

**The Australian New Church College Seminar,
May 24th to the 27th 2012**

Determinism and Freewill.

Introduction

Three things:

1. Lecturer who was a determinist at University of New England
2. Visitor to Church late last year who described himself in one conversation as something of a determinist.
3. Not long after he began visiting a Review of the about to be published book, "*Who's in Charge? Free-will and the Science of the Brain*" appeared in "*The Economist*" magazine, December 17th to 30th.

Turning it over in my mind led to me writing an Editorial on the subject in the February and March 2012 "Breaking Bread".

And, since then, I have re-visited the topic of Genetic Determinism, described in one article I downloaded from the internet as "*one area of contemporary discourse in science*".

It's one thing to point to the genetic determinism of our physicality – how tall or short we are and this sort of thing. A Genetic Determinist wants, I quote, "*to extend this further, by claiming that even our behaviour is determined by our genes. In this line of thinking, we are but victims of our genetic makeup, and any effort to change our moral nature or behavioural patterns is useless.*"

According to genetic determinism "We can't help being who we are or thinking and behaving as we do".

There is no room for freewill.

Before completely dismissing this

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*there is much about creation and life which is predetermined

*especially before regeneration we have every reason to believe that there is much about our behaviour and approaches which is pre-determined, genetically and environmentally.

*and whilst the Writings are loud and clear about the reality of freewill, and the absolute necessity for it, don't take this as saying that on every occasion and in every state and situation we are acting from freewill.

Constant, fixed and reliable

(picking up on the point immediately above that "*there is much about creation and life which is predetermined*")

There is much about creation and in connection with the Lord's dealings with us and government of the universe which is constant, fixed and reliable.

This is highlighted in "Divine Providence" in paragraph 190, for example:

"There are many constants that have been created so that varying things can happen. The fixed regularities of the rising and the setting of the sun, moon and stars are constants. There are times called eclipses when they obscure and block out each other. There are the warmth and light they provide. There are the times of the year that we call spring, summer, fall, and winter and the times of the day called morning, noon, evening, and night. There are also atmospheres, liquids, and solids in their own right: there is the power of germination in the plant kingdom; there is this power as well as the power of reproduction in the animal kingdom; and there are all the events that consistently result from these powers when they are put into action according to the principles of the design.

These and many other constants have been provided from creation itself in order that an infinite variety of events may happen. These various events could not happen except in the context of things that are constant, fixed and reliable."

See, too, the book "*Proving God*"

Also, the laws of the Divine Providence. These, too, are constant, fixed and reliable.

There is a 'plus' side to this but there is also – from our point of view – a 'down' side as well. (We could wish the Lord wasn't always so 'walled in' by these laws; could step outside of them' come to our rescue; save us from the consequences of our poor choices, etc.).

Determinism: all about what is caused by others or involves factors that deny us the exercise of our freewill.

This in fact takes us into the Chapter in "Divine Providence", and to the law of the Divine Providence, "*that we should not be compelled by outside forces to think and intend and so to believe and love in matters of our religion, but that we should guide ourselves and sometimes compel ourselves.*"

And so you have it said that no one is reformed

- *by miracles and signs, because they compel
- *by visions or conversations with the dead
- *by threats or by punishments
- *in states where freedom and rationality are absent

What might those states be "where freedom and rationality" are absent?

Undue dependent friendship

Highly charged emotional situations

Immaturity

Ethnic mindsets

Historic resentments

Immaturity – a closer look

First here, let's just look at the question of spiritual accountability for our actions.

For us to be spiritually responsible **both will and** understanding must be involved.

This needs thinking through.

It is not just a matter of thought from others.

Understanding requires that we must see and acknowledge a truth about something for ourselves- not just from others.

The question is: when does a person come into such adult, “independent”, ownership of truths and values?

Might it be more like 30 than 20?

The difference between evil and sin

A child and a teenager or a person not acting from freewill can do evil but with their understanding ‘compromised’ they cannot sin.

It is not much more than a generation or two since certain tribes in the highlands of New Guinea practised head hunting. What they did was evil, but they did not sin.

What is “some overwhelming longing” (?)

As in True Christian Religion, 523:

“The saying goes that no one can keep the law completely, and this is even more difficult, because the person who breaks one of the Ten Commandments breaks them all. Yet this manner of speaking does not mean what it sounds like. For it must be understood to mean that a person who acts deliberately and from conviction against one commandment acts against the rest. This is because acting deliberately and from conviction is utterly denying that it is a sin, and if anyone else says it is, he dismisses his opinion as worthless. If anyone thus denies and dismisses sin, he pays no heed to anything which is called a sin. This is the position reached by those who are unwilling to be told anything about repentance. On the other hand, those who by repentance have removed some evils which are sins, reach the position of believing in the Lord and loving the neighbour. The Lord keeps them determined to abstain from further sinning; so if through ignorance or some overwhelming longing they sin, this is not counted against them, since they did not intend it nor convince themselves that it was allowable.”

Is this helpful?”

The article, “Time To Be Honest” in *“The Economist”*, March 31st to April 6th 2012, pages 86-87.

All of us are addicted to something

Whilst the jury is still out, for me, with regard to this, I read once that in all likelihood every one of us is addicted to something

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Drugs and alcohol and tobacco are of course the most readily accepted as such. But what might you also add to this?

Self-image

Success

Work

Sport

Hobbies

pornography

These things can become obsessions, or even compulsions.

Is there, then, room for freewill, still?

I wrote in "***Breaking Bread***" in my Editorial in the February and March issue:

"Externally, it can indeed seem that we are not in freedom but are driven by our compulsions, genetically-based and – maybe – environmentally induced – as these can be. What intrigues me is what is, yet again, held up to us in our church's Teachings, about it being "an eternal law that everyone should be interiorly in freedom." (Heavenly Secrets" 2876). One of the things this is saying to me is that notwithstanding compulsions they can't determine what we think and feel about them. We can still stand apart from them and make observations and decisions about them – even if we continue to be held in thralldom by them."

Going back to – and picking up on – what we touched on earlier, about factors which deny us the exercise of our free-will.

With regard to,

"No one is reformed in states where freedom and rationality are absent",

DP 138 reads,

"There are many states that lack freedom and rationality, but in general they are assigned to the following categories: states of fear, emergency, mental illness, serious physical illness, ignorance, and intellectual blindness."

My comment:

As illnesses are identified such as were never known about a generation or two ago I have in recent years come to wonder if in fact there are not a great number of people who do not and cannot exercise freewill than I had previously supposed.

e.g.

Autism

Asperger syndrome

Bipolar disorder

And who knows what else, even yet to be discovered?

In all this, of course, we have to be on our guard against making excuses for people when, in reality, excuses are not called for and absolving people of a responsibility they should in fact bear.

Two final points:

1. Being created for a specific use in the Grand Man of heaven: To what extent does this “determine” things about us?
2. Viktor Frankl and his eloquent affirmation of the reality of freewill.