

An Argument Against the Existence of Free Will

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Abstract

This paper examines the mechanisms of free will by evaluating the components of free will, defining what conditions must be present in order for free will to be actualized, and evaluating if these conditions are capable of existing beyond a vacuum chamber. Surveying the viewpoints of Jean-Paul Sartre, Georg Hegel, and Robert Blatchford comparatively, this article introduces a hypothetical scenario which disproves the existence of absolute free will.

1 Introducing and Defining Free Will

The concept of free will is vast and complex, transcending the current understanding of the universe.. However, there is no free will to be found for us; For true free will to exist, there would have to be only one consciousness at any given time to avoid conflicts of interest, whether physical or abstract. This paper proposes a distinction between the terms ‘free will’ and ‘freedom’. Free will describes a hypothetical scenario in which a single entity controls everything (in which we are all cogs in a machine or pawns on a chessboard), leaving no room for environmental or genetic factors to influence decision-making. In contrast, freedom is a more attainable concept for humans. While we cannot alter our genetic makeup or surroundings, we can make choices within a set of options determined by the inherent randomness of the universe. In distinguishing freedom, it is necessary to identify the levels of freedom that lead up to the idea of

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absolute free will. The first ‘tier’ of freedom, which is also the most encompassing, is societal freedom. It is essential to determine if individuals can engage in basic pursuits without limitations. However, this level of freedom cannot be achieved for every person since complete societal or social freedom would require an impossible abundance of land, money, and resources. Totalitarian desires of one individual may contradict another’s freedom. Nevertheless, moderate levels of freedom on this level can be attained, either through socio-economic status or living in a society that enables such freedoms.

Beyond societal and social freedom lies the concept of freedom of personality, which refers to the ability to express oneself freely. However, achieving complete freedom of personality is impossible. As Jean-Paul Sartre argued in “Existentialism as a Humanism,” our existence precedes our essence. In other words, who we are is determined before we can choose who we want to be. Unlike Sartre’s stance towards free will, in which suggests that we have freedom to be who we want to be and the moral responsibility to own our decisions, our choices are largely influenced by our desires, affinities and our heredity, as argued by Blatchford in “The Delusion of Free Will” [1]. According to Sartre, if we consider ourselves exceptions to our ideal perception of humanity, it weighs on our conscience. For example if we value healthy eating habits as ideal but indulge frequently in junk food, we bear the moral responsibility of acknowledging our distinction. Despite our desire for freedom of personality, we are still subject to external social structures that precede it, even if these social structures only have the significance we grant to them. Is it thus possible for the human mind to even grant itself freedom? It continuously seems to impose limits on its perceptions of itself and the environment around it.

Following social and personality freedom lies the concept of freedom between choices. However, the existence of a society in of itself limits one’s options to exist within it or to abandon it. It is impossible to achieve universal free will between choices because true free will would imply an infinite range of options or no selection at all. This boundary is inherent in the concept of free will, and it means that we will never be able to achieve true free will. The final tier of freedom is the freedom to exist. Although we cannot choose to come into existence (both in regards to the existence of a metaphorical ‘soul’ or consciousness that predates the coagulation of our atoms and cells), we can choose to end our consciousness as we know it. This May be the only true form of free will one can experience. It is important to recognize that we can still be free people even if we have no free will. The debate about the existence

of free will is The debate over free will is often linked to moral considerations, as we may feel that lacking free will implies being enslaved or restricted. This is the conclusion we reach when considering the vacuum left by the absence of free will. In reality, our existence is shaped by the random chaos of the universe, which imposes limits on our choices and actions. Nonetheless this does not mean that we are necessarily confined. We choose between multitudes of limited options, actualizing choices we have already made subconsciously, but maybe this is the limit of our capacity. Slavery bears the notion of unhappiness, but if we can be happy people, then maybe we simply exist amongst the context of a meaninglessly predetermined and chaotic universe.

