

Why People Were Created with Freedom of Choice

Edwin de Kock

If God knows everything in advance, why did he not create the first human couple, our ancestors, with a disposition to make a correct choice in response to Satan's wily words? Young and sometimes not so young people often ask this question. The answer is simple: because the Lord made them good, they did begin their existence with precisely such a disposition. Nevertheless, because they could freely choose what to do, they allowed themselves to be led astray.

The inevitable second question is more difficult to deal with: But why did God not program people in such a way that they would always have to love him and live righteously? I have never seen anybody deal with this issue quite satisfactorily, but perhaps John Milton has provided us with a clue. He represents the Creator as saying:

“I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall . . .”

The Lord desires the service of love and not enforced obedience, and further:

What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
When Will and Reason (*Reason also is choice*)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoild,
Made passive both, had servd necessitie,
Not Mee.”

(*Paradise Lost*, Book 3, lines 98-111)

But what is the clue? It is found in the italicized words, *Reason also is choice*. I would, however, also add concepts like “imagination” and “creativity.” These faculties, taken together, make up much of the human mind. Let us dwell a little on this with a few examples.

Animals are largely biological robots, though not entirely so. They cannot really reason and are therefore obliged to obey their instincts. For instance, no wild animal—even a very hungry one—would ever rush into a fire. A cat cannot jump into a river to swim. Genetically programmed, mere animals are limited by built-in “taboos”.

People, however, are different. If they want to, they have the ability to walk into a lethal fire, a raging torrent of water, or any danger to save others—even at the risk of losing their own lives.

A knife is potentially both useful and dangerous; therefore, the user should know what he or she should or should not do with it. It is not intended for stabbing or cutting another human being. With a genetic taboo, however, a surgeon could not operate on a patient with cancer. But he has the power of choice, which Milton equates with reason. The Lord has not programmed into us the instinctive limitations that characterize the rest of this world's creation. Morality is complemented by and closely bound up with reason, which cannot be dissociated from it.

But what about creativity? Look at bird nests. Those that are built by finches, turtle doves, and swallows differ from one another, immensely. On the other hand, depending on the species, these are always made of a specific material with the same invariable shape, from generation to generation. The necessary skills for creating them remain the same from

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century to century, for they are biologically programmed into these non-reasoning creatures. What they have is inherited memory. This is marvelous and in itself an argument why there must have been a Creator. But once again, people are not like that. They are born with very few instincts, and precisely for this reason they are not limited to one particular architectural style. Instead, they are ingenious and inventive, continuously able to develop brand-new techniques. Therefore, these often differ from culture to culture.

If the father was a carpenter, the son does not need to make his table in exactly the same way or to paint it the same color; for he has the power of imaginative choice. All the time, people can come up with new inventions, gimmicks, and gadgets, as well as marvelous works of art: paintings, sculptures, handicrafts, cathedrals, music, and much, much more. Without imagination, creativity, and reason—which are closely tied up with the ability to choose—there could be no composers, poets, or writers.

The misuse of the mind, the power to think and to do, can lead to drug abuse, suicide, murder, and degeneracy in every shape and form. Creativity and imagination, closely allied to reason, can also be used to make increasingly terrible weapons, like crossbows, bombers, or nuclear weapons—with planetary destruction as an ultimate possibility. Besides, what human monsters has the power of choice not thrown up in history, mass murderers like Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, and Mau Tse-tung!

But without freedom of choice, with a fixed mentality fated to move along well-defined grooves, human beings would forever have lacked the wonderful endowments of reason, imagination, and creativity. That is to say, they could not have had minds at all.

The Creator did not, however, want to make yet another batch of robot-like animals. Instead, he wanted people, like angels and beings on other worlds, to possess the potential of becoming on their plane what he is on his (“godliness, godlikeness, is the goal to be reached,” as Ellen White expressed it). He desired additional children, who would keep on developing their ever-increasing powers, companions for him through eternity.

When the Lord made Lucifer, he knew very well that one day this would lead him to Calvary. He saw everything in advance . . . and considered the ultimate sacrifice worth while. But what if he had not created the Morning Star? Then, in the ages to come, there could well have been another such self-willed rebellious being.

There is, of course, yet a third argument that a person may sometimes advance: “Yes, but why could I not have been born on a sinless planet?” The answer is simple: You could not have been. The being that you are could have existed with only the exact genetic inheritance, parents, and background which you have inherited. If human history could be changed in the smallest detail, people would have had children by other mates, resulting in different offspring, and you would never have been born.

Therefore rejoice, for your present life is absolutely your only chance of eternal life. If Christ had not come, poor Adam and Eve would no doubt have been destroyed . . . and that would have been the end of you and me. We would have been eliminated in advance. Of course, if you insist on their pessimism, your final reaction may well be: “But I would prefer never to have been born!” This, however, is a pointless reaction. After all, you are in the world. Why, then, not make the most of it. Embrace your unique opportunity, which is after all a wonderful destiny awaiting a wonderful multitude gathered from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people—as well as every era—when Jesus returns.

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