whose morality humans derived morality. Morality is human conducts, which are actions that a man performs consciously and wilfully and for which he can be held responsible (Austin, 1901-1975 Fagothey, 2021:3). It has always held a special place in philosophy and theology because of its consequences on the dignity of man. Moral evil is any morally negative event caused by the intentional action or inaction of an agent, such as a person. An example of a moral evil might be murder, war, theft, rape, or any other evil event for which someone can be held responsible or culpable. It is moral evil because it is an evil emanating from man's exercise of free will. Obviously, moral evil has brought about the degeneration of things in every aspect of human life. Transgression and corruption, which have brought about so much pain to mankind, are some of their products. This phenomenon is almost becoming a culture in our different sectors or sections of life (Ochulor & Bassey, 2010:446-447). The evidence of this human wickedness in the world is transparently undisputable and even threatens the existence of God. How can it be said that a good God who is loving and all-powerful exists while there is so much evil in the world? The problem of evil is no doubt the greatest challenge or obstacle to the belief in God. Thus, it seems so unbelievable that there is an omnipotent and Omni-benevolent God. If He truly exists, why would He permit so much pain and suffering in the world? This is a

philosophical question that threatens the monotheistic belief in God (Peterson, 2017:166-192). Hume argues that: "Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" (Hume, 2017:59-78). According to Hume, the problem has been the basis of a positive argument for atheism. If God exists and is omnipotent and perfectly good, a perfectly good being would eliminate evil as far as it could; there is no limit to what an omnipotent being can do; therefore, if God exists, there would be no evil in the world; there is evil in the world, and therefore, God does not exist. Could this assertion be true? Can the existence of evil cancel the existence of God? God exists, though evil equally exists. Evil is a result of man's freewill (Plantinga, 1967:49). This paper aligns with this thought because what we call evil did not exist from the beginning of creation, as everything that God created was good (Gen. 1:31). Thus, evil is a result of man's moral free will. At this juncture, let us consider the basic cause of moral evil.

There is no cause without an effect. No one is born with a morally deficient mind. Even God would have been unfair to create some people with a morally good attitude and others with a morally bad attitude. Thus, moral evil is rather a product of human activities resulting from the free will of man. African Traditional Religious belief holds that for a man to be truly human and successful; he must be in a constant relationship with the Supreme Being (God) as well as good spirits. These gods have power over evil and good spirits, which influence the actions of man. Africans believe so much in the realities of these spirits. One notable thing about the spirits is that they respect the freedom of man. Thus, if a man repeatedly opts to do evil, the good spirits automatically withdraw their protective power. The man will then fall victim to the evil spirits who take hold of him (Deezia, 2018:246). This implies that the influence of the evil spirit on man is the cause of moral evil.

Although some external influences, such as moral/ spiritual bankruptcy, government's poor attitudes to crimes, secret cults, unemployment, poverty, evil communication, and corruption, are also viewed as causes of moral evil, I uphold the African Traditional belief on the subject matter as explained above because it does not contradict the Christian view on the origin of evil. Neither does it contradict the view of other religions on the matter of evil. It is a general belief that an idle mind is the devil's workshop. Wicked thoughts quickly enter our minds when we are not busy doing something. This philosophy projects that idleness is ultimately the cause of evil. Whichever way we look at it, moral evil is a product of the mind, which comes as a result of man's free will. Moral evil is what contemporary people, including philosophers, tend to have in mind when they talk of "evil" (Hannah, 1951:49). Russell complements the view of Arendt on the explanation of moral evil (Russell, 2014:24). However, Kant's view is that moral evil is not rooted in freewill. According to him,