2 On Existentialism

Jean-Paul Sartre, a leading figure in the existentialism and free will debate, posits that we are ultimately responsible for our actions and determining our own values and purpose.. What we aim to be is what we consider the ideal form of humanity. There is no predetermined human nature or moral foundation laid out for us by a higher power. We cannot determine our ‘essence,’ the stuff that composes our soul, but it is up to us to determine our value and purpose—this, to Satre, is free will. So, how can one explain the formation of our ideal identities?It is largely a product of our heredity and environmental context, which both influence our cognition and stem from random chance. This means that our choices to become moral, kind, or wealthy humans are not necessarily a result of free will, but rather a result of the freedom provided by society, which enables the freedom of personality, which in turn enables the freedom of choice (as previously defined). Sartre distinguishes humans from utilitarian tools by highlighting the importance of purpose. Knives, for instance, are created by humans to cut things, and their value and purpose are derived from their function. In contrast, humans are not born with a predetermined purpose; they must create their own purpose and meaning. While a child may have been brought into the world to fulfill a parent’s desire, the child itself has no inherent purpose. Rather, it is up to the individual to assign meaning and value to their own existence. Drawing from Georg Hegel’s Master/Slave Dialectic, [2] it is evident that the slave exists to the master only to serve as a slave. It is an act of reclamation to consider oneself above utilitarian purposes assigned to oneself. We can choose to reject this utilitarian view and instead

recognize that everything is inherently invaluable unless we assign meaning to it. There is no difference in value between a human considered a slave by some and a master by others; all humans are inherently purposeless and invaluable, just like a knife. This does not render them useless or wasted existences; they have the freedom to exist in any way they can. Although there is no common human condition, collective consciousness, or inherent meaning, we are still the product of our heredity and environment. Nature abhors a vacuum, and even seemingly random decisions are ultimately a result of the true randomness of the universe. For example, our preference for eggs over toast for breakfast may be a culmination of genetic and environmental factors with random origins. The only "true" force that assigns value to anything is chaos and probability.

3 On Determinism

In contrast to Sartre's existentialist perspective, there are two opposing views: determinism and fatalism. Determinism holds that our future is determined by past actions, while fatalism suggests that our fate is preordained. The idea of a predetermined path implies that there is a meaning behind all of the predetermined characteristics of existence, but this may not necessarily be the case. Both determinism and fatalism have been associated with negative and nihilistic views in philosophy, but it's worth noting that they have the potential to be positive as well, so we'll refrain from criticizing them in this regard. While determinism and fatalism do not assign a deeper meaning to predetermined actions and events, it is important to note that our prior actions are predetermined by context. Thus, these actions are not choices that we have any say in, beyond the illusion of choice that we grant ourselves, which challenges determinism's claim that our fates are determined by our prior actions. This grants a certain plausibility to fatalism, except fatalism attributes the responsibility of determining context to some sort of irreverent and irrefutable destiny established long before events occur. In reality, these events have no great meaning or predetermined occurrence. The only predetermined aspect of them is that it is determined that these events will somehow occur, either in their occurrence or in their absence, and even that is random.

Drawing from Robert Blatchford's "The Delusion of Free Will," one can observe a more fatalistic perspective; which asserts that events are influenced by external factors, but are not necessarily predetermined or predictable. The

concept often implies that destiny has a fixed and meaningful nature, however, this is not necessarily the case. Our destinies are shaped by random events and lack inherent meaning. The only meaning within our existence is the meaning we choose to attribute based on values developed through our heredity and environment. Destiny occurs and plays out as events happen randomly. The past is the only objectively determined aspect of existence, yet it can still be interpreted subjectively. The notion of determinism disregards the possibility of freedom by making absolute claims, “the sky isn’t blue at all because at night it turns black,” or “leaves are not green because they turn brown eventually.” Determinism does not permit the existence of fleeting states of happenings or context-dependent existences or compromises. In Determinism, absolute free will does not exist, however, this does not negate the existence of partial freedom within certain contexts.

4 On Compatibilism

Compatibilists argue that even if our fate is predetermined, we still possess free will in the sense that we can make choices between available options. However, the question arises: what influences our choices? Our desires, wants, and needs are all shaped by our environment and heredity, and therefore, our choices are not truly free. The so-called ‘free will’ discussed in compatibilism refers to the freedom of choice within the constraints of our predetermined circumstances. In contrast, true free will would not require making choices that limit or close off options. Instead, all of our desires and needs would be readily available to us, and we would have an infinite range of options to choose from, without any external factors influencing our decisions.

5 Hypothetical Cases and the Oxymoronic Nature of Free Will

Several philosophical problems and paradoxes have been discussed in the context of arguing against the plausibility of free will. One of the most famous of these is the Omnipotence Paradox which asks whether an all-powerful God can create a boulder so heavy that even He cannot lift it. Similarly, in the case of free will, can one create a scenario that contradicts the universal nature of one’s all-powerful free will? It seems that free will can only exist in a complete vacuum with no

external influences or constraints. A scenario that highlights the limitations of free will is that of a hypothetical utopia: let the constraints of this scenario be the constraints of reality as we know it. Imagine you are a researcher studying animal behavior and you create a "perfect" environment for a population of chickens. The warehouse is equipped with everything the chickens could want: food, water, stimulation, resting places, and more. Inevitably, there will not be enough room forever. Even if the chickens' utopia keeps expanding and expanding, there are limits to this. As the population grows, the resources become limited leading to competition and unrest among the chickens. Despite their previous experience of living in an environment that closely resembled the idea of free will, they are now constrained by their circumstances. This scenario illustrates how the illusion of free will is limited by external factors, even in a seemingly perfect world.

