

Re: The Road with no Branches argument

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From: Immortalist (*Reanimater_2000_at_yahoo.com*)

Date: 10/22/04

Date: Fri, 22 Oct 2004 12:24:34 -0700

"Keynes" <Keynes@earthlinkspam.net> wrote in message
news:ijjin0lfqat5bq8ofkrlrvgtqrbqt8tpi9@4ax.com...

> *On Thu, 21 Oct 2004 23:01:52 -0700, "Immortalist" <Reanimater_2000@yahoo.com>*

> *wrote:*

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> *>When we say that a person chooses among several possible behaviors is there*

> *>really a choice or does it just seem like there is a choice? Do people just*

> *>(through the action of their more complex brains) simply have better behaviors*

> *>than wasps, while still being totally mechanical in executing those behaviors?*

> *>Dennett gives his definition of determinism on page one: all physical events*

are

> *>caused or determined by the sum total of all previous events. This definition*

> *>dodges a question that many people feel should not be dodged: if we repeatedly*

> *>replayed the universe from the same point in time would it always reach the*

same

> *>future? Since we have no way of performing this experiment, this question is a*

> *>long-term classic in philosophy and physicists have tried to interpret the*

> *>results of other experiments in various ways in order to figure out the answer*

to

> *>this question. A related current fantasy game for physicists is to imagine*

that

> *>there are multiple universes and every time there is quantum indeterminacy*

each

> *>possibility occurs and new universes branch off. Since the 1920s physicists*

have

> *>been trying to convince themselves that quantum indeterminacy can in some way*

> *>explain Free Will. Dennett dismisses this idea as silly. How, he asks, can*

random

> *>resolutions of quantum-level events provide people with any control over their*

> *>behavior?*

>

> *>Since Dennett wrote *Elbow Room* in 1983 there has been a futile, but still*

> *>on-going attempt by some physicists to answer this question by assuming that*

the

> *>brain is a device for controlling quantum indeterminacy so as to construct*

> *>behavioral choice. Dennett argues that such efforts to salvage Free Will by*

> *>finding a way out of the prison of determinism are wasted.*

sci.logic: Re: The Road with no Branches argument

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> >*Dennett discusses many types of Free Will. Many philosophers have claimed that*
> >*determinism and Free Will are incompatible. What the physicists seem to be*
trying
> >*to construct is type of Free Will that involves a way for brains to make use*
of
> >*quantum indeterminacy so as to make choices that alter the universe in our*
favor,
> >*or if there are multiple universes, maybe brains can choose among the possible*
> >*universes. Dennett suggests that we can have another kind of Free Will, a type*
of
> >*Free Will which we can be perfectly happy with even if it does not give us the*
> >*power to act in more than one way at any given time. Dennett is able to accept*
> >*determinism and Free Will at the same time. How so?*
> >
> >*The type of Free Will that Dennett thinks we have is finally stated clearly in*
> >*the last chapter of the book: the power to be active agents, biological*
devices
> >*that respond to our environment with rational, desirable courses of action.*
> >*Dennett has slowly, through the course of the book, stripped the idea of*
> >*behavioral choice from the idea of Free Will. How can we have Free Will if we*
do
> >*not have real behavioral choice? Dennett tries to substitute control for*
choice.
> >*If our mechanical brains are in control of our behavior and our brains produce*
> >*good behaviors for us, then do we really need choice? Is an illusion of*
> >*behavioral choices just as good as actual choices? Is our sensation of having*
the
> >*freedom to execute more than one behavior at a given time really just an*
> >*illusion? Dennett tries not to beat his readers over the head with this issue,*
> >*but I think he should have.*
> >
> >*If all people have is an illusion of behavioral choice, if people are just*
> >*machines behaving in the only way they can, then what about personal*
> >*responsibility? How can we hold people responsible for and punish them for*
their
> >*behaviors if they have no choice in how they behave? Dennett gives a two part*
> >*answer to this question. First, we hold people responsible for their actions*
> >*because we know from historical experience that this is an effective means to*
> >*make people behave in a socially acceptable way. Second, holding people*
> >*responsible only works when combined with the fact that people can be informed*
of
> >*the fact that they are being held responsible and respond to this state of*
> >*affairs by controlling their behavior so as to avoid punishment. People who*
break
> >*the rules set by society and get punished may be behaving in the only way they*
> >*can, but if we did not hold them accountable for their actions, people would*
> >*behave even worse than they do with the threat of punishment. This is a*
totally
> >*utilitarian approach to the issue of responsibility, there is no need for*
moral