there is no conceivable ground from which moral evil could first be traced to human beings (Kant, 2018:3). This assertion attributes evil back to God. Kant cannot be true because evil cannot be attributed to God. In contrast to the above assertion by Kant, James Sennett posits that God can create free creatures, but He cannot cause or determine them to do only what is right (Sennett, 1998:40). His reason is that if God does so, then the creatures are not significantly free after all, as they do not do what is right freely. Thus, Sennett opines that for God to create creatures capable of moral good, God therefore, must therefore create creatures capable of moral evil; and at the same time prevent them from doing so. Thus, Sennett attributes the source of moral evil to the wrong exercise of freedom by some of the free creatures God created. However, John contends that evil can be intentional, accidental or ironic (Stackhouse, 1998:36). In line with the above assertion, John Hick argues that Moral evil is the kind of evil whose occurrence is dependent on intentional human actions and inactions (Hick, 2010:12). According to Hick, Moral evil includes all wrong acts of omission and commission accrued to the misbehaviours of moral agents in society. Moral evil is usually caused by human misuse of free will. All categories of human wickedness against a fellow human being, such as terrorism, murder, rape, adultery, stealing, and such like, are examples of moral evil.

THE CONCEPT OF FREEWILL

The freewill defence holds that God is an omniscient, all-powerful, and perfectly good Being, in all cases, and thus created the best possible world despite it containing evil. Free will is the link between the soul (or psyche) and human action (Gillett, 2016:167-198). Freewill in philosophy and science is the supposed power or capacity of humans to make decisions or perform actions independently of any prior event or state of the universe (*First Cause | Philosophy*, n.d.). According to Peter van Inwagen, the term free will is not commonly used outside the boundaries of philosophy. He posits that free will is “a philosophical term of art” and is not usually used in non-philosophical language (Inwagen, 2008:329). Kane, however, opines that free will is “the power of agents to be the ultimate creators (or originators) and sustainers of their ends or purposes (Kane, 1996:4). Here, Kane's main concentration is on the power of the individual to act freely. A German philosopher Michael Pauen understands free will as self-determination without external influence (Paeue, 2004:52). He suggests that the ability to perform an act and the ability to refrain from performing the act without external control is free will. Thus, free will is the ability to decide between two or more actions without any form of external coercion. Chad Meister and Dew suggest that significant human freedom means that human beings can obey as well as disobey God depending on their preferred choice. They argue that a choice is a true choice if and

only if it is a choice that can be made and corollary consequences followed, such as in the Garden of Eden (Meister & Dew, 2013:45).

God certainly could have created beings with perfect morality, but a perfect being would not have free will in every moral scenario and therefore would be lacking in actual morality rather than determined morality. Feinberg opines that “The free will defence begins by pointing out that God is not the cause of evil in the world; the abuse of human freewill is” (Feinberg, 2001:1184-1187). Plantinga further argues that the heart of the free will defence is the claim that it is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or as much moral good as this world contains) without creating one that also contained moral evil. And if so, God may have a good reason for creating a world containing evil (Plantinga, 1974:343).

DETERMINISM AND DOCTRINE OF NECESSITY

This is a philosophical theory that holds that all events, including human decisions and actions, are causally determined by preceding events. The projection is that there is no course without a cause. Events are completely influenced by previously existing causes. This is similar to predestination in theology, which holds that all events have been determined by God, usually concerning the eventual fate of the individual soul. It is a doctrine that states that God has eternally ordained all that will happen, especially regarding the salvation of man. Agah points out that it was through the divine will that God has eternally elected certain men to salvation and assigned others to condemnation. Every step of salvation rests quite completely on the will and activity of God Himself (Agah, 2002:3). This is the major problem of freewill. People are meant to believe that their actions are influenced by external factors that are unknown to them and beyond their control. Even the moral responsibility of man is denied in the face of determinism. Why should human beings not be responsible for their actions? Does it make sense if a man who killed another is granted a pardon on the grounds of influence by external factors? Is determinism not another way of denying people’s freedom of choice? Or did God create human beings to live a predestined/ predetermined life? Is it possible that people’s choices and actions might be determined by fate or unconscious motives?

