

What is Free Will?

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By the term free will I mean the belief that the human will has an inherent power to choose with equal ease between alternatives. This is commonly called 'the power of contrary choice' or 'the liberty of indifference'... Ultimately, the will is free from any necessary causation. In other words, it is autonomous from outside determination" (No Place for Sovereignty, pages 43-44).

This says that the will is able to resist influences and go against them. The will is free from anything outside of it that can program it or affect how it chooses.

WHAT DIFFERENT VIEWS EXIST REGARDING FREE WILL?

Are choices really choices? What is choice or free will?

There are only four views on offer. No more and no less.

#1 Experience shows we make choices. This view says it is pointless to ask how free will works for it is a mystery. While all accept that programming is involved we do not feel it. Whether you think your choice has a random element it does not feel random either. Whether choice is programmed or not we should not feel free but we do. That is why we should be very cautious with this view.

#2 Free will is random or indetermined. This view in effect denies free will for it means that a good person can suddenly murder without explanation. Free will and the idea that we need to explain how we choose go together. Random free will can mean literally anything can happen or it can mean the randomness is contained. Either way your action is not yours but just happens. That is not free will.

#3 Free will is determined - that is it is programmed. Those who say this idea fits the doctrine of free will are in fact redefining programmed will as free will. It is just determinism under a different name. The name is compatibilism. Its a scam or just confused.

#4 Free will is determined but partly random. This is not free will for programming and randomness do nothing to make an act really yours. If it comes from causes or from random effects then it is not your act. And what if the presumption that the determined and undetermined work together all the the time is wrong? What if the murderer was free when he helped the old lady cross the road but not free when he stabbed her? Partial free will is no good for insane killers are not responsible for their actions even if part of them knew what they were doing. Part is not enough.

View 1 is the only one that believes in free will. The others just use the words but are redefined Dualism is the doctrine that your mind or soul (not to be necessarily equated with your brain) is the real you. All forms of free will however mysterious can only be adopted if you posit that this magical degrading doctrine of dualism is true. Dualism downgrades the body by default and treats bodies like houses that some ghost lives in.

So free will if it is to mean more than just words is: Freedom from anything outside of you forcing you. It is freedom from stupidity and passion within you which can force you even better than an external force can. It is freedom from oneself in a sense that allows you to do something opposite to your character. That in a sense is also freedom to be yourself. It is freedom from how influence can control you without you even realising you are being played. Positive freedom is freedom to act – it is active. Negative freedom is just the absence of coercion – it is passive. The two are the same thing but just looked at from different angles.

Is there scientific evidence for free will? No - science can only judge responses but not what is behind them. There is no way to detect what makes you act for it is so complicated.

SUMMARY

1. Determinism. This means that events follow a unique trajectory, just like a video tape – you stop the tape, rewind it and replay it. It will always repeat itself exactly.

2. Indeterminism. This means that events do not follow a unique trajectory. Each attempted replay would result in a totally different outcome.

Thanks whoever put that online! It is good for putting the free will debate into a nutshell.

IN DEPTH: WHAT IS FREE WILL?

Free will is creating an act out of nothing. You are the creator. Free will is the ability to act on your own behalf. Free will must be the only and final explanation for what I consciously do. The action is yours and not the result of programming and other things that make the brain think it really does choose when it does not. Free will is the ability or power to willingly do other than what you willingly do – it means you can choose. It means you can deserve. All agree that free will is the ability to choose one of two or more courses of action that are presented as good to the intellect. This is the definition used by the Catholic Church (page 52, Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine, Part 1; page 3,4, Moral Philosophy) and everybody else. Free will says that when two or more options are open to you it is up to you which road to take. There are no forces making you go for one. If there is no free will there is no such thing as choice even if you feel free and think you are free.

This is what we are tricked to believe. We are forced to combine personal responsibility and the right to be rewarded or punished with choice. But in fact the only definition we need or really want is this one: Free will is the ability for our body/brain to enact what we desire or want it to do at some given time. It is about what we can get our bodies to do.

