Vagueness of Free Will

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Abstract

I aim to bring the idea of "degree of free will or freedom" into philosophical debates on free will by rejecting the two choices formulation, 'we are either free or not'.   This idea is based upon my viewpoint of regarding free will as a realistic phenomena actually occurring.   First of all, I focus on the fact that it is vague whether an agent is free or not.   This vagueness is interpreted as ontic vagueness, corresponding with the status of freedom as real. However, Evans's argument regarding ontic vagueness must be considered as, according to his argument, ontic vagueness about identity and objects are impossible.   I point out that this argument assumes the truth-value gap position in borderline cases, hence we can avoid Evans's argument by adopting truth-value glut position.   Of course, the truth-value glut approach has serious difficulties, but I conclude with sketching out a possibility to develop this approach in the free will debate via the introduction of probabilistic valuation.

Body

1 Degree of Free Will

I will begin with pointing out the strange discrepancy between the philosophical discussion

on free will and our ordinary notion of freedom.   Philosophers traditionally have raised the question, 'how is free will compatible with necessity?', which has motivated a metaphysical debate between so-called compatibilism (e.g.Hume) and incompatibilism (e.g.Kant). Basically, the debate is backed up by this two choices disjunction, 'we are either free or we are not free', together with the idea of determinism. Indeterminism is sometimes considered in this debate, but even in that case the disjunction is retained.   On the other hand, when we talk about freedom in ordinary conversation, it is not unusual to mention <u>the degree</u> of free will or freedom we have. For example, we can say we have more degree of freedom in selecting jobs when we have a driver's license than when we don't have one, or that a mentally disordered person is less free to control their actions (including offences) than a healthy one.   If so, it seems that the philosophical debate on free will has to take the concept of degree in free will more seriously; otherwise the debate will have no practical applicability or reality.

2 Ontic Vagueness

How, then, can we reflect the concept of degree in the free will debate?   There are some possible routes, but here I will pay attention to the fact that it is often <u>vague</u> whether an agent is free or not.   This is easily confirmed by the example of the mentally disordered offender suggested above.   If the offender is so disordered as to make no sense of even basic logical rules, the offender is judged to act not from autonomous free will but just from mechanical impulses. However, there are borderline cases.   What about the case in which the offender mostly understands logical rules and moral norms, but is brain-washed by a cult that condones

killing, or the case in which the offender is normal but suffering from personality disorder partly caused by brain disease? If we admit the core meaning of free will or freedom lies in the fact that the agent isn't controlled by the external causes, we will hesitate in the cases above to decide whether the offender had free will or not when committing the offence, for in those cases the offender seems to be partially governed by the external causes. Probably this decision depends upon how much they are brain-washed or suffer from the personality disorder. In a word, this situation is so vague that we can't definitely declare whether it is true or false that the offender acted from their own free will.

What sort of vagueness appears here? As is well known, there are two types of vagueness, i.e. linguistic vagueness and ontic vagueness. As regards free will I want to take ontic vagueness to matter as, as I described, I hope to highlight the issue about the practical applicability or reality of freedom, which should be discussed by regarding free will as a sort of realistic phenomenon that actually occurs. Ontic vagueness usually matters in discussions about material objects like mountains or clouds, whose boundaries are vague, but if we could take freedom (at least a part of its mode) to be a natural phenomenon actually occurring in nature, perhaps as a brain state able to cause human actions, it is not inappropriate to employ the concept of ontic vagueness in this context.

3 Evans's Argument

However, vagueness brings about some puzzles. The sorites paradox is the most famous, but, as far as ontic vagueness is concerned, we mustn't overlook a classical puzzle given by

Gareth Evans in 1978. He argues about whether the concept of a vague object is possible or not by analyzing vagueness of identity. His argument proceeds as follows. Suppose (1) it is indefinite whether *b* is identical with *a*. Then (2) *b* is such that it is indefinite whether it is identical to *a*. But (3) it is not indefinite whether *a* is identical to *a*. So (4) *a* isn't such that it is indefinite whether it is identical to *a*. So, from (2) and (4) by Leibniz's Law, (5) *b* isn't identical to *a*. But the conclusion (5) contradicts the assumption (1). Therefore, by reduction to absurdity, vague identity and thus vague objects should be impossible (Evans 1978. p.208).

