

THE ILLUSION OF CHOICE

By

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For Gideon; a better brother... never lived.

As beings with sufficient reason and intellect to doubt, we may be inclined to doubt love, destiny maybe even God. But to the majority of us nothing can ever sway the one belief, even when heavy storms shifts and drags us in varied directions... our belief in free will. The self evident idea that every decision we make, was made without any external influences; that our choice is our own, that we may have avoided this hurling storm if we wished. This perhaps, is what justifies our correctional system for if it was otherwise, a man raping two women and shooting their dog... would in no way be considered a felony, if the man had no choice.

But before I delve into these deep thoughts, let me explain what free will is considered to be. It came as an astonishing surprise when I realized that the term free has more than 200 senses in itself. But what I call free will is not something that begs to be defined. We all have an intuitive idea of what it means.

Free will is simply a matter of having genuine options and opportunities for action, and being able to choose between them according to what one wants or thinks best. Another man might say "The will of man in his power to choose between alternatives". No matter how elegant or technical, one may wish to express his thoughts. Free will or the

lack of it is a part of us, just like our lungs, legs and two eyes.

One thing which all humans, of all races and origins strive for, one thing they have given their lives for - is not the sense of sight, or smell or touch; but the blissful sense of freedom. Did they all know that freedom comes in different degrees and forms: freedom of the flesh, freedom of human dignity... the freedom of the mind? Man has, and continues still, to eradicate all forms of freedom oppressors. These oppressors that hinder him to be free. But one freedom still lingers, a shadow in the dark, an illusion on our eye; the freedom of will.

Did we have to attain the freedom of will or is it a different type of freedom? A kind we didn't have to bleed or sob for? A kind of freedom which was furnished to us. It is in times like these when I recall my father's words "Forever be healthily vigilant to that which comes with relative ease" he would always say.

But what fascinates me most is that free will is not all we believe in. We also believe in a cosmic plan that exists in the intertwined strings of nature. When our loved ones depart before we wish, when we still need them and cherish them. The advice which comes out of every ones mouth is "There is nothing we could have done, it was meant to be" or "It was God's plan". The one minute we convince

ourselves we can control the future and that our destiny is in our hands. But the very next moment we acquire comfort by depriving ourselves of choice. Still the truth can only be one... do we have choice, or are we like a doll... fabricated to smile?

Existing hand in hand with free will is determinism, some define determinism as the view that the history of the universe is fixed: everything that happens is necessitated by what has already gone before, in such a way that nothing can happen otherwise than it does.

Man is an admirable kind of being, just hush and observe... you shall see. He is the ruler of all things but also prey and slave to all things. We wish to have control... but at the same time we wish to be controlled, we wish to believe that "it was meant to happen" and at other times say, "Hard work, the right decisions... here I am, I made it happen". One might think it is a matter of avoiding responsibility, or to give a sense of comfort.

The truth is much more complex than that, it has to do with two competing theories... battling in our minds. That our lives are determined (the lack of free will) or are undetermined, unplanned. This intangible battle rarely has a victor or a dark horse... so our mind settles somewhere in between, believing in free will in some

cases and determinism in others. Of course there are some among us, perhaps those much wiser or more evolved who stand firm on one end of the pole, as the rest of us find ourselves confused in the middle.

The idea of freedom of choice (free will) cannot be put on the same sentence with determinism, without the two battling each other on the page. They are opposites, opposites never agree. Exist yes, but never agree... they cannot both describe the same reality that we live in.

To some, this might seem an unanswerable question. But perhaps the text which follows might illuminate this question. Freedom is a matter of not being physically or psychologically forced or compelled to do what one does. But are we free to choose? If not it deems every other type of freedom useless.

I think all can agree that we cannot have the freedom to change our future, while at the same time believe something already controls our future. Do we have free will? If yes, this man who raped two women and shot their dog. Deserves to be put in chains, and his crime cannot be justifiable. But again, can circumstance justify action - good or bad? If the man had no free will, it would mean he had no choice... no will to choose freely. Then we

just have to let him go and hope he never keeps a pet.

A friend once asked me, "If God has a plan for all of us, he must know the future... but if he already knows the future (that you going to shoot dogs). Why would he punish you for it?" This question came from a deep place of thought, he was right, if God knew every sin I'd ever make... why would he later want to send me to hell for that which he knew I would do. I did not want to think of the converse - that just like us, he is blind to the seeds of the future.

But let's leave God out of this, do we have free will or are we living in a world that gives us the illusion of free will. "If I did not have free will I would know" you might try to convince yourself. In the 17th century Isaac Newton postulated that for every action, there should be an equal but opposite reaction. The law that for something to happen - it should have been caused by another thing happening. But again you may say, "Our decisions are different, they are not affected by anything." Since our decisions, our choices are so elite and extraordinary that they defy the laws of physics, right? Our decisions are spontaneous, they have no effect.