"SHOULD FREE WILL" AND "CAN FREE WILL"

Free will doctrines typically assume you should use your will to love and to be fair or whatever.

Some hold it is not about ought or should but about can.

Say "I can not I should." Should implies judgement and can sounds liberating.

We do not care what can means as long as we do something we can so there is no need for belief in free will as in should.

Should free will is not the same thing as can free will.

You can have can free will without should free will but you cannot have should free will without can free will

TWO POSSIBLE UNDERSTANDINGS OF USING FREE WILL TO CHOOSE GOOD

Free will is the ability to will to do other than what you will to do without you being programmed by your past or anything to do what you do. It means you can kill a person as well as save them and that you are the cause or creator of the decision you make. You are not programmed to make the decision in which case you could have done different and in which case it was not a real decision. If you are programmed then you only think you have made a choice but you could not have done other than what you did. Free will implies that we are responsible for our actions. Free will is the doctrine that you can choose.

So free will is the ability to choose. This makes us think of two ways we might choose.

One, you might be able to choose only between different kinds of good.

Two, you might be able to choose good or bad for yourself or others.

We feel we can do these.

But what if free will was one or the other? What if we only had the freedom to choose between different kinds of good and couldn't choose evil?

It is said that only Two can confer moral responsibility for morality is doing the good in preference to the bad. It is said that if you can only choose good you deserve no reward for you are unable to do evil. It is said you are not responsible. But this is nonsense for we are not faced with good and evil "choices" all the time. If we can give our baby a cuddle or a rattle we have a choice between two good works. Are we to say that just because we have those two in our minds and do one of them that we are not responsible? If we are responsible then a reward is deserved. So you can have free will without having the power to do evil.

For most people, the importance of free will is to do with us being able to pick good or bad. It is possible to have a kind of free will that only lets you choose one of a number of things that are good and noble without having the power to do bad. But that is not the kind of free will the world wants to believe in. It would say, "You could be able to freely choose different kinds of good but not evil. But since you cannot do evil your works have no merit. They are free but not freely good morally speaking. They are said to be not really good for they do not mean you are a good person but only a puppet."

We can self-program. Even if we have the power to do freely do evil, we can make it dormant so it is the same as if it is not there at all. You can be your own puppet so what is wrong with that?

NO IN BETWEEN

The doctrine that tells us that we are programmed to do what we do or that there is no such thing as choice is called determinism. When the determinists say that they are free they mean that there is no external compulsion and that they can act according to their nature not that they really can choose. Determinism is the view that we have a will but it is not free.

The will is the faculty we have with which we seem to make choices. It is either free or unfree. If there could be hidden forces controlling you though you think they are not then nobody and not even yourself can accuse yourself of having done anything deliberately wrong. So the choice is between unfree will and free will. There is no in-between. Some say there is but they are messing around with words.

ULTIMATE FREEDOM?

Sam Harris holds that there is no real free will because we cannot be the final or ultimate cause of what we do. An analogy, suppose something made the universe. That something is the start of all other causes so it is the ultimate cause. To be ultimate choice-maker means you have to control the preconditions of your choice not just your choice. Nobody is the ultimate creator of their actions so free will is proven false.

Daniel Dennett says you don't need ultimate free will to be free. It is enough to have a little freedom. It is like we have a little say in how our programming works and what it will get us to do. He says it is very valuable and worth having even if it fails to give us any significant responsibility.

IS FREE WILL ABOUT THE MAJOR SPIRITUAL CHOICES?

What is free will ultimately or solely for? Maybe free will is purely about choosing God or rejecting him? You might have no free will except that. You could be programmed to choose coffee not tea. And when it comes to doing something entirely for the love of God or otherwise free will could kick in. That would be a part-time free will. It focuses only on the final goal of your free will - the ultimate.

