



Free Will: A Modernist Interpretation

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Abstract:

Who can say for sure if our lives are predestined? This philosophical conundrum has been going on for a long time. Classical thinkers who believed in a theocentric universe and viewed God as a merciful saviour for humanity embraced the belief in fate. Alternatively, humanism maintains that individual agency is crucial in deciding people's destinies. Did Adam and Eve have free will when they ate the fruit, or was their downfall predetermined by fate? Ongoing philosophical debate has surrounded these subjects for a considerable amount of time. In contrast, the existentialists of the twentieth century believed that human existence has no purpose. The more we try to make decisions based on our free will, the more we give in to the ridiculousness of life's lack of purpose. To understand the vital philosophical domain of our existential problem, this study explores how free will has been understood throughout history, specifically through modernist lenses.

Keywords: Existentialists, Freewill, Humanism, Philosophy, Social and Cultural Forces, Twentieth century.

The philosophical question of whether or not our lives are predetermined has persisted for ages. Classical thinkers held the theocentric view of the cosmos and saw God as a kind shepherd who would save humanity from evil as they believed in destiny. On the other hand, humanism holds that free will is the most critical factor in determining human fate. Is it fate that Adam and Eve would fall because they ate from the fruit, or did they have a choice? There has been a lot of philosophical discussion and controversy surrounding these topics for quite some time.



On the other hand, existentialist authors and thinkers of the 20th century believed that life is meaningless. The more we strive for free will decision-making, the more we revert to the absurdity of life's meaninglessness. The paper delves into the various interpretations of free will throughout history, examining it via modernist lenses to comprehend the crucial philosophical realm of our existential crisis.

The existentialists argue that the idea of free will and freedom of choice is illusory. Albert Camus uses Sisyphus's mythological figure to elucidate contemporary man's nature and decisions in his book *The Myth of Sisyphus*. As a punishment for his excessive enthusiasm for life, God made Sisyphus roll a rock to the peak of a hill, which would roll down, and he then had to carry it back up again. The modern man's everyday rolling of the rock uphill is like Sisyphus's activity. One could see this rolling of stones as a form of punishment, leading them to believe, as the determinists do, that they are powerless over their own lives. The counterargument by non-determinists is that Sisyphus's free will was partially at work when he chose to roll up the stone because he enjoyed the task (the argument of the non-deterministic).

Mostly, people are content to roll up their stones and go about their daily lives. We feel good about our decisions when we may readily repeat the same actions. Like multiple-choice questions, this one allows us to select one of four possible solutions but only lets us not come up with our own, even though our fifth response could be better. Consequently, one's life choices and priorities shape one's understanding of free will and predestination. Circumstances, beliefs, and cultural and psychological upbringing affect how they manifest in different people.

It is not easier to communicate with someone who is emotionally disturbed than with someone reasonable. Beyond the ridiculous barrier of human life, we are all acting by what is already predetermined, even though our options are limited, and we often feel free to select among them. Therefore, the concept of free will is a fallacy. Furthermore, whether limitations are internal or external is irrelevant to that delusion. We are constantly bound to follow a predetermined order, even though our freedom is limited.



We tend to choose with all the restrictions, whether discussing political freedom or philosophical, emotional, or cultural choices. Schlick is correct in saying that there are times when we cannot make "unimpeded rational" decisions because of the many obstacles that prevent us from truly living a life of choices. Furthermore, reality limits us and, for the most part, dictates our decisions.

Many different things can lead to oppression. On occasion, the downtrodden realise they are oppressed; on other occasions, they appear to accept their tyrannical rule as inevitable. As an example, gendered rearing normalises patriarchal processes in women's psyches, even if women often think it is to their advantage to be under men's care and beneficence. It is culturally expected that the oppressed will always be oppressed and that the ruling class has every right to hegemonies and enjoy all the benefits that come with it. It may be women in a patriarchal setting or people with low incomes in a contemporary nation-state; either way, it is always the colonial parameter which teaches the colonised to trust in the culture and superiority of the coloniser. The majority of oppressed people do not recognise that their oppression is happening in their minds and in their cultural conditioning, which means that they do not fight back or even acknowledge that they are being oppressed.

