

## A.J. Ayer's Solution of the Problem of Free Will

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**ABSTRACT:** The primary aim of this paper is to examine the analytical perspective in A.J. Ayer's philosophy to solve the problem of free will. As logical positivist Ayer (1910-1990) adopts an analytical method to sort out the problems with regard to free will.

**KEYWORDS-** Free Will, Determination, Duty for Duty's sake', Critique of Practical Reason'

**INTRODUCTION-** The problems 'free will' is a complex problem as it is related to the other problems- the problem of determinism, fatalism, causation and responsibility. Both freedom and will are used synonymously but however, they have different independent meanings. 'Will' refers to the capacity or ability of conscious of human being to choose a particular course of action and realisation of a particular end. The word 'Will' derives from Latin term 'voluntans' which stands for 'decision making capacity' or 'conscious decision making' or 'reason-involving motivational capacity'. Will may have many propensities and freedom is the most essential attribute of will. Will is free and its being free denotes its freedom from causation, determination and responsibility. Freedom is taken from Greek political concept 'eleutheria' which means 'liberty'. Freedom is an elusive concept since it has various meanings and interpretations. In politics, it refers to liberty of the individual and in social sphere, it refers to control and regulation over our action performed prior to us-ness of our action. But Ayer defines freedom as consciousness of necessity and responsibility.

While discussing the problem of freedom of will, a lot of questions are confronted by us. These questions are- Is man a free moral agent? Is free will a myth or fact of human existence? Is determinism opposed to, or compatible with freedom? Is freedom a gift of God or the achievement of man. Is freedom anti-thetical to, or identical with, the acceptance of responsibility? Is freedom from external control and constrains the only justified freedom? Is freedom a means to an end or an end in itself? Does freedom imply a balance and harmony between reason and emotions?

Some of these questions are analysed and discussed from the philosophical standpoint of A.J. Ayer.

At the outset Ayer clarifies that 'will' is not a moral concept and value as it is more conscious, rational and logical rather than unconscious, irrational, feelings, emotions and sentiments. In his emotive theory of value, Ayer defines moral concept as the expression of human emotions and feelings but not generated out of reason. In his words- In every case in which one would commonly be said to be making an ethical judgement, the function of the relevant ethical word is purely 'emotive'. It is used to express feeling about certain objects, but not to make any assertion about them. Will should not be confused with divine will which Ayer declares to be non-sense and meaningless. Some religious thinkers and Indian thinkers argue that there is a duality between the rational self and the sensuous self,

the former being non-attached to the body and its object of desire, is free, enlightened and enjoying while the latter, being so attached is bound, blind and suffering. And, thus, human freedom is circumscribed by, and dependent upon the divine will who sanctions freedom to man. But for Ayer the rational will is the real will which enjoys complete freedom by itself and to identify this 'will' with the divine 'will' is an unnecessary religious, even metaphysical trappings which is neither empirically verifiable not tautology and as such this identification is meaningless.

Thus, man in his opinion is both free and responsible agent who can perform deliberate and intentional action by using free will or rational will. Ayer prescribes three conditions under which a man is said to have acted freely. Firstly, a man should have acted otherwise if he had so chosen. Secondly, his action should be voluntary. Thirdly, no body should compel him to chosen as he does.

It is commonly assumed that both the concepts of freedom and determination are antithetical and inconsistent with each other. Determinism states that every fact of the Universe is pre-determined by external causes and so predication or retro-diction about the world can be possible if sufficient knowledge of the past and present is available. This deterministic theory is mostly accepted by classical natural science which explains every natural fact in terms of available conditions.

Determination can be categorized as hard- determinism and soft-determinism. Hard determinism theory is propounded by thinkers like Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Newton, A.E. Houseman and others. They adopt a mechanical view of the universe and claim that the universe is absolutely determined and ruled by inevitable laws and as man is a part this great machine that is universe and as such, he must be determined not only in his actions but in his choices and he must be determined not only in his actions but in his choices and wills. Soft deterministic thinkers like Hume, J.S. Mill, Ayer and others provide an empirical interpretation of the deterministic order of the Universe. Hume in his article 'Liberty and Necessity' provides a compatibilistic interpretation of freedom and determinism by explaining causal order of the Universe in terms of constant conjunction of cause and effect. Following Hume, Ayer also claims that freedom can be reconciled which can be contrasted with freedom. Ayer clarifies it as- "Now we began with the assumption that freedom is contrasted with causality: so that a man can't be said to be acting freely if his action is causally determined." But this assumption has led us into difficulties and I now wish to suggest that it is mistaken. For it is not, I think, causality that freedom is to be contrasted with but constraints.