But people can look at you with eyes of dismay, even revulsion if you told them we have no ability to choose. Because the

idea of free will is all we have, all we can hold on too, but are we holding on to an illusory dream, a thing you can wake up from? And think "It was so real." This idea makes us work harder to change and brighten our future. This idea makes us learn so we never repeat our past. This idea tells us we are the master of our own soul the captain of our own future.

Bill is 34, and he just got fired today, he loved his job. So he felt like dying when he heard the news, he really felt like dying. His boss told him he didn't have a choice, "lying bastard!" Bill thought "Of course he did. He could not have fired me". But as Bill sat there wet from that morning rain, those words repeated in his ear "I didn't have a choice". We all have a choice, "I had a choice to wear this stupid jersey" as he pinched it outward. He started retracing his steps, from morning till now, but when Bill thought about the exact moment he decided to wear the 'stupid jersey'. He realized something peculiar, it was cold outside, almost freezing... he could have chose to wear a golf T-shirt and look cool, while everybody else was stuffy... but he was never cool, normally he was the one who was always stuffy. And besides he could not live with two weeks of a bad cold, a cold that has made a mockery of him since childhood. "I still had a choice, to wear this particular jersey" he now said with an unsure voice.

But again he realized that two of his jerseys were dirty and the other was at the dry cleaner's - this was the only clean one. The more he thought about it the less and less were any of his choices really his. The more they seemed tampered somehow, skewed somehow. He was soaking wet, "this was my decision" he persisted to say. "I chose to go into the rain." But again Bill loved his job. It was the only thing that gave his life value, a sense of belonging. At least he could be around people at work. He thought of that first step to step from the warmth and shelter of his apartment to the cold rain. Bill has never been late, it was a badge of honor... and he could not have disgraced his badge by missing work due to a little rain. Besides he loved the rain... his best memory was clothed by rain, that first kiss in the soft rain... and even softer lips in the rain. Subconsciously he hoped the rain would make him relive that memory. As Bill sat there having an epiphany, he realized that his will to choose freely was tampered somehow, tampered by unforeseen forces.

Our current situation, genetic inheritance, upbringing, historical situation, encounters, past failures' and/or victories etc. affects our character, personality, preferences, and most of all our mode of thought. There exists a three stage process where the

externals we cannot control,
involuntarily change our mode of thought...
which in turn affects our choices.

Every decision we think we make, every
free thought we think in our brains is
affected by other things, past or
present. A choice you make, whether you
buy or you don't buy depends on that
advert you saw... that problem it would
solve, that nice service you received.
The universe we live in affects the
choices we make.

I compare this to a sick man with sick
thoughts, playing a sick game with a
sheep. He would blot out the path to go
north with blazing fire, same with west
and east. Leaving only south to go, the
sick man does not know the future... he
just knows that although there are four
directions, 'four choices' only one of
them is most likely to be taken? Imagine
if the sheep was you, what path would you
take? Did you really have a choice?

This is how life is designed, at each
point of a life decision... all other
choices become rather blurry and
fictitious choices, put there to conceal
the truth that there was only one choice
from the very beginning. The undeniable
truth is that life presents us with
choices and expects a singular choice.
While at the same time having an idea of
the choice you are most probable to take.

The analytic or scientific man might say, "I am not convinced, these are just theories, and besides something without free will is deterministic - can be determined before hand." The brightest might even add "If we had no free will, then in theory you could calculate, what a person's decision will be before it even happens". The answer is "yes, since this is not magic... but science; you can," think of a significant moment of decision, like continue to read or do something else, every possible choice we can make... is associated with a certain percentage to it: let me call it the 'percentage of choice'.

5% might be inclined towards making a cup of coffee, 85% towards reading on; this is interesting stuff, while 10% eagerly wishes to go watch Kim Kardashian. These percentages will differ from one person to another, depending on your 'life history'. So if I know your life history, I will know that you will choose the choice with the greatest amount of percentage associated with it (in this case, to read on) - the most probable choice. This percentage of choice, unlike ones fingerprint is not something we are born with, but something that gets accumulated with ones advancement in age. A person's percentage of choice changes as you learn, grow, discover... this book, is at this moment affecting how you think, and hence your percentage of

choice. "Probabilities? The scientist might add... that does not prove anything" but he who says should not forget that our most fundamental theory of quantum mechanics is probabilistic in nature.