According to Kate, choices and actions are determined due to conditions obtained earlier (such as the decrees of fate or the foreordaining acts of God or antecedent causes plus laws of nature) whose occurrence is a sufficient condition for the occurrence of the event (Kane, 2005:8). The above assertion implies that the determined event will not occur unless the earlier determining conditions are met. In this case, who is responsible for obtaining the earlier determining conditions? This is a problem for freewill because human actions are up to them. The ultimate sources of human actions lie in them and not in some external factors that are beyond their control.

Kane, however, argues that a favourable answer to freewill debate for most philosophers is compatibilism, which posits that freewill and determinism are compatible. According to Kane, determinism is a kind of necessity, but it is a conditional necessity. A determined event does not have to occur; no matter what else happens (it need not be necessary). But it must occur when the determining conditions have occurred (Kane, 2005:8). All doctrines of determinism imply that every event, or at least every human choice and action, is determined by some determining conditions in this sense.

COMPATIBILISM AND FREEWILL

This is the belief that freewill and determinism are mutually compatible. Compatibilism holds that it is possible to believe in both without being logically inconsistent. The implication is that causal determinism does not exclude the truth of possible future outcomes. Because freewill is seen as a necessary prerequisite for moral responsibility, compatibilism is often used to support compatibility between moral responsibility and determinism. Libertarians and hard determinists are the two basic schools of thought in philosophical debates that have to do with freewill (“Front Matter,” 2018). The former argues that human beings have freewill while the latter maintains that everything that happens is determined by external causes which are beyond human control. These external factors that seem to place humans at the receiving end, and not actors, are not limited to life experiences such as family dynamics, cultural norms, beliefs, and expectations that influence human choices. Others are environmental factors such as the physical environment, which includes technology, education, and government policies. Social influences like peer pressure and social expectations can also influence human freewill and moral responsibility.

According to Gillett, there is a great disagreement in philosophy concerning what is meant by the terms such as “could have done otherwise” and “alternate possibilities”, as well as disagreement over whether alternate possibilities are necessary features of free will and moral responsibility, as is often claimed. However, He holds that freedom does not necessarily require alternative possibilities to be true (“Front Matter,” 2018). By rejecting the necessity of having alternate possibilities to have freedom, Gillett argues that determinism removes alternate possibilities but does not remove freedom, which he believes gives a much more coherent expression of compatibilism. He highlighted significant tensions between compatibilism and the freewill defence and Augustinian theodicy, both of which assume an incompatibilist view of freedom and regard evil as being a necessary by-product of humans having freewill.

On the contrary, Avak Howsepan (2007) argues that both metaphysical compatibilism and theological determinism are not true. The argument is that if

traditional theological determinism is true, it then means that God determines all human actions (evil actions inclusive). The implication is that God is responsible for all evil actions that are performed by humans. However, this assertion contradicts the nature of God. Thus, Howsepian (2007) holds that no wholly good being will be the determining cause of another's evil act. For this reason, he concludes that no free evil human-act is a theologically determined compatible act.

Jason Turner projects a compatibilist account of freewill that states thus: 'although God can create creatures which are both free and causally determined, the freedom of determined creatures depends on God's not taking into account what they will be determined to do' (Turner, 2013:126). According to Turner, God may be able to create free and determined creatures without being able to create creatures determined to always freely act rightly. He sees freewill defence as a theistic strategy for rejecting a certain argument for the non-existence of God. Turner disagrees that freewill defence works only if the creatures in question have a sort of freedom incompatible with determinism. He further argues that even if determinism is true, it is often assumed that the freewill defence is available only to those who think that compatibilism is false. He added that if freewill and moral responsibility are compatible with determinism, then God could have created free creatures in a deterministic universe (Turner, 2013:1286). This position breeds a level playing field between freewill and determinism. Turner posits that an apparent incompatibility between compatibilism and the freewill does not exist. Arguing on the compatibilist freewill defence, Turner concludes that merely being a compatibilist or a fan of freewill does not deny the existence of the other. Thus, there is room for freewill in compatibilism.