Determinism is synonymously used in the sense of causation and fatalism. Fatalism is a philosophical belief which states that human being has no power to change the course of event and a man should follow the principles like 'what is going to happen is going to happen'; 'I shall do what I shall do' and so on. This belief is condemned by Ayer on the ground that fatalistic principles are analytical and tautological in nature which can't solve the real problem of free will. He says that "This is tautology, just as it is a tautology that what is going to happen is going to happen. And such tautologies as these prove nothing whatsoever about the freedom of the will."

The law of universal causation holds the view that every fact of the universe including material and non-material, human and non-human etc. are causally determined. The causal laws necessarily and sufficiently explain each and every phenomenon of the Universe. But Ayer does not agree with such view because of the following reasons:

Firstly, the law can't be applicable universally. Secondly, 'Will' also can't become free as it is subject to the law of causation. Thirdly, the contrary of the law is 'every event can't have a cause' is also thinkable.

Thus, Ayer clarifies that freedom can't be defined in term of causation which assumes a necessary connection between cause and effect. And to say all causes equally necessitate is a tautological statement which conveys no empirical information. Rather he defines "causation in terms of 'constant conjunction' between cause and effect and 'constant conjunction' by means of discrete, distinct and isolated sense contents which can't presuppose a necessary casual connection between cause and effort. He argues that "In short there is an invariable concomitance between the two classes of events; but there are no compulsions, in any but a metaphorical sense".

It is due to this reason Ayer claims that freedom can't be contrasted to causality but to constraint and compulsion. Freedom can be inconsistent with causality. When an event of one type occurs, an event of another type occurs also is a certain temporal or spatiotemporal relation to the first. The rest is any metaphor. And it is because of the metaphor and not because of the fact, which we come to think that there is an anti-thesis between causality and freedom. Further Ayer clarifies the constraint implies causality but causality does not imply constraint which ultimately makes room for the freedom of will and action. In other words, freedom means absence of constraint, compulsion and freedom from compulsion- both external and internal compulsion and, thus, he is in favour of negative concept of freedom.

Furthermore, in many cases causal determination has been identified with universal predictability. If everything that occurs has some cause then on basis of cause, the future can be predicted. But Ayer does not support such a view. No doubt predictability is the criterion of causal determination but exact and precise predictability is never practically possible. Ayer states "certain scientific laws have been established, and with the help of these laws we do make a number of successful predictions about the way in which different people will behave. But these predictions do not always cover every detail. We may be able to predict that in certain circumstances a particular man will be angry without being able to prescribe the precise form that the expressions of his anger will take.

**CONCLUSION:** Many philosophers have been convinced that the freedom of will and action presupposes moral responsibility. Moral responsibility refers to accountability or reliability and moral obligation upon the action or omission done by the individual under free and normal circumstance. It is a kind of self-determination or self-commitment which is known as voluntariness. Ayer defines freedom in terms of voluntariness. Freedom and responsibilities can't be separated as freedom means responsible choice and selection. A man is responsible to himself and for himself. Responsibility towards others implies a genuine respect for the personality other human beings. We can't act immorally, irrationally and instinctively if our freedom is linked with moral responsibility. Ayer says "when I am said to have done something of my own free will it is implied that I could have acted otherwise, and it is only when it is believed that I could have acted otherwise that I am held to be morally responsible for what I have done. Similarly Kant's moral law 'Duty for Duty's sake' is a categorical imperative which demands that moral responsible action can be promoted by postulating freedom of will. Kant in his 'Critique of Practical Reason' argues that we can prove the freedom of our will from the indisputable fact of our obligation under the moral law. Hence from Ayer's Standpoint both freedom and

determinism by self can account for moral responsibility and the individual's choice of action.

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