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CLOUDS AND CLOCKS REVISITED

*Abstract*

This paper undertakes a critical evaluation of the problem of freedom and determinism, aiming to show that determinism is vitiated by a conceptual inconsistency, stemming from the gratuitous application of a space and time structure appropriate for idealized physical systems to all entities. This paper aims to show particularly that the time structure of actions and mental states is essentially unsaturable, and thus that the whole alternative of determinism and indeterminism makes no sense if referred to our mental and practical life. First of all, the theoretical content of philosophical determinism is taken into consideration, and it is argued that only a physical determinism (the claim that the state of the world at every time is determined by the former ones) is relevant to the issue of freedom, while a metaphysical determinism (the claim that the state of the world at every time is determined by some non-time entity, like God's will or leibnitian "complete notion") is not. Next, the variety of time structures acknowledged in our conceptual framework is emphasized: particularly, the fact that many kinds of entities devoid of exact boundaries, and provided with a position in space and time, but unable to fill such a position (like Popper's clouds), are acknowledged. The upshot of the matter is that a universal physical determinism holds good only if we suppose that every object in space and time can be reduced to entities like matter in XVII century philosophers, which is apt to fill places and times. On the contrary, if we acknowledge various kinds of objects unable to saturate space and time – as we do, when we speak of actions, will, mental states, motives –, determinism (and indeterminism too) cannot work.