

verseny37 2. idézet

Determinism and compassion

Humans are in the need of certain concepts in order to make sense of the world. Such concepts include, as Immanuel Kant concluded, understanding our surroundings through space, time and causality. Free will is also essential for our understanding of ourselves and others- the understanding of humans. This concept is interlaced with the fabric of civilization, it is the ground for ethics in general, as I will explain in more detail. Both are essential, yet they seem to be incompatible. In this essay I will investigate the nature of free will and determinism. Firstly, I will try to define causality and the way we rely on it, then explain its contradictory nature with free will, highlighting the importance of that idea. Later on, I will criticise the concept of free will, from the aspect of being incompatible with determinism, from its usefulness to society.

As I mentioned earlier, we are unable to dismiss the idea of causality. There is a psychological element to it, since we cannot accept that things just happen without any reason whatsoever. This is shown in the way how humans tried to explain the nature of the world, first through myths, then religion, then science. Without this concept, gathering knowledge of our world would be impossible. It also contradicts the scientific worldview, which relies heavily on inductive reasoning. The implicit premise of all arguments derived from observations to general conclusion, is that if it happened once, twice or hundreds of times, we have sufficient reason to believe that the results will not differ, if tested once again. It is impossible to observe an infinite amount of cases, so we are left with the hope that reality follows some rules. We need to be able to trust our surroundings, otherwise we will fall into a state of existential dread.

The concept of determinism derives from the acceptance of causality. If we believe that everything is caused by something, in a long chain of cause and effect relationships, our actions too must be part of such chain. As neuroscience progresses rapidly, the way our brains function lose the certain mystery element that gave us the space for the idea of free will. Our needs and desires can be broken down to the certain physical, chemical and biological reactions. We can now examine how the use of alcohol or substances damage the brain, how certain genes carry the inclination towards mental illnesses, or how a brain tumour can alter one's personality drastically. One might say, rightfully, that we do not have such knowledge on the complexities of the human mind, but that does not mean that it is impossible to reduce thoughts completely to the firing of some neurons, just because science has not reached that point yet. This would mean that we do not have any more control over the processes of our brains, than, for example the beating of our hearts. Even if we reject this view for being too rigid, or crediting to complex ideas to too simple mechanisms, it is apparent that there are many factors that influence one's personality besides genes. We do not choose our family, the way we were raised, our environment, ethnicity or sexual orientation, and so on. These factors define our identity, and yet are beyond our control. This begs the question whether we can hold anyone accountable for the way they are.

This brings us to free will. The idea of free will is often described as the freedom to do otherwise, or the freedom to choose to do otherwise. This is also the foundation of moral responsibility. We do not judge a predator hunting its prey, since it has no choice to do otherwise. This idea is visible in the way our legal system works. The lack of control or options is recognised as a condition that could lead to a softer sentence, for example being manipulated or forced to do something, or having no other choice, like the act of self-defence. In a sense, everyone is held accountable to their degree of freedom. It seems as if without free will we lose the grounds for any moral judgement. The belief in free will is also essential for democracy. Denying it would mean that the people can never in fact exercise their right

in decision making. It is also questionable whether they deserve these types of rights at all. In this age of mass manipulation this issue becomes more urgent. Freedom of information is damaged by various factors, like the spreading of fake news, especially now that technology allow allows to target people based on their interests. If people are not conscious of what choice they are making, they are not acting freely.

The loss of free will is often portrayed as a moral crisis. Some argue that we must accept free will, even if we know, it's a mere illusion. this is a concept too useful to let go. But this would also contradict our basic human understanding, the idea that truth and goodness are intertwined. Illusions might be helpful, but they slow down progress. I find the attacks on determinism from a moral perspective deeply misguided. Looking back to a few decades ago, similar concerns were raised as the Western world became increasingly more secular. Many feared that the decline of Christianity would mean the decline of morals, that without the fear of hell or the promise of heaven people would have no reason to act good. This fear proved to be unjustified, as there is no evidence of a difference in moral judgements of a believer and an atheist.

We should also recognise the societal advantages of believing that determinism is true. though viewing ourselves as morally irresponsible agents might weakens our sense of morality but viewing others the same manner helps to be more empathetic. If we label someone as a mere criminal, we dehumanise them, while there are many aspects to take into consideration before judgement. Statistically most people how become convicts are form a low socio-economic background, uneducated, and a significant number of people with aggressive tendencies were victims of childhood abuse. The deterministic approach helps to realise that luck sadly is a bigger influence on our lives than the things we choose. The concept of free will perpetuates the idea that people are responsible for their own suffering, as if it was only upon themselves to change their conditions. Determinism is often conceived as a pessimistic approach, that means we are unable to become the architects of our own future. However, this mostly arises from its confusion with fatalism. The fact that our choices are (to different extent) influenced by past events does not mean that they have no value. While its true, that given the same stimulus, our reaction will not change, but we are not just influenced, but also influencers.

In conclusion, belief in determinism inspires us to become more compassionate. we should all aim to reach the possible highest level of freedom, to provide the highest possible options by striving to create a more equal society.