According to the French post structuralist philosopher, the modern nation-state is repressive, and the downtrodden are coerced into giving their consent through the use of surveillance (Foucault) and the Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser) (Chaffee, 2015). Igniting a discourse of hegemony that oppresses without the oppressed falling into a false consciousness, the methods of oppression and their analysis have therefore expanded beyond the exterior and psychological domain to seek a more comprehensive political-cultural arena.

While we may feel free to make our own decisions, it is essential to remember that societal standards also play a role. We should consider gender and occupation. Some occupations are strongly associated with one gender or the other, primarily due to societal expectations and values. Can a man stay home and take care of the family? Is there going to be societal acceptance and celebration of such a choice? Patriarchal training has taught men that they should be the ones



to pay the bills at home. The patriarchal system teaches men that staying at home and taking care of the family is a woman's job.

Many kitchen-sink dramas were written in the mid-twentieth century, including *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne, in which a guy thrust into the traditionally female domain of the home acts abusively because he cannot adapt to his new job. Psychological conditioning could be the explanation for some. Cultural conditioning makes men believe they belong in the public sphere from a young age, which in turn causes psychological conditioning. On the other hand, the feminine side is all about keeping oneself to one's own space. As a result, cultural conditioning has led us to subconsciously accept and internalise societal standards, leading to irrational thinking, behaviour, and actions we regret when we think about them logically.

Several things influence what we do and how we decide to act. Instinct has a role in certain decisions, circumstances in others, and psychological and social factors in others (Feldman, 2007). There are sensible ones, such as considering every conceivable outcome of a choice before making a final judgement. Decisions are not based on a single component but on a combination of factors. Decisions made on the fly are commonplace when time is of the essence. There are moments when we can think things through and weigh our options rationally. Since social and cultural standards shape our minds, our decisions are often based on what society expects and what societal norms urge us to do, which can be challenging when trying to balance our intellectual and emotional selves with our instincts.

Cultural and social forces dictate how we behave in many situations rather than our free will. Cultural stereotypes frequently have a significant impact on our decision-making. Everyone needs to take into account how cultural stereotypes impact their decision-making. Responsibility for one's decision is an inevitable byproduct of the critical thinking skills required to weigh all of one's options and make a final selection.

Our "necessary and immutable laws that she imposes on all the beings she contains" are a result of our inseparable "connection to universal nature," according to D'Holbach (quoted in (Chaffee, 2015, p. 165). He claims that the universal rules of nature influence our thoughts and



judgments more significantly than we give them credit for. As the physical cosmos moulds human experience and behaviour, D'Holbach contends that people do not make choices based on their judgement, logic, or instinct. Any attempt to analyse human activity using such a deterministic model would be severely limited. It does not allow people to think for themselves, be unique, or make decisions independent of external influences, such as peer pressure or scientific consensus. William James draws parallels between "a universe of actualities" and "a universe of possibilities" in *The Will to Believe* to suggest how the philosophical discourse is entangled in the web of these competing forces that shape human thought and perspective on life. This is a way of putting it, comparing determinacy and indeterminacy. When Calvin brought up the subject of free will vs. predestination, it was an age-old argument (Chaffee, 2015).

We make good decisions in our day-to-day lives because we have plenty of options and live our lives to the fullest, believing that we enjoy them. If that is the case, then existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and others push us to consider the fact that every moment of our existence is a crazy struggle against the forces that are causing us to live a ludicrous life. The existentialist thinkers' metaphysical suffering stems from the reality that, if we look closely enough, we are not offered a choice in our lived experience but are instead compelled to live according to what fate has decreed for us. In this ridiculous human existence, we have no choice but to keep going. Assume that this existential philosophical conundrum has Albert Camus seeing the worst in humanity. When asked about this, Sartre takes a more optimistic tack, saying, "Man is nothing but what he makes of himself" (quoted in (Chaffee, 2015, p. 194). To make sense of the ludicrous circumstances in which he is destined to exist, James and other existentialist philosophers force a contemporary man to delve deeper than his immediate surroundings and perceive an underlying plan (Van Inwagen, 1995). Industrialised city life magnifies this modern man's misery.

So, many authors all around the globe discuss the philosophical problems and spiritual suffering of contemporary man. Instead of asking if one's life choices are free or limited, one should ask how to manage these options to make human existence meaningful. Some may think that the limitations of choice have made life's game too difficult. On the other hand, others could



argue that since people can not control their fate, it is preferable to live in the now, appreciate the relationships we have built, and not waste time moping about hypothetical "possibilities" but instead seize the day.

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