Let's consider a scenario where you, as a researcher, remove some chickens from the population for slaughter without the others knowing. The remaining chickens may continue to live in their utopian environment, but is it possible to achieve universal happiness for a population with free will without compromising the freedom of a few? If the researcher didn't impede on the freedom of the select few chickens taken out to slaughter, would the entire population still even have any free will at all due to their inability to achieve happiness? Can complete happiness be achieved with free will? Would people be willing to deal with the suffering of others for the sake of their happiness? If so, can it truly be considered free will? From this, we can conclude that free will can only exist in a vacuum with a single sentient identity..

The existence of free will is incompatible with multiple independent bodies. Consider the Omnipotence Paradox, which can be restated as a physical question: can an unstoppable force move an immovable object? The magnitude of their forces is relative to the observer's point of view, and from different perspectives, both the force and the object are equally powerful. If both of these entities possess absolute free will in their actions, then they cannot coexist due to their contradictory nature.

6 Real-World Discussions on Free Will

I had a discussion with three of my peers, Michael, Alex, and Chance regarding the existence of free will. Each of them offered a unique perspective with varying degrees of complexity. Michael argued that the existence of free will depends on how one defines it. According to Sartre, if you do not consider one's 'essence' in your definition of free will, then you do possess free will. On the other hand, if you subscribe to Blatchford's belief that existence is uncontrollable on a subatomic level, then you do not possess free will. We did not delve into the question of whether one has free will in choosing how to define free will. Alex took the position that free will does not exist due to the multitude of conflicting desires and influences that affect our decisions. On the other hand, Chance argued that free will is an illusion because our choices are determined by factors such as the environment and heredity. He presented a scenario that we took into consideration. He speculated that if he were a god, he could grant himself the option of having free will or not. He explained "I could eliminate the portion of my godly brain that granted me foresight and the knowledge of my ability to control everything and put that power in another equally powerful 'body' of myself which I could turn on and off at my own will." I challenged his assertion that his proposal would constitute true surrender of free will, arguing that what makes us acutely aware of the potential negative consequences of our actions and the randomness of chance is precisely the fact that we cannot simply switch off or control the universe's unpredictability. For example, if we get into a car accident, we cannot rewind time or manipulate the laws of physics to our advantage. Additionally, even if he programmed his other self to only remind him of his power in dire circumstances, this would still be a predetermined action, and thus not a true relinquishment of free will.

After our discussion on free will, Chance and I continued to discuss happiness. He proposed that happiness can exist strictly by itself, without the need for contrasting periods of non-happiness. He cited the Experience Machine, a thought experiment developed by philosopher Robert Nozick, which involves a sensory deprivation tank that allows the individual to enter an artificial reality of their choosing. [3] Chance argued that with complete control and free will over our surroundings, we could achieve existentially pure happiness within the Experience Machine.

Once again, I countered that happiness cannot be sustained in a permanent state and that it needs to be balanced with sadness to provide a broader per-

spective of life, making happiness more fulfilling and meaningful. The fleeting, spontaneous nature of happiness is what makes it valuable and exciting. The lack of control over when we experience it creates a sense of novelty and surprise. If one could predict all the surprise birthday parties or marriage proposals or gifts or happy accidents in their lives and plan them out on certain intervals, it would not be as fulfilling. ;Thus, the existence of free will undermines the purity of happiness because it is dependent on the random actions of others. He then asked me, "What if you were always happy?" to which I responded, "I'd be bored out of my mind!" Chance refuted, stating, "but you'd be always happy." This brought me back to our earlier discussion on free will. If a claim is absolute and universal, then there is no point in arguing the hypothetical because it cannot be challenged. Claiming that one would always be happy in a hypothetical situation assumes a limited understanding of human emotions. Happiness in human terms is multifaceted; one can experience happiness while still feeling bored or desiring variety. Therefore, stating that one would always be happy in a certain situation is an oversimplification of the complexity of human emotions.

Tangentially, if we consider free will in human terms, it is possible to be a content person with the experience of freedom without having the more absolute control of free will.

References

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[3] Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Basic Books, 1974.

[4] Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Les Editions Nagel, Methuen Co., 1946.