This 'law of human causality' has gone by with different names and different forms... the religious called it God, the romantics called it destiny. What ever you call it, there is a sense of controlled or guided future that exists, which controls who we end up with or the fortunes which depart or enter our lives.

A friend once asked me "I don't know what to do... there are just so many choices" rambling on in the hopes that I will advice him... "It does not matter" I told him, "out of all the possible choices you can make, only one of them is real, the others are illusions put there to distract you... and to make you believe you have a choice." he stared "The one choice which based on the history of your life, you are most probable to choose... is the one that is real.". That stare assured me that I had just overloaded his mind.

Depending on where you were born, who you grew up with... who you met or who you didn't meet your percentage of choice differs, it is a unique element; a fingerprint of your future. A thing which if known to extreme certainty, your future could be discerned.

What we think, where we live... who we love. Depends on the universe at large. "Who I love?" someone else can again protest. Well your idea of beauty, humor, charm all depends on what you already know. When you meet someone new, you love the old things that you already know from this new person. He had that tattoo, you always wished you had but never had the courage to get. That smell your father had when you would run to him and feel a sense of happiness... that gorgeous look the media throws at your face, and besides, you were in need of someone at the time. He had the largest percentage associated with him, when he came with dazzling eyes and a sexy French accent. Your percentage of choice might have looked something like. 3% go home and watch a chick flick, 10% hope something better will come along and 87% embrace and never let go.

An wise homeless man you meet today, who changes your life might cause you to make a decision to build a shelter one day. So from the most important of decisions to the most trivial ones, something affected that, to make you think this... to make you choose that. Your choices were and are being tampered with.

Still what is this thing, if it be God; I develop a sense of respect for this con he has pulled. I could even go as far as calling it the single most greatest con... because this way although he gives you

choice, he still retains control by knowing what you will do.

I can state the law of human causality more concisely and say, because of what happened at A, if B happens you will be inclined to choose C. Because I had failed, and my father taught me of honor and that the shame of defeat is worse than death... I will take my own life. It does not have to be a single event... but rather a series of small and subtle events accumulating to affect your decision.

Here is Tom the bank is about to repossess his house. His three daughters, after losing their mother are now faced with losing their home. 20 million up for grabs, the lotto poster says. And remembering how Suzy went on and on about how she won a few bucks. The few pennies left in his pocket, which he picked up in the street before, seem to be sufficient. The first 6 numbers that come to Tom's mind are the birthday of his three daughters, 24-13-31. "This is for you" Tom says, as he casts his bet... a few tears swelling up. A week later Tom wins... was it luck? Or a sequence of events that made him make the decision to bet? Influencing his free will; for the better or for the worst. Although these stories I say are not the full story, they reflect the law of human causality. That because of what happened at A, if B happens you will chose C.

Who am I? A question I once dared to ask myself. I am every book "I chose" to read, every conversation "I chose" to engage, every lover "I chose" to love. But if our choices are not our own, and we chose much less than we thought we did. Then the question, who am I? Receives the answer, I am what events chose for me to be.

Like Darwin's theory of natural selection. The theory of human causality is not an event... but the accumulation of many different events that influence your belief, your type of thinking... which at the 'time of choice' influences your decision. An observer at the 'time of choice' cannot possibly comprehend the millions and countless millions of events that led to you saying no, hell no. He simply cannot. But neither can you.

What does all this mean? It means everything you ever did, was affected by everything that was done to you. Your output depended on your input. Every fire that burnt you, every stranger that helped you and every lover that hurt you, affected the fire you put out, the stranger you later assisted... that love you closed your heart to.

The law of human causality, contrary to the name, is not limited to human beings... this law affects everything which has the ability to make a decision. Let me propose an experiment, say we have a

robot call him RBT101, he is a waiter in the near future, now whenever a familiar customer enters the door, he can either chose to go say hi or walk away. The designer of this simple program would normally let RBT101 say hi or walk away at random... thus make choices at random. But if the law of human causality was added to this program RBT101 might find in memory that the gentleman was very nice, and that he left him a good tip the other day, (although RBT101 did not know what to do with a tip). Thus he makes the choice, to go say hi. Until this human element is added into RBT101's program... he will always be an expensive toy who can never resemble the complexity of a human being.

I have always found it amusing to look at a circus animal - a wild creature tamed to be humorous or entertaining. If on one part of the world is a circus Lion, that has never seen the thorny bushes of the jungle and whose best friend is an old monkey who speaks sign language and a young boy with braces who feeds him regularly. And on the other part of the world a might Lion, a protector of its heard... with its sole purpose to rip flesh from bone. When these two lions are presented with a choice, either to harm a human being or otherwise, due to their different percentage of choice when it comes to kill, a percentage that was affected by their inputs. They will react

differently, you might even, to some extent, predict the choices they will make.