This argument was so shocking that many reactions arose immediately. Initially, some philosophers argued that its conclusion is simply a mistake as a matter of ordinary and quantum theoretic facts (e.g. Lowe 1994 et al.). I agree with this point, since my discussion supposes that ontic vagueness is a realistic matter, as exemplified by the issue of free will. But, if so, there must be something wrong with Evans's argument. Why is that? There are quite diverse points of view as to this, raised by many philosophers.

4 Truth-Value Glut Approach

It seems to me, however, that a naïve reaction against Evans's argument is that (1) and (5) aren't contradictory. The assumption (1) seems to mean "'*a* = *b*' doesn't have definite truth value", which implies "'*a* = *b*' isn't true". Then, this is nothing but the consequence (5). This reaction is motivated by the standpoint which regards indefiniteness as a truth-value gap. Actually many philosophers analyze Evans's argument from the viewpoint of a many-valued logic (e.g. Broome 1984). But, truth-value gap approach implies as to (1) "'*a* = *b*' isn't false" as

well, while (5) seems to mean "'$a = b$' is false", according to a natural interpretation of negation. Thus, it seems that (1) and (5) aren't consistent after all.

However, there could be another direction to lead our naïve reaction. That is to say, <u>the truth-value glut approach</u>, which provides the alternative that, "'$a = b$' is both true and false". If we adopt this view, (1) and (5) are perfectly consistent so we could avoid the conclusion of Evans's argument, because we can deduce "'$a = b$' is false" from "'$a = b$" is both true and false". In reality, the truth-value glut approach seems to indicate the existence of a positive state of affairs in borderline cases, and hence conforms to my point that freedom is a sort of real phenomenon actually occurring which can cause human actions. On the other hand, the truth-gap approach can refer to only the negative status of borderline cases which is causally inert. In other words, both of the approaches of truth-value gap and truth-value glut may be theoretically equivalent as a dual, but are practically different from each other.

5 Probabilistic Valuation on Degrees of Free Will

Even if this is so, however, it's not an easy option to adopt the truth-value glut approach. First of all, this approach calls a contradiction into my argument. As to this, I want to introduce the concept of ontological contradiction that Patrick Grim suggests, which admits that a state of affairs can both have a property and lack the property (Grim 2004, p.53). That sort of conflict is brought about from a different point of view, which is quite suitable to describe the issue of the borderline case of free will (probably in the court). Second, as far as the logical status of the truth-value glut is concerned, we have to encounter some quite controversial theories.

Paraconsistent logic and dialetheism are its representatives, and in particular subvaluationism (as Dominic Hyde developed it) must be considered in connection with the problem of vagueness. However, I set those aside now, as all of those are basically semantic theories, whereas I'm now focusing on ontic vagueness.

Instead, I want to propose a probabilistic approach to treat cases of ontic vagueness like that of free will. Actually, the concept of probability concept will harmonizes with the truth-value glut, since, for instance, when we judge the agent was free by probability 0.4, we affirm that 0.4 weight and negate 0.6 weight. Namely, the concept of probability concept admits that both affirmation and negation of one proposition somehow actually obtain, which conforms to the truth-value glut scheme. Additionally, the probabilistic approach reacts to the law of excluded middle in the same way as the truth-value glut approach, which is quite different from the reaction of the truth-value gap approach.

How, then, can we valuate the degree of free will in terms of probability? I offer a brief sketch as my tentative conclusion. When we face some borderline cases about whether an agent acted from their free will or not, we can collect (i) their physiological data -maybe about their brains, (ii) and other data i.e., about time taken for them to give a primary and independent answer to the question "why did you do that?" If they give an answer immediately, we can suppose that the degree for them to be controlled by the external causes will be less, so they were freer. On the basis of those data we can valuate the degree of free will of a particular agent. This is a sort of probability whose value 1 should apply to the state of perfectly free situation, although ideally. I think that this probability can be interpreted as either degrees of

belief, or a kind of objective propensity that people who valuate have. Although the free will I

analyzed here may be just a prima facie free will or only a part, it is one possible route for

bringing the concept of the degrees of free will into philosophical discussions.

References

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