

Analysis of the Possibility of Being Ultimately Responsible for Our Actions

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Abstract: In philosophy, free will refers to the ability to make value judgments according to one's own will and determine one's own direction of action. Moral responsibility is the moral behavior that people should choose and the moral obligation to nature or society or others in certain social relations and natural relations. It is often assumed that only when people are free do they have moral responsibility for their actions. From the scientific point of view, however, man is not free because his actions are subject to causal explanations, which are deterministic in nature. The relationship between free will and moral responsibility is often debated. Some people believe that an individual's behavior and character are the results of a series of events, so it is difficult to completely control their own behavior. Others believe that individuals should be responsible for their own actions on the basis of free will. Can individuals control their own actions? Are individuals morally responsible for their actions? The above two questions are the two questions that need to be discussed in this paper.

1. Introduction

The capacity for individuals to make decisions independently of any prior events is considered as free will [1], and was applied widely held belief in human moral responsibility, which underpins the principles of law, reward, punishment, and motivation [2], despite its existence is still in controversy. Those unbounded debates centralize the argumentation for the existence of free will and its relationship with determinism and moral responsibility.

Does free will really exist? This question has been debated in academic circles until now. At first, only philosophers were interested in this topic, but with the development of science and technology, more and more people from other fields joined in the discussion. Both sides have different opinions, and it seems that everyone has a point. In daily life, we all feel that there are many constraints on our behavior and thinking, such as social norms, economic ability, family pressure, and even psychological characteristics shaped by the environment we grew up in, which can limit our choices. We know we are not completely free. However, we still believe that within certain limits, people still have freedom of choice. For example, you can choose to read a book without looking at your phone. The question of whether man has free will is as much a question of science as of philosophy.

The opposite of free will is a concept called determinism, which basically says that everything in nature has a cause and is the result of a previous action. With the advent of mechanics, determinism found a scientific basis. If everything in the world is made up of particles that collide with each other according to Newton's laws, then the state of the particles at each moment is clearly determined by the state of the particles at the last time. There is no such thing as free will.

In order for us to be ultimately responsible for our actions, we need to have free will, which is the ability of humans to make judgments or perform actions independently of any antecedent occurrence or state of the universe, that one cannot be the *causa sui* [3]- cause of itself [4]. On the other hand, hard determinists doubt the existence of free will and claim that nothing could be *causa sui* [5]. They hold that universal causal rules govern the occurrence of all physical and mental phenomena [6], thus the existence of moral responsibility shall be denied. To them, any special treatment, such as credit or punishment, is unfair since one's character and behavior are the result that is beyond one's control [7].

Based on above insights, two questions are raised: do we have control over our actions? And are we morally responsible for our actions?

2. Steps to Consider the Two Questions

The preliminary step to consider is whether individuals have the choice to decide their own actions or it is only a belief they have [8]. People have actions with the foundation of external world and inheritance, those factors drive their choice in an invisible way. When people act, they act in the situation where they find themselves are in. Thus, this essay will use the argument from determinism to further illustrate that individuals is incapable of making free decisions and control over their actions.

Second, based on the statement of the first question, people need to be ultimately responsible for the way they are in order for them to be ultimately responsible for their action. There's Hume's study of the concept of necessary connexion as arising from our human proclivity for making inductive deductions, which is linked to such imperfect conjunctions [9]. People are unable to control the external world nor genetic inheritance. Thus, they lose free will and the ability to make a choice, making them not able to be responsible for their actions and a series of actions follows.

From the above, the conclusion can be dawned that if, those actions are indeed the cause of our previous actions that people lose their control with, they should not be ultimately responsible for their actions. And the following further illustrate to answer these two questions.

3. Control over Our Actions

To begin with, the commonest way for most individuals determines the situation is the human sensory reception: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. All five receptions are controlled and transferred by the brain [10]. These sensory receptions support individuals to recognize and believe the sense of having control over their bodies and actions. However, a new investigation suggests, it's now possible to interpret our particular genetic code, which consists of 3.2 billion DNA "letters" that form a blueprint for our brains and bodies and is unique to each of us [11]. Based on this study, if the internal gene determines the behavior of the individual with a specific personality in a specific environment without the individual's consciousness, it does not reach the meaning of *causa sui*, that is, the individual makes a free choice without reaching the individual's consciousness.

The ego refers to self-awareness, that is, the act of being conscious. Control refers to the control of one's own behavior or direction of behavior. The purpose of self-control is to overcome people's instinct, impulse, habit, desire, etc. To overcome is often those who are not conducive to personal development, and do not conform to the moral behavior.

As Hume suggested, an individual's understanding of necessity and causation is derived purely from observed uniformity and a consequent tendency to infer from 'cause' to 'effect', which is clearly inadequate as an evidential base from which to infer anything as strong as universal determinism [12]. The main problem existing can be interpreted as a *prima facie* incompatibility between the freedom of human actions, and the universality of causal law [13].

