

University of Washington

Consequences of Determinism

Andy Simmerman

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Professor Mark Smith

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The realization that determinism is true would likely have a significant impact on how I interpret my own political beliefs and how I view other people and their beliefs. Determinism, simply defined, is the idea that every belief or action is the natural result of prior events and causes. Discovering that our political ideals are formed as the result of factors largely beyond our understanding and control would lead me to hold my personal ideals less confidently and to view opposing beliefs and those who hold them as less immoral. Having said that, my unconscious emotional reactions and my attitude toward others who do or do not share my values will likely remain the same, even in the face of this truth.

If we arrive at our beliefs and values due to a deterministic process, it follows that I had no “choice,” at least in the traditional sense, when it came to my various political stances. I hold certain beliefs not because some aspect of my will assessed the available options and chose those which I considered best, but because of a combination of factors and events that occurred in the past outside of my control. I’m not even aware of many of these factors, such as how my personal genetic makeup or various evolutionarily advantageous behaviors shaped my beliefs. The realization that this is the state of the world would completely shatter the notion that my political beliefs are the “correct” ones. In a non-deterministic world, I choose my beliefs based on how well they align with my personal moral code, similarly decided by myself. My values represent my sense of morality and the world I want to live in. If they were effectively chosen for me by a stew of causal factors, I would no longer possess the same level of confidence in their moral correctness. I can no longer take any credit for the morality of the various stances I hold, because I never had the possibility to believe any differently. To be moral requires a choice, choosing moral over immoral, and if determinism is true then this choice never existed. Viewing my political stances this way would lead me to become less politically active in general. I would

feel powerless, like a puppet controlled by causal factors, and would see little reason for large amounts of political participation if I couldn't even determine why I held such beliefs. Trying to change my beliefs would be ineffective towards regaining a sense of control, as, ironically, the truth of determinism would itself be another causal factor that led to the shift in my values. Despite having learned this truth, I would likely feel an unconscious attachment to my various political stances that my rational knowledge of how I formed them would be unable to overcome. I can no longer look at them from a rational perspective of morality, but I would still feel positive emotions when I see my ideals win out and negative ones when they falter.

My perception of those whose political beliefs align with mine would similarly be altered. Without determinism, I share a kind of bond with those who have the same beliefs and values. We all came to similar conclusions about how we want the world to be structured, and we all made a conscious choice in the selection of our beliefs. That idea of *choice* is central to the camaraderie we share because of its moral aspect. When I see others who share my political views, it allows me to make a positive moral judgement about them without even really getting to know them. This kinship should vanish when I realize that they, like me, did not *actually* choose those beliefs. Our political beliefs only align due to a combination of seemingly arbitrary factors, and any slight variation in those causal factors could have very well put their beliefs in opposition to mine. Their morality is no longer a factor. It is possible, however, that this unifying force of shared belief could remain present in a different form. Even though factors outside our control led to our political stances, our different experiences led us to the same conclusions, conclusions that I feel an emotional attachment to. I will still feel this attachment to those people and their beliefs even when armed with the knowledge that neither of us "chose" to think that

way. I am still wont to look more favorably upon those who share my beliefs simply due to an unconscious, positive emotional response.

When it comes to people whose political beliefs differ from mine, the other side of the coin is displayed. Just as I cannot grant moral credit to myself or others who share my belief, I can no longer hold those who oppose me morally culpable. It would also be more difficult to believe them stupid, as we often do with those who hold different beliefs. Even individuals holding beliefs many would consider morally reprehensible, such as racists, can no longer be held morally responsible for those beliefs. Again, the ability to choose is necessary to make a moral judgement of another's beliefs—even when those beliefs deny the humanity of other people. This does not mean, however, that I would suddenly seek out the company of those with differing beliefs, nor would I *feel* differently about them. Rationally, I would be aware that they did not choose to feel the way they do, but I would still have a negative emotional reaction to their values. This negative reaction would likely be even stronger than the positive reaction I retain with those who agree with me. Hearing racist speech or even just arguing with those with different viewpoints will cause me to experience frustration and anger, no matter how often I remind myself that they were determined to feel this way. I would still *feel* that their beliefs were morally repugnant, even if I was aware that morality is no longer in the cards. My attitude toward these opposing beliefs and those holding them would remain just as it was before I learned determinism was true.

Discovering that determinism is true would essentially remove all conceptions of morality from my political beliefs and the beliefs of others. Morality is only possible with choice, the ability to determine right from wrong and *choose* to do or believe in what is right. Determinism doesn't allow for choice, and thus removes any concept of moral credit or

culpability from political beliefs. Despite the disconnect between morality and political values, it is unlikely that my unconscious and emotional reaction to others' beliefs will change. I will still feel pleasure when talking with others who feel the way I do, and feel strong negative reactions when others express beliefs in opposition. This sense of moral righteousness is deeply engrained within us, and even the rational realization that others deserve neither credit nor blame for their beliefs cannot overcome it.