Here is a variation on the notion that free will is only about your ultimate purpose in life: "Having the power to choose one of different alternatives is necessary before you can be called a free agent. If you have no way to do other than what you do, if there are no possibilities that you can choose from you are not free. So we are talking about alternative possibilities being what free will is all about. Kane talks about alternative possibilities as in ultimate possibilities. Only in those is free will made possible. Free will is founded on ultimate responsibility. He speaks of SFA - self forming actions. Your ultimate responsibility is to choose actions that make you what you are. If you form yourself into a thief then you are a thief. Your actions flow from the kind of person or character you are."

This view is nonsense but interestingly it refuses to pretend that the sin is not the sinner. The sin is the sinner for the sin shows the kind of person the sinner is. Also it is part-time free will and it does not give people the full-time free will they want to imagine is true.

All believers in God do think free will is part-time in the sense that you can turn it off by drinking too much or taking drugs.

But a God who sets up part-time free will then is doing what you do when you are not free. The drunk who kills is God murdering for God is the puppet master.

FREE WILL AS SENSE

The will, whether free or not, is a sense. It reaches out for an action be the action a thought or a deed. Even when you don't move you are doing something, you are not moving. The will is a need to do something. Is the will a capacity or an activity? The will is a need that responds to other needs such as the need for friends and food etc. It is a capacity and an activity.

THEORY

Free will is a theory. You can accept it or dismiss it. Just like that.

DO WE REALLY BELIEVE IN UNPROGRAMMED WILLS?

The Christian doctrine of free will tells you not to look for an explanation if some stranger passing you on the street just thumps you in the face. It says it just happened for no reason. But we will not buy that. We will look for a reason. We will not simply just say the person freely did it and that is all there is to it. To explain what people choose we need the why. Their wills are not totally under their control.

The Christian doctrine ties free will to the idea of a spiritual soul. It will say free will is not subject to any natural explanation. That only encourages the notion that you should never ask anybody why they just hit you for there is no point. Do you really want to live in a world where people act so randomly? There is a sense in which the thump was random but we are not talking about that.

We do not really believe in real free will or want to. A choice made randomly and without explanation is not a choice at all. It simply cannot be.

FREE WON'T

There is free will and what some call free won't. Free will is when you freely give a child some sweets. Free won't is when you freely won't give. Free won't is as much of a choice as free will. it is a yes to no. So if there is no free will there is no free won't either. The two work together for to choose something is to say I won't to other things.

CAN ONLY GOD GIVE US FREE WILL?

Some think that if there is no God then there is no free will for it is such a conundrum and mystery that only God can give it and facilitate it. Free will would have to be a miracle but the problem is it is a miracle that cannot be shown to be real. It is assumed. If God has to do hidden miracles to run the universe that is a bad sign. It shows that he is unable to think of another way. He cannot make free will natural. How can it be for it is like creating an action or choice out of nothing? It makes us the creators of our behaviour and deeds.

They are definitely right.

God may give us the power to create from nothing. But that amounts to him creating our sins from nothing for strictly speaking only God can have the power. If Padre Pio raises up Friar Tuck from the grave as God alone is master of life and death it follows that God is doing it and Pio is only the instrument.

So the doctrine of free will inherently implies there is a God and inherently implies that he is evil.

If God gives me freedom am I responsible to him and myself? If God alone matters then free will is all about being responsible to him for doing his will or otherwise. If God matters most then there is not much difference. But our instinct is what we want free will to be for us not for him. We want it for our society.

Hypothetically, what happens if we are indeed free agents but there is no God?

Free will really means creation of an action from nothing. Freedom without God seems to be not freedom but random as in something just popping into existence uncreated. Such freedom is grounded in nothing but itself. This puts freedom and choice in a void and makes them meaningless and valueless.

It is assumed that God avoids this problem. But the fact remains we do not know what freedom is – we just have the sensation of freedom. But that is not the same as understanding what it is and how it works and if it works.

