

## **FREE WILL: UNDEFINED AND UNBELIEVED**

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By  
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First, I want to thank the Philosophical Club for giving me this opportunity to subject some of my ideas to critical examination. These are the ideas that have formed the basis of my life and the basis upon which I have evaluated people and situations over the past sixty years. Let us not even begin to think what might happen if my philosophy of life is shown to be wrong. I shall have to go back and redo the whole thing all over again. Saints forbid!

At this point I can speak of thoughts of sixty years ago as the historical bases of my concepts. The reasons that I had serious thoughts about 'causality and human behavior' at the age of 12 or 13 were primarily two- fold.

1. I stuttered or stammered for the first forty years of my life. My speech gradually improved with age but was a significant problem up to the age of 44.
2. My father had a degree in pharmacy from the University of Buffalo and when I was 12 went back to school at Western Reserve University to obtain a degree with a major in psychology. It was then that I heard of Freud and Jung and ideas of human behavior.

I was reading about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table going on a 'Quest for the Holy Grail' and I rather formally, to myself, set upon a quest to find out 'what makes people do what they do'; why do people do different things; why don't they all do the same thing. One idea that I pursued was to consider 'choices' for action at a given instant to be like a balance or scale with many pans onto which ~'weights would be put. The weights were previous experiences related to each particular 'choice' with the expectations of positive experiences at this instant weighing heavier than negative ones. The choice with the heaviest weight would be the one that was done and all other 'choices' became virtual choices because they did not occur. I realized that the expectations of the result of a particular choice depended on the past experiences with that choice. I further concluded that it was inconceivable to expect anyone to act in any way which was unrelated to their past experiences.

From this came the view of the 'mind' as a near infinite filing cabinet with certain major headings fixed by instinct, such as, fear of falling, fear of a loud noise, sucking instinct, eye bat, maybe, swimming, etc. Maybe there are 100, or 1000, whatever number are fixed as the major headings. Every experience, whether liminal or sub-liminal placed into long-term memory must be recorded with respect to experiences already there. Thus, there is tremendous branching and sub-headings. Then there is a mechanism, like a secretary, that cross-indexes experiences placing a certain experience under other related headings. This cross-indexing is surely related to dreams and leads to creativity since new ideas ar~ always combinations of old ideas.

Out of the above came the First Axiom of Human Behavior, namely, **EVERYTHING YOU DO SIMPLY DEPENDS UPON WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOU BEFORE.**

Since axioms in geometry have corollaries, the first corollary says,  
Everything you do, seems to you at that instant to be THE thing to do.

The second corollary says that you could never expect anyone to do other than they did for that would be like viewing a movie a second time and expecting it to be different from the first. In other words, human behavior is a single-valued function at every instant in time.

Immediately, words such as Good, Evil, Sin, Guilt, etc. became inappropriate as descriptions of human behavior. All of this lead me to consider 'generic' Man to be the Innocent Victim of Forces Beyond His Recognition, Knowledge, Understanding or Control.

Now comes my disclaimer. On the basis of all that is above, I was never able to read philosophers, such as, Kant, Hegle, for I knew that philosophers believe in 'free-will' and are concerned with good, evil etc. This puts me in the embarrassing position of not being able to compare my attitudes or philosophy with that of the commonly accepted authorities in the field. Nevertheless to respond to the title of my talk, I shall discuss Free-will and Determinism.

I shall begin first with definitions. My summary of definitions from several dictionaries concludes that 'free' is defined as lacking constraints, restraints and encumbrances, 'will' is defined as intent, aim, proposal, demand, purpose. According to these definitions, 'free will' immediately would seem to be an oxymoron, a sort of implicit self-negation. Many definitions of 'free will' merely used it in a sentence, such as, 'he acted upon his 'free will'. The one which seemed most explicit to me was, 'action without antecedent'. While the definition may be considered to be concise and clear, it nevertheless borders on the realm of impossibility. To me the concept of 'action without antecedent' is as incomprehensible as the question, 'what happens when the irresistible force meets the immovable object?' It is on these bases that I consider 'free will' to be a subjective illusion.

Another common definition of 'free will' states that it is the opposite of 'determinism'. 'Determinism' considers our thoughts and actions to be the result of our previous experiences and to be determined or dictated by our previous experiences. Unlike 'predestination' which carries the connotation that our thoughts and actions could be written in advance somewhere, the concept of 'determinism' should encompass the totality of events that have occurred prior to a given instant and the knowledge of how each previous event mayor may not affect our decision or 'choice' at that instant. Events may include even the Heisenberg indeterminacy of the position and momentum of sub-atomic particles, chaos theory, along with cosmic rays hitting certain brain cells. Thus, in a way, determinism is a sort of extension of predestination, but because, a new- born baby will have a near infinitude of experiences within the first year, if predestination implies a written description, it is not a practical description of human behavior. However, this leaves us with such an infinitude of factors that determinism would seem to be so unwieldy as to be useless. Nevertheless, these two opposing concepts require totally different opinions and totally different attitudes towards human behavior. It is our attitude towards human behavior that forms the bases of our institutions, namely, economic, legal and spiritual. It is for this reason that an investigation and understanding of 'free will' and 'determinism' may be considered our most basic and most important endeavor.

I propose that no one really believes in 'free will ' as the motivation for behavior. I submit that when someone has done some act, the first question is, "What happened?" The next question is always, "Why did he/she do that?" The mere fact that this second question is asked indicates that the questioner expects an answer that shows a causal relation to the 'act'. Further I have never heard the second question to be answered, "He/she did it because of his 'free will'. Even, "I don't know" is preferred; this also implies a causal relation to some previous experience that is not known to the respondent.

Let us view the societal implications of all of this.

First, a society should define its purpose so that actions can be judged as 'good or bad' or better as 'desirable or undesirable'. For example, in a head-hunter society, if you don't hunt heads, your behavior would be classified as undesirable.

In our society the goal should be something like 'the inhabitation of the Earth by reasonably large numbers of these animals called people in as much peace and happiness as possible'. Now we have a standard to judge actions as desirable or undesirable. People committing desirable acts should be rewarded in some manner. Those committing undesirable acts must be stopped, i.e. dogs that bite people must be restrained, but more importantly the person committing undesirable acts must be studied to determine, if possible, what factors occurred in his past that made him consider this undesirable act to be the thing to do at that instant, so as to attempt to prevent those factors from occurring to others. The most fundamental comment that may be made about any action is, "There is a person who has had a past that made him think 'that was the thing to do."

Finally I would like to point out that according to psychology, many of the most important experiences, particularly the unpleasant or traumatic ones are repressed since it is too painful to remember them, yet these are frequently the most important factors determining our behavior. Since we cannot remember these experiences, we can not understand why we do certain things and thus we may think of 'free-will'. However, I consider free-will to be A Subjective Illusion.

I have prepared the following small activity for us.

I wanted to formulate an equation of Human Behavior. What I obtained was a graph which I want you to duplicate. The abscissa (x-axis) is in years starting at zero. The ordinate (y-axis) is the fraction of life added per year'. The first year is taken as 1; the year from one to two (at the year 2) is one-half your total life up to that point; the year from two to three is one-third; from three to four is one-fourth, etc. Connecting the points gives a graph which explains,

1. Why time appears to go by more rapidly as you get older. This because each year is a smaller fraction of your total and thus seems shorter.
2. If you equate the area under the curve, to learning or experience, then it explains why it is so hard to teach an old dog new tricks.. If the dog learns one thing from 0 to 3, then you would have to teach the opposite until the area under the curve from 3 on equaled that from 0 to 3 if this were the only factor involved. Of course there are many other factors.