sci.logic: Re: The Road with no Branches argument

> >indignation when people break the rules of proper behavior. Is it, then, moral
to
> >punish people who are unable to do other than break a rule? Yes, people have
the
> >right to come together and improve their condition by creating rules and
> >enforcing them. We would be worse off if we did not do so. Again, an argument
for
> >utility.
> >
> >One final issue, if people do not have real behavioral choices, why not
collapse
> >into fatalism? Again, Dennett's argument is that we may not have behavioral
> >choice, but we do have control of our behavior. Dennett asks us to look around
at
> >the universe and ask, can I even conceive of beings whose wills are freer than
> >our own? For Dennett, the answer to this question is, no, not really. In Elbow
> >Room he tries to explain why all the attempts that people have tried to make
to
> >prove that people have behavioral choice have failed and are, in the final
> >analysis, not really important anyhow. As humans, we are as much in control of
> >our behavior as anything in the universe. As humans, we have the best chance
to
> >produce good behavior. We should be satisfied with what we have and not fret
over
> >our lack of behavioral choice.
> >
> >As usual, I find it very hard to disagree with Dennett. My largest complaint
> >about Elbow Room is that it does not satisfactorily deal with the issue of why
we
> >feel so strongly that we do have behavioral choice. I agree with Dennett that
we
> >do not have choice, but why do we feel like we do? My answer to this question
is
> >that our sensation of having behavioral choice has been carefully selected by
> >evolution. The well developed human sensation of having Free Will and being
able
> >to select among possible behaviors has strong survival value. People who loose
> >the feeling that they can plan alternative behaviors and execute their choice
of
> >possible behaviors tend to become fatalistic and stop struggling for survival.
As
> >Dennett writes, Belief in Free Will is a necessary condition for having Free
> >Will. When we are planning for the future and thinking about possible actions
to
> >take in the future, we are expending considerable amounts of biologically
> >expensive resources (brain power). Evolution has designed us to feel strongly
> >that all of our effort of planning pays off, that we control what we do. If
this
> >connection between our brains efforts to model reality and predict the future
and
> >so make possible good outcomes is disconnected from our sense of self and our

sci.logic: Re: The Road with no Branches argument

> >will, then fatalism and self-destructive behaviors are close at hand.
> >
> >So at the end of our philosophical hair-splitting, we reach the same
conclusion
> >as the average man on the street, but we have some additional baggage. If we
> >accept Dennett's arguments, then we recognize that we have no real behavioral
> >choices, but we continue to behave as if we do. I would say that when we feel
> >like we are making a behavioral choice, this is a very convenient way for a
brain
> >to make sure that it keeps planning and struggling for survival. Our conscious
> >thoughts never see the detailed working of our mechanical brains, we can never
> >directly sense that we never really have behavioral choice, that our brains
are
> >deterministic machines. Our brains are designed to present us with a
tantalizing
> >array of apparent possibilities and the sensation that we have choice, while
in
> >reality there is only one way things will work out in the end. So, at the end
of
> >our philosophical journey we must be satisfied that our brains are in control
and
> >we must content ourselves with behaving as if we have behavioral choice, even
> >though we know we do not. Nature has played a devious trick on us. Grin and
bare
> >it. It could be worse, think what it would be like to be a wasp.
> >
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> <http://www.geocities.com/ResearchTriangle/System/8870/philosophicus/Elbows.html>
> > <http://www.geocities.com/ResearchTriangle/System/8870/books/HawkTime.html>
> >
>
> One analyzes future possibilities of action and selects the one he likes best
> or hates the least. We always do exactly as we want. This is how we are
> made, and it gives us the illusion of freedom of choice. But to always do
> what one likes best is not freedom at all. It's a mechanism that utterly
> limits freedom. Real freedom would allow one to hate what he loves
> and to love what he hates. We're certainly not inclined, and therefor
> not Free to do any such thing. We're caught in our own web.
>
> We're bound and determined by our inclinations and opinions to do
> what pleases us and to avoid what displeases us. And so we are
> easy to influence and manipulate by those who understand human
> nature. Salesmen always sell the sizzle and never the steak.
> They play on our attractions and aversions like a harmonica.
> Since we are gullible we accept substitutions of emotion for
> substance, and even imagine we have got the better of the deal.
>

The unholy shepherd even knows that one. He predicts a particular move will, through chain reactions of sheep movements, place the herd, by scaring them to move, in a desired location. He determined it be "extension across time(s)."

sci.logic: Re: The Road with no Branches argument

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