Determinism, as introduced, could be discussed as universally allowed, that all things happen based on the adequate cause to make it happen in the specific situations [14]. Determinism is a theory and theory that there are objective laws and causal connections in nature and human society, which is opposite to non-determinism. The determinism in psychology believes that all the activities of people are the result of the previous certain reason and several reasons, and the behavior of people can be predicted according to the previous conditions and experiences. This deny the ownership of free will by an individual, and their control over their actions since all the events that is happening are the only result of the previous events. People have no right to make their own choices. Thus, they can hardly have free control over their own actions.

In this way, as it is concluded by Gary Watson, if determinism is true, then everything that occurs, including situations of external world and human actions, are causally required by the universe's antecedent condition in line with natural law. And if human acts are causally necessitated by the past and the rules of nature, we will never be able to do anything other than what we do until we can falsify

the laws of nature or the description of the past [15]. Above this, when individuals are conscious of being free, they are not directly conscious that their actions are uncaused, since the absence of causation is not something one could be directly aware of.

No matter whether people think they have control over things, for example, libertarians who strongly defend a strong notion of free will. Determinism is more persuasive since people cannot control their genetic composition and subconscious behavior. Determinism is a theory that cannot be correlated with experience, that is to say, no empirical evidence can overturn determinism, and likewise, no empirical evidence can support determinism. Individuals might not even be aware of the impact of these subconscious behaviors and changes in external factors. This makes individuals, supported by their own senses, think that they have the illusory right to choose their own behavior, but this is not the case from the perspective of causal determinism. The occurrence of all things is the only result of the accumulation of all previous things, and the individual cannot guarantee his control over the external environment of the event, and therefore cannot control the behavior affected by the external environment. The law of cause and effect in the sense of determinism is a necessary prerequisite for us to make free choices. In other words, free choice is actually based on causal law. If there is no causal law, then we can't make free choice at all. Because any choice is based on the expectation of the result, the correct expectation of the result needs the help of the law of cause and effect.

4. Moral Responsibility for Our Actions

On the basis of these philosophical arguments, new investigation emerged to demonstrate the existence of leading effect of necessities. Benjamin and his colleagues discovered that the conscious desire to move (designated W) occurred 200 milliseconds before the motor act, but 350-400 milliseconds after readiness potential (RP), which is a ramp-like rise of electrical activity in the brain that happens before actual movement [16]. Because the conscious purpose or decision to move arrives too late in the neuropsychological sequence, Libet and others conclude that it cannot be the genuine cause of movement [17].

This leads to further arguments for moral responsibility skepticism. As mentioned before, moral responsibility refers to people's moral responsibility for their own mistakes and their adverse consequences. In social life, people have certain freedom to choose their own behavior, so they must bear corresponding moral responsibilities. This argument claims that free will and ultimate moral responsibility are incompatible ideas, because we would have to be *causa sui* to be free in a sense required for ultimate moral responsibility, which is impossible [18]. Friedrich Nietzsche first introduced it, and Galen Strawson later resurrected and developed it out [19]. Specifically, summarize the early basic argument from Galen Strawson which has further developed during following years:

1) Nothing could be *causa sui* [20].

2) To be ultimately morally responsible for one's conduct, one must be *causa sui*, at least in some critical mental aspects.

3) However, in order to fully take responsibility for one's mental state, one must have contributed to it in some way. Furthermore, in that regard, one must have done more than just cause themselves to be who they are. In that regard, one must also have made a deliberate, explicit choice to be who they are, and they must have been successful in making that choice come true.

4) Therefore, it is impossible for anyone to be ultimately morally responsible for their action.

Simply conclude the skepticism of the moral responsible argument, the prerequisite of being morally responsible for their action, they have to have free will. However, since people could not be ultimately responsible for the genetic arrangement and external world, they could not be ultimately responsible for the actions that are inevitably led by those necessities.

To consist the moral responsibility skepticism would require individuals to overturn their previous view that whether they are guilty or not guilty, criticism, thus, exists for the worry of jeopardizing of morality. The central claim of those criticism explains around the argument that the moral responsibility skepticism would undermine "morality" [21]. However, this argument did not hugely challenge the skepticism since the language are ambiguous to state the specific moral judgments or

obligation they include, if no clear state is listed out, it is possible to be an extreme claim [22].

Therefore, under the skepticism about moral responsibility, people should neither be blameworthy nor praiseworthy. Thus, the confident positive judgment of blameworthiness is unjustified since people lack of freedom to choose their own actions, it is unfair for them to take responsibilities for those necessities that are out of their areas of control [23]. At this point, it could be stated that rewards and punishments are distributed not because specific actions “merit” them, but because some useful purposes are believed to be offered by inflicting through this process.

5. Conclusion

Free will is the ability of an autonomous and self-controlled agent to decide and control its own behavior. Moral responsibility is the responsibility of an individual with free will to be kind and faithful to society and others. From building argument through two questions, discussing whether individuals have control over their actions and should they take the moral responsibility over their actions, what could be concluded are as follows, that individuals lack of chance to have free will, thus, they cannot be *causa sui*, the moral responsibility becomes impossible when individuals lose the opportunity to control their actions freely. Everything that happened is the accumulation of previous event, and is controlled by the necessities which is determined by genetic inheritance, and external world. Lacking control over these circumstances makes it impossible to be ultimately morally responsible for everything individuals do.

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