

Free Will and Determinism

Descartes, Spinoza,
Leibniz, Hume



Overarching Perspectives on Free Will & Determinism

- Determinism
- Libertarianism
- Compatibilism

Descartes

Two faculty theory of knowledge:

- Intellect - incomplete, imperfect
- Will - expansive and equivalent to God's capacity for will

How does Descartes reconcile the omniscience of God with humanity's capacity for free will?

- We cannot fully comprehend everything about God

Spinoza

Monism:

- Everything is God, so everything is determined, including past, present, and future

“all things are in God and are so dependent on him that they can neither be nor be conceived without him, and lastly, that all things have been predetermined by God, not from his free will or absolute pleasure, but from the absolute nature of God, his infinite power.”

Spinoza

Three Kinds Of Knowledge:

1. Knowledge of the first kind (from imagination and sense experience)
2. Knowledge of the second kind (from “common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things”)
3. Knowledge of the third kind [i.e. Intuition] (“from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things”)

Adequate Ideas:

- Ideas which come closer to an ultimate truth (only knowledge of the second and third kinds)

Inadequate Ideas:

- Ideas which have some grain of truth in them but are very ill formed or convoluted (only Knowledge of the first kind)

Spinoza

- No free will but a bit of wiggle room
- We cannot choose what ideas to believe or even think about
- However we can strive to invest ourselves in investigation of adequate ideas and thus gain a greater proportion of adequate ideas than inadequate ideas
- No free will does not mean we should simply give up living

Leibniz

- Monads are the purest of all substances
- Monads are active and mind-like
- Monads are representative and windowless

Leibniz

“The Present is Pregnant with the Future”

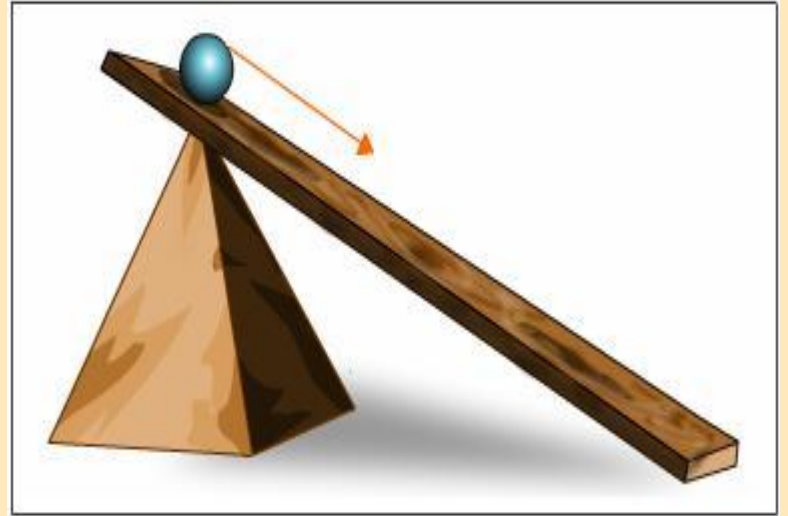
- Principle of Sufficient Reason
- The presents comes directly from the past

Leibniz

- This is the best of all possible worlds because God created it.
- If it were not the best of all possible worlds our conception of God as benevolent and all-knowing would perish.
- Our reality and God's inevitable creation of this world are both void of any free will and are thus determined.

Hume

- The debate over free will and determinism is verbal
- Relationships between causes and effects are inconceivably complex.
- Humans have no sense of the causal power of the past. Future seems uninhibited.



Hume

Necessity and Liberty

- Physical laws create sense of determinism or necessity.
- Our actions are still free if our will causes them independent of external influences, such as coercion.
- Moral accountability fundamentally unrelated to determinism

Back to Descartes

- In what ways does Descartes' robust vision of free will sound similar to Hume's account liberty? Is Descartes really more of a compatibilist?

“And when I take not of the fact that I doubt, or that I am a thing that is incomplete and dependent, there comes to mind a clear and distinct idea of a being, that is, an idea of God. And from the mere fact that such an idea is in me, or that I who have this idea exist, I draw the obvious conclusion that God also exists, and that my existence depends entirely upon him at each and every moment.” (AW, 54).

“Either because I clearly understand that there is in it an aspect of the good and the true, or because God has thus disposed the inner recesses of my thought - the more freely do I choose that direction.” (AW, 56).