

"Leto said: "There's no single set of limits for all men, Universal Prescience is an empty myth. Only the most powerful local currents of time may be foretold. But in an infinite universe, LOCAL can be so gigantic that your mind shrinks from it."

-CHILDREN OF DUNE
(Herbert 1976:257)

48. FREE AGENCY AND THE FUTURE - FACT OR FALLACY?

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INTRODUCTION:

The third principle of this work is that there is an attribute called "free agency" inherent in human spirits. It is perhaps the fundamental characteristic differentiating between humans and non-humans. The latter, whether they are members of the animal or plant kingdoms, respond to their environment through a genetically encoded set of algorithms¹. These algorithms superficially mimic free agency in the sense that particular responses are delimited to particular stimuli, this variability suggesting free will. However, the inventory of responses is small, when compared to the variability of responses available to humans. Those genetically and neurologically determined algorithms represent a drastically truncated version of free agency, if they represent it at all, in spite of their sophistication.

Free agency is necessary for us to direct our actions in the scheme of salvation we use. And we behave as if we really believed that this free agency is unlimited, that we are truly the sole masters of our destiny, and that it is a divine attribute. Volition, being able to do what "I" want to do, is assumed to be possible, that no forces or influences can or will limit us if we choose to exercise it. This latter is only possible actually in certain political systems, or within our minds, but it is nonetheless possible in the mind.

PREDICTABILITY CONFLICTS WITH AGENCY?

However, we have all faced the enigma that derives from

- (a) the belief that we do have unlimited agency and
- (b) the belief that the future is foreseeable.

Most of us have struggled briefly at least with this dilemma, though not too strenuously for most of us, and then passed on to the more practical struggles of mortality. But it remains a problem: if the future is foreseeable, as suggested by Isaiah's, Abraham's, Enoch's, etc. visions, then we must ask: is there really free agency? If it is foreseeable, aren't we then simply moving from birth to death on a greased rail that exists in some manner to guide and control us? If we believe the future really is

¹ I have no proof that there is a genetic code involved. I base this claim on the fact that the repertoire of responses available to the members of any specie is narrow, when compared to the possible responses that are theoretically possible in any settings. Further, this repertoire is present in succeeding generations of the specie, even in cases where the parents have no opportunity to teach and the young have no opportunity to learn, as for example in the reptile families. These facts - (1) the consistent repertoire of responses, (2) the uniform delimitation of those responses and (3) their expression in succeeding generations - are highly suggestive of genetic transmission. This information is encoded in the DNA so it is thereby passed between generations. If one denies genetic encoding as the mechanism of transmission, then s/he would be in the most peculiar position, vis a vis science, of having to claim that this information is transmitted across generations in some metaphysical way, i.e. via spirits, or by invisible forces, etc.

foreseeable, then how account for real free agency?{²}

This question is neither sophomoric nor trivial, though a few readers may respond to that way.{³} Enoch saw what was to be according to guiding angels who took him into the future. If those futures that he saw were predictable, and were the ones that were going to come to pass, then the implication is that the very process of living must be predetermined, guided or directed, else how could it be predictable. If each of us was going to make non-predictable choices through the exercise of agency, and if each generations's decisions and choices were equally unpredictable, a compounding of deviations in all directions from a predictable course should develop such that there should practically be an infinity of possible futures for this world with its billions of humans. And with that number of possible futures, then it should be impossible to prophecy and state that a specific thing is going to happen, at least it should only be possible with a small degree of confidence. But it seems that the Lord doesn't allow this to happen, or He doesn't feel it necessary to tell us or it just doesn't happen.

OMNISCIENCE CONTRADICTS AGENCY?

