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ABSTRACT

In this work, I will discuss the arguments proposed by Karl Popper against determinism, in his book *The Open Universe*, and specially their consequences for the possibility of free will's existence.

There are many kinds of determinism (and the book begins by discussing the differences between them), but Popper will argue in particular against 'scientific'³ determinism. This one can be essentially subsumed to the proposition that all events in the Universe (including human actions) are entirely determined by previous events, as proposed by the mathematician and physicist Laplace:

We ought (...) to regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its anterior state and as the cause of the one which is to follow. Assume (...) an intelligence which could know all the forces by which nature is animated, and the states at an instant of all the objects that compose it; (...) for [this intelligence], nothing could be uncertain; and the future, as the past, would be present to its eyes. (Laplace, 1951, pp. 4-5 apud Popper, 1988a p.20).

Now, it is easy to see that, on philosophy, this position has grave impact: if everything (and specially our actions) is already pre-determined, then there can be no free will or any other kind of freedom. When it seems that we are making our own decisions, we would only be under the illusion of deciding, and we would be as determined and predictable as (and would not have more freedom than) mere hands of a clock. Therefore, all Ethics would be meaningless: why should we worry about how to live the best of all possible existences, or about how to reach happiness, if all our existence and all our actions are already pre-determined?

Beyond the grave impact on philosophy, determinism implies deep consequences for other areas of human activity, for example in most religions (is there sin if there's no real choice?), as well as Law (is there any sense, or would it even be 'fair', to sentence someone as guilty of any crime, if the criminal had no choice and was instead determined, since ever, to commit it?)

Against determinism, Popper offers a series of arguments. I will present these arguments and analyze them, as well as follow Popper's considerations on their impact regarding the matter of free will, which even as he explicitly leaves outside the main body of this book, he comes back to discuss it in his Afterword (POPPER, 1988b, pp. 41 and 115).

Here, I want to attain three objectives: to (1) provide a refutation of determinism; (2) discuss its consequences to the matter of free will, as relevant both inside and outside of philosophy; and (3) help spread the word about the main book we're working with (we have seen that it's practically unknown in Brazil, even by the Popper specialists I have met so far).

Keywords: Popper. Determinism. Free will.

³ The author itself employs single quotes around the word 'scientific' (see for example 1988b p.1)