

## **FREE WILL and BEING UNABLE TO SIN ARE COMPATIBLE**

Free will means you can do a or b and you are the cause of the choice you make. It denies that you are merely programmed or conditioned.

Free will to do good or evil is not the same thing as free will to do moral good or moral evil. The latter has baggage of rewards and punishment.

Free will that is always freely used to do good is in theory [so we are told!] possible.

But if God or nature or anything that is not you makes sure that you will always choose good then the philosophers say the end result is not free will at all. Most philosophers do not care. It is only Christian philosophy that worries much about it for it seeks to blame us not God for bringing evil into the world. And they also need free will to be about moral good or immorality not the other type of good.

Some thinkers feel that a totally out of character change in a person such as the person who always worked to save lives and who suddenly kills somebody in cold blood only seems to happen but in fact they have been unnoticeably changing over time so their decision was not sudden but spread out perhaps over several years. Most of us think of a decision as something we go for right now as opposed to something being spread out and made over months as opposed to in a moment. And the decision is in some way incomplete until the action is done. This tells us that temptation to do evil is definitely itself evil when it is a sign that you are gradually choosing an evil such as murder. The argument that God would have to destroy our free will if he made us inclined only to good is based on the supposition that each moment we can freely and unpredictably do bad or good so we can do something out of character any time even if we do not.

Many believe that something ensures you choose what you choose anyway so it is a pity it does not ensure you are always completely well-meaning.

If God is not ensuring that a being with free will is always choosing good then something else is. Your programming is not so it could be your programming.

Even if there is a God he could set up nature to programme you. Atheists and believers alike have to ask if free will is real if we are biological computers.

What if a free agent only chooses good and this good is not moral good?

What if a free agent only chooses good and this good is moral good?

What if a free agent only chooses both kinds of good? If so which kind of good matters? Are we meant to be good but is moral good only a by product of the good? Are we meant to be morally good meaning the potentia to do the other good is merely a by product?

Human acts and choices are not between good and evil but between one level of good and another level. We only do what we call evil when we are attracted by some good. There is no such thing as an evil person. The person simply has chosen the wrong kind of good. Good, like what we call evil, often looks ugly - think of the dentist! We must see ourselves not as bad but as people with an amazing potential for good. That makes us positive and confident which is essential for living a good life. The doctrine that we are free to deliberately do evil or good is incoherent. Free will and having no potential to sin are not only compatible but both ideas go together. To deny one is to deny the other.

Free will to choose what is evil for its own sake would not be free will at all. It would be to be insane. And yet if we cannot do this we still don't have free will. If we do, we don't have enough of it to justify God letting us do grave evil.

Religion presumes that we must have free will though it is possible that we do not and just feel that we do. Feeling free does not mean you really are free. Usually it is said that God lovingly gave us free will so that we would not be automatons. It is even dubiously said that a truly loving God would give us free will. That is nonsense. If God said he was no longer going to give free will to babies that will be born from now on would we be evil parents for trying to make babies? No. But we would be if creating automatons is bad. Free will is limited in the sense that you are forced to deal with some choices and not others at any given moment. And we could avoid being automatons by being able to make free choices but without the moral aspect. In other words, we are free to go here or there or do this or that but we are not free to intentionally do evil.

The philosophers, Professor Mackey and Professor Anthony Flew, assert that free will is compatible with never sinning or wanting to sin. They say that God could have made us all naturally good. They say he could have put us in an environment in which we are preserved from temptation and the real risk of doing evil.

Their critics claim that this would not be free will for God must have done something to stop us being free to sin so he is using us as puppets. But this is untrue. We do what we think is good for we are not free to do what we think is bad just because it is bad. It is the good that attracts us in the evil not the evil itself.

God does not need to program us but to program our circumstances so that we can program ourselves to be good. Perhaps he could allow temptation but let it be so weak that the person will easily ignore it and will ignore it. He has to give us a nature of some kind so it is an error to say that his giving us a nature, making us the way we are and shaping that identity by life experience, is the same as him making puppets of us. Religion says evil is slavery so it follows that if he gives us a nature that is both good and evil then he IS making puppets of us.

