The Illusion of Free Will

With the way the world is run today, with wars, revolts, and crimes at a high, one must wonder: “Do humans have free will?” If the human brain can be sedated and altered with toxins such as alcohol and drugs legal and illegal, then no, in this case the brain is ruled by chemistry. But what dictates whether or not one will participate in the use of these drugs? What separates Hitler from Gandhi? Why is one person brought to fame by the mass murder of millions while the other is gaining notoriety by preaching the importance of nonviolence and justice? Not everyone was raised in a religion with rules that binds them to a certain lifestyle or has found a religion in later life that does the same. For example, someone who lives in the moment, someone who does not fear the unknown or an idol will be liberated and willing to try things that a religion may strike down or forbid. Free will does not always pertain to life and death but whether to be a “good” or “bad” person. The only thing that will affect these decisions both big and small are the way we have been raised and basic instincts we are all born with, not the idea of free will that the human race is so found of. There are no right or wrong choices, just accepted and socially unacceptable ones. You are a product of your environment.

Many define free will as “the ability of agents to make choices unconstrained by certain factors” but this idea is much broader and contains more variables than just A and B. When one is under the influence, stressed, anxious, or fearful their decisions will be affected. There is no such thing as making a right or wrong choice as well as moral or immoral ones, thus free will is an illusion of the human mind to have us feel more in control and better with our fear regarding the unknown. Many have failed to make this connection because of their religious beliefs but their arguments are not backed up my factual evidence, only their opinions. It often tends to contradict itself. One will choose to live with morals if they have been raised in an environment that demands them. Taking a life away in order to gain wealth and power would not have to be weighed. But for the people raised with little care, who had no parent figures, will not comprehend the meaning of a human life. Their right and wrong is different from someone who was raised in a loving environment, someone who was able to look up to someone. The ideas of right and wrong are ideas that are necessary for a successful society, which is why children are conditioned at a young age to determine the differences between the two. They do not define the decision making process in humans, the chemistry of the brain determines that.

Determinism is the belief that every event and action is dependent on other earlier and interconnected events. Determinism disputes the fallacy of free will and better understanding it exposes the faults in agreeing with such a notion. An example of this is the universe which follows the laws of physics, what determines the world, what limits every organism. Humans cannot change their chemical balance in their entire body because we are limited by the physical laws of nature. You cannot decide to be 20% water or to change every positively charged particle to negative in your body. We cannot control everything and to remain ignorant to that serves no positive purpose. Another example is the birth of the universe which caused the wide spread of galaxies and solar systems, which fashioned planets, some that can support life such as plants and bacteria, which eventually started animal life and what has become known as the human race. The same can be said with this essay written in English. Why is this not written in German or any other language besides? This is due to my upbringing in America by people who spoke English, not German. The same can be said about past generations and most likely future. Environment dictates perspective, one cannot and does not create or determine outcomes without weighing consequences, everything is based on past experiences, way of life in the present, and the future that is impossible to avoid.

Many religions, such as Christianity teach the consequences of one’s actions. Although this is fundamental and positive for society it ignores the laws of nature and contradicts itself in the process. This is contributing to the illusion of free will that most people have. Since the church has previously accepted past scientific theories such as evolution, those in charge are most likely not aware of the chemistry of the human brain. Obviously, using the bible to support the theory of free will is not convicting enough evidence. Others, who are separate from religion, may also believe that free will is always an issue of morals and what is the norm will always be the right way of thinking that everyone can see the clear answer but this is not true, there will never be a “right” answer. A newborn baby is a clean slate and the environment they are raised in will determine their future path. No one chooses to come into this world, what race they are, what social class they are born into, or what culture they are brought up into. They can only know what they have been exposed to, what is comfortable and familiar to them, this is what they will recall when asked to choose between two things. No one is born with knowledge of all things the world holds, we are all susceptible to disease and emotions whether we want to be or not. The belief of free will is so strong because people do not want to come to grips with the fact they cannot be in control of everything, the universe does not evolve around you, and you evolve around the universe.

The idea of true love, a staple in Hollywood movies, novels, and music can also come into play when discussing the theory of free will. Imagine across the room you spot the person of your dreams, you cannot think of life without them and up close they are even better. Is this the universe working its magic or are you just subconsciously picking out the most fit mate, the best person to produce healthy offspring. Unfortunately, not one person is meant to be with someone although it may seem so. So why do we fall head over heels in love with someone we have just spent minutes with? Believe it or not the idea of pheromones, the scent someone gives off that makes us have this “head over heels” feeling of love towards them. Our brains, ever since the first human being, have found some scents attractive while others we are naturally turned off from. For example, humans and animals alike have been known to be naturally turned off by the scent of family members. This is nature’s way of preventing inbreeding which in turn prevents genetic mutations and puts offspring at a greater chance of survival. We are constantly digesting new information and taking things in from our surrondings,

The human brain is an extremely complicated and diverse organ; it controls the emotions and chemicals released into the body. When someone is diagnosed with depression, a serious mental disorder, free will would suggest one can choose to no longer be sad and detached. But no one can alter the amount of serotonin and dopamine being released between synapsis in the brain without the use of drugs, hopefully prescription drugs. Toxins such as alcohol and drugs both legal and non-have the ability to alter judgment and the way we perceive things. This is certainly a constraint in the decision making process of the human brain. When under the influence, the brain will think differently than it would sober. The idea of free will has always been a hot topic for the science world and recently researchers have been able to find the exact moment when neurons tell the brain to perform an action. The researchers were able to tell what the patient would do even before they were even aware they decided on it themselves. Although this may seem scary for some people and hard to digest, it is the way the mind works and to accept the unknown helps in future research and a better understanding of our brains and how we make decisions. We are not invincible and all knowing, we are not exceptions to the laws of physics and nature, and this is what makes us human.

In conclusion, the theory free will, “the ability of agents to make choices unconstrained by certain factors”, fails to recognize the advancements in science dealing with the chemistry of the human brain. This theory is filled with flaws as well as little evidence to support what it claims. The human brain is fully involved in the decision making process and subconsciously is making the decision before you are aware of it yourself. Our environment will dictate the way we respond and view situations as well as our basic instincts. What is considered immoral behavior to one person may not even faze someone else. We, as humans, are not always in control of what happens or the decisions we will ultimately make. Everyone is bound to the laws of nature and physics which drive them. There is no disputing what has been proven. Free will does not exist when you touch something hot and involuntarily pull away. When under the influence of drugs or while in fear we will react to things differently, and perhaps not in the ways we prefer. You are a product of your environment, your brain does not function without weighing consequences, it requires past experiences, the present tense, and the inescapable future.

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