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Free Will | The Philosophical Problem

The Dilemma

1. Our choices either have or lack sufficient explanations.
2. If our choices have sufficient explanations, then we can ask, “What explains the presence of those explanatory factors?” Those factors will have sufficient explanations as well, and very quickly, we will realize that the fundamental explanation(s) for our choices lies in a chain of explanations that extend far beyond anything over which we have control, and in virtue of which we are unable to do otherwise.
3. If choices lack sufficient explanation altogether and there is, at the level of fundamental reality, no sufficient reason or explanation for why we choose X over not-X, then our choices are the fruit of something indistinguishable from randomness/arbitrariness.
4. Therefore, we are either unable to do otherwise or our choices are arbitrary. (1,2,3, CD)

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5. If we either unable to do otherwise or our choices are arbitrary, then we do not have free choice.
6. Therefore, we do not have free choice (4,5 MP)
7. If we do not have free choice, then we are not morally responsible for our actions.
8. Therefore, we are not morally responsible for our actions. (6,7 MP)

Four Possible Replies

- **Deny 2** | Compatibilism/Soft Determinism—free choice, understood as the ability to do otherwise, is compatible with determinism
 - “If we had chosen otherwise, we would have done otherwise.”
 - “If we had desired otherwise, we would have chosen otherwise”

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- **Deny 3** | Soft Incompatibilism/Libertarian Free Will—free choice is incompatible with determinism, but 1) determinism is false and 2) lacking a sufficient explanation does not necessarily render an action arbitrary or random
- **Deny 7** | Semi-Compatibilism—free choice, understood as the ability to do otherwise, is incompatible with determinism but moral responsibility is consistent with our actions being determined in the appropriate manner.
- **Accept 1-7** | Hard Incompatibilism—no one is ever morally responsible because libertarian free will is required for morally responsibility, but unfortunately, determinism is true

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Evaluation

- The vast majority of philosophers (Christian or otherwise) do not want to deny the second premise or accept the argument's conclusion and therefore, most of the debate has now boiled down to the plausibility of denying premises three and seven as well as giving positive accounts in their place.
- Because the Reformed tradition does not have theological space for contingent elements within the created order lacking sufficient explanation (i.e., contingent brute facts—things true just “because they are”), Reformed theologians and philosophers have always adopted some version of compatibilism/semi-compatibilism, which happens to be the majority view in the field of philosophy at large.

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Final Thoughts

- If the concept of free choice and its relationship to moral responsibility understood as a philosophical problem is extremely challenging—which it is—perhaps it is an unwise idea to build one's theology around one's intuitions concerning them.
- Instead, given the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture, it seems better to build a theology of God's sovereignty, our ability/will and moral responsibility based on responsible interpretation of Scripture and then see what philosophical positions viably tease out our theology. In this Sunday School series, this will be our primary task and approach.

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