The notion of free will implies that you really had a choice when you made a decision. You think you freely decide because you consider different courses of action and go for one of them. Religion says free will is a gift from God for it helps us choose if we are going to be evil or good. It is really about our intentions and the kind of person they show us to be. You can intend to do great evil or great good and fail dismally. A truly good God would give us the choice between real good and real evil instead of subjective good and subjective evil. It would not be right for God to let us hurt one another just because we must be allowed to have good intentions and bad intentions.

If I have free will then I am responsible for my behaviour and what I do. It is not enough that I make a free choice. I have to be responsible for being the KIND of person who does what I do. That is very complicated. But maybe I was born to hate my children who I have treated badly. Maybe society's callousness influenced me. Maybe my brain is slightly damaged from when I was drinking too much. There are countless maybes. I can't be totally responsible for the kind of person I am. Therefore I am not to be considered to be a free agent or at least much of a free agent. Free will requires that I alone have to answer for being the kind of person I am. It is thought that free will and being unable to sin are contradictory. They are not. I have to program myself to be a decent person which limits my future free will to do evil. The more I program myself to be good the less free will I have.

The free will defence insists that God gave us free will out of love and we abused it so evil is our fault not God's. The free will defence implies that: "The best person can do great evil but does not." This denies that there is any programming - even self-programming involved. It contradicts our experience. The defence is thus an excuse for making belief in God seem reasonable.

If my love is not my own if I don't have free will, then let us consider this. I am not free to kill Hitler now so my evil then cannot be my own! So my love is not my own either.

Sin is an offence against the moral law of God. It is rejection of a relationship with God and may be a partial or total rejection. The moral law idea is awful. It means that the prostitute who engages in her profession because she wants to is condemned the most. The prostitute forced into it by poverty gets less interest from the condemnation brigade. USA Christians who are anti-abortion can be very pro-capital punishment. Moral law is often a weapon used to bully those who see that hypocrisy into silence.

The Church says we are given free will so that we can choose between serving God and sinning. This is what it means when it says we have the power to choose good or evil. But what if God has no business caring what we do? He has no need to dictate to us. He is in control and therefore he has no need to try and use moral laws to force us to do things. He is just being abusive. The only real sin would be believing in his authority!!! As it is none of God's business if we love or not it follows he can program us to do only good freely.

It is thought that the evil in our hearts and actions arises out of our ignoring and undermining our capacity or power to love. I would prefer to say that it arises out of our distorting our capacity to love. Evil is actually distorted love and goodness. To undermine or ignore would be necessary elements in distortion.

It is vital to realise that love means rewarding people for what they WOULD do. It is about treating them as if they have attained their full potential to love in the hope that our actions inspire them to aspire to attain it. Suppose you love and you can't do other than love. Suppose God prevents you from choosing anything other than love. This compulsion comes from outside you. It is not your fault. The compulsion is not internal or made by you. Therefore you have to be considered to be a freely loving person. Any other view of you would not do you justice. It would be evil. It is the same principle as rewarding a completely paralysed person for loving although they are unable to do anything loving. They are loving people not in spite of their inability to do loving things but BECAUSE of it.

Many think that a being that never resisted temptation and struggled to do good would be an innocent being but not a morally good one. This problem is accepted as an adequate refutation of the two philosophers by John Hick in *Evil and the God of Love*, page 306). But the being could be shown evil and tempted for a minute and the vision could cease when God sees that the will might give in so that the being starts willing good again.

The suggestion that it is good to suffer to be happy makes no sense. Why struggle virtuously for happiness and suffer a lot in the process when the happiness could be taken from you or you might die and cease to exist? Also, you cannot make yourself happy. People say you must do altruistic good works and happiness will come as a side-effect. But that is not causing their happiness for they could do these works and still end up unhappy. Happiness is a feeling and you cannot create it. It happens to you not because of you. If you carry out certain steps and happiness comes the fact remains that the happiness happened to you and not because of you. Suffering to be virtuous and to be happy is an illusion.

It would be safer to take the easy way to happiness which would be by not trying hard to be good and holy and forget the suffering - the immoral way and it would not be immoral then if it is safer.

The Humanist answer to this problem is that once you forget about loving God and realise all you do is done for your own self-esteem you will enjoy being good but religion says all has to be done for the love of God instead. Religion endangers happiness.

The theory that suffering is necessary for virtue really suggests that suffering is morally good and happiness is morally bad. It suggests that a God of love can't arrange for us to practice moral goodness even if he wants to for it is evil when it works for happiness.