One thing is clear: We cannot really know God if we are programmed to know him. That is not knowing. There is no difference between being programmed to know that this year is the current year or that it is 1911. When you are programmed what you know can be false so it is not really knowing. So it is fundamentally and essentially in our freedom that we find God and learn something about him and experiencing a relationship with him. So the big question is not, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" But, "What is free will and does it come from God and teach me personally something about God?"

You may be forced to kill a mental patient to save his victim. What forces you? The principle of protecting the innocent. So you have the free will to kill him under the circumstances. It doesn't look very free but you are free under the circumstances. Psychologists and philosophers feel that even if you have to kill somebody and its totally unavoidable you are still damaged by what you have done. You are damaged by what you did and damaged because the situation was so evil that you had to do it. The damage arises from how we don't see animal deaths the same way as they are not one of us but in a sense to hurt a human is to degrade yourself. It hurts a being you identify with and thus in some way it hurts you as well. This argument is the reason why those who have abortions or who administer them or those who assist in euthanasia are believed to be forever damaged by their involvement. You see abortion and euthanasia as hurting something or somebody that is like you or could be you. That sense of identity has to be erased or watered down for you to carry out the abortion or euthanasia. They say, "As life is of huge importance it follows the damage sets in with only one abortion or euthanasia." The damage punishes you even if you had to kill or if you didn't have to but did it anyway. Is that justice? Far from it! If it is like trying to damage God the only supremely good being then that is more damage on top of the damage already wreaked.

Free will then is nothing to be celebrated. Why you would want the doctrine and see it as honouring God is a mystery!

FREE WILL IS DELIBERATELY MISDEFINED BY GOD BELIEVERS

Believers argue that God is good so evil and suffering have nothing to do with him. Human free will typically gets the blame. Blaming humanity not God is the free will defence.

The free will defence cares about you being free from external forces bigger than you and does not care if you have no freedom to overcome what gets in the way of you making a rational and responsible decision. Make no mistake. Believers argue God causes your will to be left to its own devices. But what if you want to make a proper decision based on good information? You get no help there and in the important things you poke around in a mixture of light and dark. You don't know if the light is the light or a trick or if you are seeing the right things you need to base the decision on. If there is a choice does being free as in faculty matter or being free as in properly knowing what you are doing? Both matter equally one way but the latter matters most another. If doing the right thing for the right reasons matters then you need free will as in faculty so that way they are equally important. The faculty is only important as a means to being able to make the right decisions so in a sense the latter is more important. The eye and seeing are both equally important for one cannot be had without the other but when you consider than an eye is for seeing it follows the seeing is more important. Same idea.

It is clear that the free will defence is evil for it would prefer a decision to a proper decision and refuses to care enough about what a decision making faculty is for. It is evil for it refuses to admit our right to truth from God so we can make decisions right. In fact it mistakes real freedom for wantonness, doing what you want not what you need (what you need to do means you must be informed about what you need to know in order to make a choice) and wantonness for true freedom. It is evil in principle and evil because of the consequences of what we think is free will - humanity's inhumanity to humanity. To try to defend an evil free will in the face of so much evil is unforgivable.

Free will being an evil means that a world where people can do extreme harm to each other is an evil world. God should limit the harm people do.

Free will being put down as gift from God would imply you don't know how to find a good version of God. To worship him would be an evil.

FINAL THOUGHTS

If we have free will, it does not prove we should be allowed by God to abuse it.

Free will that gives us no ability to wilfully choose evil will do. You could say that if you choose evil it is because you perceive it as good and so are still meaning well. Such free will allows rewards but not punishment. People believe an alcoholic who loses his free will to do evil but who saves a life should be rewarded as much as if he were free and sober. And would you be really a good person if you wanted to believe in free will in the traditional sense of choosing good or evil just for the sake of endorsing punishment?

The idea is not as useful as we are led to believe.