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On Determinism and Free Will

CAUSES AND EFFECTS

Observation and experience tell us that everything, every event, is caused. Furthermore, those causes themselves are things and events caused by precedent things and events and so *ad infinitum* back until the beginning, the origin. That array - network of causes and effects is a solid chain back into the past and, therefore, just as solidly a causal chain into the future.

Therefore everything is already determined; it all is pre-determined. The future is as fixed and unalterable as is the past.

DETERMINISM

We can mentally conceive of all of space in all of its grand extension outward from where we, ourselves, are. We can do that even though we, ourselves, are located at only a minute portion of that totality of space and could never even visit or examine all of it.

That totality of space exists and it does so without our ever experiencing or participating in other than a small local portion of it. We can at any instant be only at one place in the totality of space.

Now mentally conceive of all of time in all of its grand extension forward and rearward from where we, ourselves, are. We can do that even though we, ourselves, are located at only a minute portion of that totality of all time and can never even visit or examine all of it.

That totality of time exists because of the unbreakable chain of causality creating and uniting it and it does so without our ever experiencing or participating in other than a small local portion of it. We can be only at one moment at a time in the totality of time.

Then, just as every place is, so every event is. Even as viewed from our current place or moment in time everything has effectively happened. All is already determined.

FREE WILL

The problem with Determinism would appear to be that only one course of action is really open to a person; that a person cannot be morally responsible for his acts because he cannot freely choose; that reward and punishment are meaningless. However, that is not so.

Although everything is already determined we nevertheless seem to have free will. We feel that we have choices and can freely select from among them. It seems to us that we are free, not pre-determined. And it seems to us that reward and punishment are significantly effective in influencing the choices that we make. That all takes place as follows.

If society and my environment tell me that I will be punished and exiled from human society for being criminal and that I will be rewarded and granted participation in human society for being honest and responsible, clearly being so told will tend to influence my behavior away from the criminal and toward the honest and responsible.

If I then decide [seemingly to me as a free decision] to be honest and responsible and so act then it is that behavior of mine that was pre-determined by the “solid chain” of causes and effects even as if it had already happened, which in a sense is actually the case.

If I nevertheless decide [seemingly to me as a free decision]

to be criminal and so act then it is that behavior of mine that was, likewise, so pre-determined even as if it had already happened, which in a sense is actually the case.

I seem to make the choice and to do so influenced to some extent by the promised punishment and reward.

However, the choice I make is pre-determined even though it does not seem that way to me. Before I make it at my then current location in time I have already made it somewhat later along the stream of my existence in time.