God says that an innocent being that cannot sin or be tempted is morally inferior to a being that has fought temptation and suffering. Both are good. Goodness is goodness. The only difference is that the latter suffered for good so it is the suffering not the goodness that is being made important. If a human species was found that is programmed to be good all the time, would we have the right to treat them badly or differently just because they don't have free will and we do?

So what about those who are good in the face of suffering and who have free will. You might think the suffering is what makes them good because they valued the good so much that they suffered for it. This, according to some, is the whole point in self-sacrifice. This implies that happiness and pleasure are evil for it is suffering for good and not good itself that matter. But why can't the person who is never tempted or who never suffers, value good as much? The suffering would reduce the value of the good. Good that you don't suffer for is better than good that you do suffer for. A tenner that you don't suffer for is worth more than one that you do suffer for unless the suffering is the main thing, unless suffering should be an end in itself, unless you should want to suffer for nothing. A tenner you have to suffer for is less worth it. If it is worth as much as it would be if there were no suffering then the suffering and sacrifice has no value. If it is worth more because of the suffering then the suffering is valuable in itself and not just because of the end. A tenner is a good if money is good within reason so there is no difference between suffering for it than suffering for some other good like chastity or generosity. But it is just as moral for it is not the tenner you want at all but the way it will make you feel and what it will do for you. This is still true if you plan to give it away for you would want to feel good if you give it away. You want love as in the glowing feeling and see getting the tenner as loving and that is what you really want not the tenner.

Mackey and Flew have been vindicated by the fact that the kind of free will their critics want, the kind in which you have to struggle and suffer for the good, is immoral and evil. It is evil because it says that God needs good that is a mixture of evil and good with the good being the dominant component and that makes no sense. The kind of love the critics want God to require of us is sacrifice and it is incoherent to say that it is love when it is performed the way they want as an act of submission to a God who can't need it for it makes no sense. Only the Devil would confer this love on us and demand it of us.

Mackey and Flew are also vindicated by the fact that free will can only be for achieving good for evil is insanity. When you do evil you lose your free will because you are crazy then. We cannot have free will in a bad action because we are insane. Maybe we can still have free will in other actions that are not evil though not the kind of freedom that would merit a reward. It is necessary to be able to do evil to be able to do good that should be rewarded.

Religion says that God does not make evil. Why did God not make us better people than what we are? Many people find it easy to be good. It is just their nature. Why are we not all like that? Their answer is that God does not owe us anything. This answer is to be rejected. Unless we are convinced that we deserve to do better than we do and put such ideas as God owing us nothing aside we are damaging our self-esteem and damaging our dignity. We are putting psychological walls up to ban many emotional benefits and wisdom from our lives. We must turn away from belief in God and turn to the recognition that we are the "divine". We must perceive that even if we do a lot of wrong and a lot of people are hurt we still deserve the help and chance to change. The doctrine that God has the right to make some people more inclined to evil than others is a vindictive one. It is inseparable from the notion that we are to blame for evil not God so it follows that belief in

God in implicitly vindictive.

Incredibly, God cannot sin and yet we are told he is holy and righteous. The believers say the reason evil happens is because God gave us free will and its our fault for abusing it. That is not a reason but an excuse. It is telling that people would go that far and insult human suffering in order to justify their God.

To be responsible as a moral agent, you need to be free. If you are not then you should not be condemned for what harm you do. You will not be rewarded either which is odd. Surely a being forced to do wrong deserves as much love and praise as one who does good freely? After all the being was degraded and was only doing what he could do. Freedom requires that you be able to think freely. A mistake violates your freedom. Thus a person doing what is called immoral is being irrational or mistaken and does not have enough freedom to deserve to be called immoral or to be punished. The person is not really responsible for the act.

Finally

The Bible nowhere says we have free will in the sense that we are free from God's control or can get out out the straitjacket he made. Even when he permits us to act he is in control. So free will will stop feeling free and looking free in that context. If we are free then when we sin but less free then what is the point? He may as well just put us in a good straitjacket when we are in one anyway. The free will defence is intrinsically vindictive because it denies God should have given us free will but without empowering us to sin if we so choose. Free will and doing only good because of the way you are programmed is compatible.

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