This still may not illuminate the problem, so let me try another way. One may argue that the Lord is omniscient, therefore that is why he can foresee what the future is going to be, that he can identify which of the possible futures is going to happen. That sounds plausible, the, and begins to convince us that there may be no contradiction, but I still have the misgiving that this really doesn't explain away my reservation. It appears to me that if He is ever able to state precisely what it is we are going to do, that we are then being restricted. Otherwise, He should only be able to specify a subset of possible futures that are LIKELY to happen, because if we do have meaningful free agency and are allowed to make our own decisions, then there should be at least a small degree of unpredictability to our actions that cannot be

² Gary Zukav stated the problem thusly:

"The ability to predict the future based on a knowledge of the present and the laws of motion gave our ancestors a power they had never known. However, these concepts carry within them a very dispiriting logic. If the laws of nature determine the future of an event, then, given enough information, we could have predicted our present at some time in the past. That time in the past also could have been predicted at a time still earlier. In short, if we are to accept the mechanistic determination of Newtonian physics--if the universe really is a great machine--then from the moment that the universe was created and set into motion, everything that was to happen in it already was determined.

According to this philosophy, we may seem to have a will of our own and the ability to alter the course of events in our lives, but we do not. Everything, from the beginning of time, has been predetermined, including our illusion of having a free will. The universe is a prerecorded tape playing itself out in the only way it can." (1979:51)

Interesting possibility which actually could be attributed to some LDS.

³ This dilemma is noted by various authors, for example, by Rudy Rucker: "I was disturbed by the traditional paradoxes inherent in time-travel...I was also disturbed by the fact that if the future is already there, then there is some sense in which our free will is an illusion." (1982:180) This problem seems to be either not be comprehended by most LDS, or it is ignored.

foreseen until we have actually passed those decision nodes and committed ourselves to one or another of the alternate choices open at those points. If we are not allowed that freedom, if we are completely predictable, then it appears to me that we are no truly free agents.

I suppose one might argue here that there is in fact a calculus of human behavior that the Lord has devised that allows Him to predict the general, overall pattern and flow of human civilizations and societies. This type of mathematical treatment of human psychology is well described in Isaac Asimov's stupendous FOUNDATION series wherein one Hari Seldon does transform "psychohistory" into a "profound statistical sciences" that could predict human behavior when the masses being treated were large enough and the spans of time long enough. That may in fact be what happens.

ENOCH'S VISION:

There another consideration to make here. When the angels took Enoch up and showed him the future, it may be that there were in fact a multiplicity of specific futures that he could have been shown, but that he was shown just one of them, without any reference to the possibility of other futures.^{4} That was Enoch saw a video of POSSIBLE futures linked together as a plausible unfolding of human life, not as a specifically correct down to the final detail view. If the one he saw isn't the one that is actually unfolding at the present time, it matters little because the purpose of his tour was not to show him precisely what was to transpire. General outlines would be sufficient. He was being taught things for his own development and the edification of his Saints, none of whom would see the details he saw, nor would it matter to them what those details were.^{5} And since human behavior does appear to be generally predictable, even with free

⁴ Zukav elaborates on the doctrine of superdeterminism thusly:

"According to superdeterminism, *not even the initial situation of the universe could be change*. Not only is it impossible for things to be other than they are, it is even impossible that the initial situation of the universe could have been other than what it was. No matter what we are doing at any given moment, it is the only thing ever possible for us to be doing at that moment." (1979:319)

So what I am asking here, is whether superdeterminism is real, is it how the POS actually works? It would certainly support the concept that the Creator knows, before hand, precisely how each of us is going to behave and what choices we will make. But, somehow, that bothers me because it seems like our testing in then little more than an empty charade that we act out, ending up precisely where we were foreknown to be headed. Do you like that idea?

⁵ A problem with this concept of approximate truth is that the Lord's system tolerates no deviations from absolute truth. So it would seem unlikely that what an angel showed a mortal would be anything less than absolute truth. The doctrinal basis for this claim derives from D&C 129:7, which states:

"Ask him [ed. the heavenly messenger] to shake hands with you, but he will not move, because it is contrary to the order of heaven for a just man to deceive...", but if the visitor is a devil "...he will offer you his hand and you will not feel anything; you may therefore detect him."

This is the same principle.

agency thrown in, it is likely that what Enoch was shown was accurate to within a few degrees.