ALTERNATE POSSIBILITY AND FREEWILL

It is impossible to explore the relationship between alternative possibilities and freedom without also including some discussion of moral responsibility. Jennifer Gillett argues that one of the key reasons why freedom and determinism are often seen to be incompatible is because freedom and moral responsibility are assumed to require alternate possibilities, and determinism is assumed to rule out alternate possibilities (Gillett, 2018:4). Alternate possibilities are often described using the phrase "could have done otherwise" or "the ability to act otherwise than one in fact does" (Gillett, 2018:19). Quoting Antony Flew, Gillett states that the content of what we mean by could have done otherwise "is, or should be, the crux of the dispute between Compatibilist and incompatibilist" (Gillett, 2018:22). In contrast, he acknowledged that some have suggested that alternate possibilities do not need to exist as choices in reality, but only in the minds. He argues that to be a genuine alternative possibility requires more than just the alternative action being physically and logically possible. This is because there

seem to be occasions where, theoretically, alternate possibilities are not viable alternatives. He concludes that determinism does not rule out alternate possibilities, because alternate possibilities are not even required for freedom. A compatibilist's view is that even if human behaviour is determined, humans still have meaningful control over their decisions and actions. However, Critics of compatibilism argue that any type of freedom that is compatible with determinism and lacks alternate possibilities is not true freedom (Bishop, 2009:109).

According to Gillett, one of the key reasons that Plantinga and others reject compatibilism is because they claim that determinism removes alternate possibilities and by doing so undermines freedom (Gillett, 2018:69). He argues that a rejection of the principle of alternate possibilities strengthens compatibilist objections to the free will defence by highlighting that even if it is accepted that determinism is incompatible with having alternate possibilities, this does not mean that determinism is incompatible with having freedom and moral responsibility. The issue is that if freedom does not require alternate possibilities, then determinism, being incompatible with alternate possibilities, cannot be a satisfactory reason for rejecting the compatibilism of freedom and determinism, Gillett concludes.

Whereas the freewill defence requires that God cannot ensure that free humans always choose good. A compatibilist approach argues that it could be possible for God to create free humans who always freely choose to do good. However, if human beings are only free to choose what is good, it means that there is no alternative responsibility. Nevertheless, supporting Plantinga's view on freewill, Gillett opines that human choices could be free even if the desires and circumstances which bring about those choices are determined by God (Gillett, 2018:70). The point is that if freedom does not require alternate possibilities, then human beings will lack the capability to be able to choose to do good or to choose to do evil. In whatever way, from the compatibilist position, persons who lack the possibility of choosing evil only lack alternate possibilities and do not necessarily lack freedom. In other words, human beings could be free, yet always choose good, just as God is free yet always freely chooses good. This assertion breeds unhealthy comparison between God, whose holiness is not in question, and human beings. There will be no room for moral evil if the compatibilist position is accepted. The best bet is to align with Gillett that human choices could be free even if the desires and circumstances that bring about those choices are determined by God.

Mackie, rejecting determinism, posits that it would be incoherent to say that God would have made human beings to freely choose the good because if God had made men to choose, that is, force them to choose one way rather than the other, they would not have been choosing freely (Ryan, 2012:4). Freedom would not have been complete freedom. However, Aquinas's ontological conception of evil suggests that God and creation can respond to Mackie's compatibilist challenge by proving that the act of

