

## CORRESPONDENCE

TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

SIR,

May I offer some (I hope) constructive comments on Dr. Bourke's article on "Responsibility, Freedom, and Determinism," in *Philosophy* for July 1938?

First, it will (I think) clarify the problem to recognize expressly that "freedom" denotes not a positive quality, but the absence (or at least incompleteness) of some determination. "Capricious freedom" is the absence of *all* determination, and must be rejected for the reasons correctly stated by Dr. Bourke. "Rational freedom," *qua* freedom, is "independence on the determining causes of the sensible world"; *qua* rational it is determination by reason. As Dr. Bourke points out, it is exemplified not only in moral action but also in knowledge.

But what is "neutral freedom"? Is this term anything more than a name for a problem, or a confession of ignorance as to its solution? Sometimes I act morally, determining myself by the law of reason; sometimes I act immorally, or "a-morally" (as the case may be), being determined by "causes of the sensible world." Since I do both, obviously I *can* do both—this is "neutral freedom." The problem is, *What* determines me to act sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, of the line that divides the moral from the non-moral? One is tempted to postulate just the least trace of capricious freedom! But that has been shown to be inadmissible, since it denies, not safeguards, responsibility and moral value. So until we can show the existence of some third kind of determination which decides between natural and rational determination, "neutral freedom" remains but a name for the problem.

In what direction lies the solution? I would make a suggestion. How in fact do men try to promote morality? The answer is twofold—first by "rewards and punishments," secondly by persuasion. The first by itself cannot make men moral, it can at best make the moral choice easier by balancing inducements to outwardly right conduct against those to outwardly wrong conduct. Persuasion, however, is nothing but trying to bring rational determination into operation; and its success depends upon the person to be persuaded being already in some degree reasonable, that is, rationally determined.

Does not this indicate that the problem of freedom in the sphere of human action is not, How can one kind of determination replace and overthrow another? but rather, Where every event is describable in terms of an intermingling of different types of determination in varying proportions of relevance, how *in fact* does one or the other attain to dominant relevance in each case?

If so, the function of philosophy here is not to solve by *a priori* methods a problem set by experience; but rather to purge our statement of the problem from illegitimate *a priori* elements, and to send us back to concrete experience for its solution.

And that is where Religion comes in.

Yours faithfully,

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