

Are our actions inevitable?

Sveinung Knutsen Nøding

Kristiansand Katedralskole Gimle, 2STC

My argumentation will only touch the issue of our actions to be inevitable. I assume that the closely related subject of free will is not the issue. I will also assume that there exists no form of god or other supernatural phenomenon that is able to interfere. The statements that I make about physics are taken from the book 'The Emperors New Mind' by Roger Penrose.

For what we do to be inevitable, the universe has to be deterministic. That is, if the universe is in a certain state, and all knowledge about its state is known, it is in theory possible to calculate and predict all former states and all future states, predicting the future. This is because a deterministic universe will always behave a certain way based on an earlier state. This means that the universe could not have turned out any other way than it is now at this time. If it is the case that the universe is completely deterministic, all of our actions are inevitable. One will act based on the circumstances only, there is no real choice involved.

Classical physics is deterministic. That means that if we are to obey only the laws of classical physics, we act in a completely deterministic way. If so, the people referred to in the quotation by Nagel are necessarily right. But not in all physics is everything completely deterministic. In quantum physics there is something known as 'amplitudes'. Translated to the world above the molecular level, this is chance. Being random chance, one can't predict what will happen. The state of the system in place does not decide entirely what will happen at a later time at the quantum level. It is quite possible that this is something that impacts our brain. As it is the brain that is responsible for making decisions in the human body, this could alter the choices our brain makes. By introducing a random element to our choices, no action we may take will be entirely inevitable.

The main strength of my argument is that it does not leave room for any answer other than that ones actions are not inevitable, given the assumption that quantum physics affects ones brain. The main weakness is the assumption itself. Whether or not the assumption is true is uncertain. Arguments against mine might be that I assume too much. Perhaps either my quantum physics assumption or god assumption is wrong. Another question is whether the physics I use are correct or not. To this I would respond that they appear to be, but I myself can't prove that. Physicists would have to confirm or discard that. But as my source is a physicist I believe that the physics are correct.

My thoughts about the examination question are that I do not believe that our actions are entirely inevitable, but that they might not be far from it.