creating such impeccable freewill is logically impossible (Rodriguez, 2020:2). Thus, a perfect freewill is that which is without external influence. There are two different kinds of freewill; a state of innocence and a state of moral perfection (Stackhouse, 1998:7). Illustrating the point above, Stackhouse describes a state of innocence as a kind of freewill that was exhibited by Adam and Eve, whereby human beings could choose to do evil at any moment. Describing moral perfection, Stackhouse used the theology of heaven to explain it to mean a complete moral maturity that produces a character of holiness that is confirmed through a lifetime of moral choice. He further argues that freewill is not lost in heaven, as human beings will still be free to do what they prefer, but will be thoroughly habituated in goodness so that they simply will not do evil. Christian List, arguing against freewill scepticism, states that the denial of freewill would raise significant questions about the picture of humans as choice-making agents, and it would cast into doubt society's practices of assigning responsibility to people for their actions. It will therefore become problematic to hold a person responsible for something he or she did not freely do (List, 2019:10). According to List, abandoning the idea of freewill would have far-reaching implications for human self-understanding as autonomous agents, independently of any implications for criminal justice (List, 2019:2). He raised a concern that genuine deliberation about important decisions such as which career to pursue, whom to marry, which ideology to endorse and so on would be meaningless if human beings are not viewed as being free in making those decisions. Thus, it would be problematic to hold a person responsible for something he or she did not freely do.

FEWEILL IN BIBLE PERSPECTIVE

Howbeit, freewill is detectable in the naming of the animals, the naming of Eve, the freedom of the serpent to tempt, and the freedom to disobey God's command, which resulted in the fall of mankind. God is omniscient, omnipotent, and Omni-benevolent. A completely good God could not have created evil. However, He allows man the freedom to choose. This played out in the creation story when God said to man; you may freely (unconditionally) eat (the fruit) from every tree of the garden (Gen. 2:16). God added; "but (only) from the tree of the knowledge (recognition) of good and evil you shall not eat, otherwise on the day that you eat from it, you shall most certainly die (because of your disobedient) (Gen. 2:17). A critical look at the above Scripture would suggest that God should have removed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and its fruit from the garden. But God did not, thereby allowing humanity the freedom of choice of obedience. Even the dialogue between the serpent and the woman portrays that God has given man free will in terms of choice of actions; "And the woman said to the serpent, we may eat fruit from the trees of the garden, except the fruit from the tree which is in

the middle of the garden...” (Gen. 3:2-4). And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was delightful to look at, and a tree to be desired to make one wise and insightful, she took some of its fruit and ate it, and she also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate, and their eyes were opened (Gen. 3:6-7). The consequences of their actions were the pains and evil that surfaced as pronounced by God (Gen. 3:14-19). This follows that if man had chosen to obey God, evil would not have been in the world. However, humans’ freewill does not cancel the doctrine of predestination or determinism. The doctrine of predestination has a strong advocate in John Calvin, the sixteenth-century Protestant reformer (Lam, 2020:3). John Calvin's view on predestination and freewill is a complex one, rooted in his belief in God's absolute sovereignty and providence. He believed that God's will is the ultimate cause of all events, including the salvation of individuals. While Calvin affirmed free will, he also held that God's will ultimately directs and determines all human choices. He emphasises double predestination. Martin Luther rejects the idea of double predestination, which suggests God predestines some to hell (Matzat, 1996:2). Although Martin Luther's view on predestination and freewill affirms that God's predestination is the cause of human salvation. He nevertheless emphasizes the role of human freewill in accepting God's grace. Luther’s position is in line with the Scripture “for God so love the world, that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The phrase “whoever in this scripture accommodates human freewill in the will of God,

CONCLUSION

This paper posits that even if human behaviour is determined, humans still have meaningful control over their decisions and actions because whatever influences a man must first of all be accepted and settled in the mind. A moral personality is a self-conscious, self-determining being. The ideal of determinism in philosophy or predestination in theology does not cancel the existence of freewill, though both seem to be incompatible. There is a relationship between God’s sovereignty and humans’ responsibility, mostly in the case of human salvation. Thus, freedom of will is real and compatible with determinism. What this means is that we can have free will in a determined world. Any contrary view will either deny the moral responsibility of man or the sovereignty of God.

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