Although each individual being has a different 'fingerprint of choice', if we were to look at the human race as a whole and tabulate the data, a bell shaped graph would emerge. And three cases would be discerned, the first case is the average being or those that fall, in the range of 68% with respect to the mean of the graph (which is why most of us will make similar choices, go to school for example) then 68% - 95% (these are a bit more radical, but still acceptable, the following might bunk school a few times) and finally the extreme cases between (95 and 100)% (these guys are too radical that they quit school at the 1st grade).

What this means, is that, some neighborhoods or races or countries, on the average, will have a different fingerprint of choice than others... although this does not mean that within this divisions there are no extreme cases that may defy the odds, based on their personal influences, thus they can make a different future for themselves.

We all have a choice, my teacher once told me. There were once two identical twin brothers, orphaned by a young age... faced the same abuse, horror and woe throughout their lives, same home, same school... same face. But at the end the

other became a Doctor and the other wasted away among petty thieves and random drugs. "Choice" my teacher said; this is what separated the two men. We were all convinced by this sad story that our fate is our own, and we made more effort in our school proceedings... but the story is flawed, yes, it takes into account the "substantial" factors such as school and environment. But fails to take into account the small and subtle events that shape us and the times in which they shape us. We are not just a product of pivotal proceedings, but also of those laughs and cries, victories and defeats, rains and rainbows. It is this that affected their percentage of choice... this which truly shaped their future.

Sometimes, how one thing affects another's decision might be as complex as the universe itself. Three things can affect each other, so that the third thing can influence you. The idea of shaping our own future is comforting and soothing... giving us control of our lives, dominion over the future. But we are all intertwined, by the all embracing law of human causality.

Imagine a complex mouse maze, specifically created to offer the mouse one specific path (a single choice), but disguising this choice by other paths, that are deceptive and phony. The experimenter knows that the mouse will not take them. Choice was given, but not

the choice the mouse had hoped... but the illusory choice it failed to see.

Question, knowing what we know... knowing the law of human causality, can we change the future? Is there anyway we can cheat this law, and coincidentally affect or change our future? Yes, but it would be a dire task... although not as dire as changing ones evolutionary path.

Meet Lucy, due to this and that, here and now... the ever present law of human causality, she works at night. And due to the roughness of her job with strange men, she wakes up at a hospital, Lucy has amnesia, all her percentage of choice that she has accumulated - reset. She can start afresh, at least relatively so.

Because the percentage of choice is not a fixed constant but a changing variable, we can change who we are; our modes of thought. But the only way man can change anything is if he first conquers himself - the beast within. If you can know before hand which negative choices you are going to take before it happens. You can work on changing your percentage of choice towards a much more positive choice, thus tricking the subconscious an agent which ultimately controls our behavior and decision, how to react.

The topic of free will is mostly debated because of its mutual reference to moral responsibility. Are we responsible for our actions? This could range from: your

lips are dry, you could choose not to apply anything on them and leave them dry and rusted, but because your boyfriend is coming, you want to look presentable. So you liberate your lips from a dry world to a much smoother world. We can easily discern which choice was viable and which one was not. But if you use this same type of reasoning, to the evil deeds that some of us commit, can we say... he had no choice? He had to kill all those people.

Since there exists an element of control over the percentage of choice, then we cannot be morally responsible, in the absolute, and at the same time be morally irresponsible, in the absolute.

At the beginning, I told a story of Eric... a man who raped and killed two women... then shot their ugly dog. Let me explain what happened before. Eric was protestor for human rights at the wrong time, and in a very wrong country. Many years he was locked up in solitary confinement many, many years. 10 years went away but he still remained in that small dark cell, the only thing that kept him company was a picture of a woman on the wall. A picture he drew with his own blood, the picture kept him sane... the picture gave him hope. To mark the end of the year, hungry dogs would enter his cell and violate his human dignity. He yearned for freedom and more than that, he yearned for the soft sight of a woman, her smell... her breath. By the 15th year he

was released... and as he was walking, he came across a lonesome house, in the empty outback's, where two women lived... this is where we first met Eric, judged him and misunderstand his percentage of choice. Eric wants to be with these two lovely doves in every way a man could wish to be with a woman. But when the deed was done, when he could finally breathe... he remembers, he can not go back to that hell they called a cell, no ways. So he kills them both... their dog approaches angrily in the hopes of saving its masters. But all he sees is 15 years of abuse by the flesh by canines. So he shoots the dog in its ugly face. But this is not his full story, until you can feel what he felt, see what he had seen... think what he had thought, you cannot comprehend and understand his choice by one quick stare.

Does this make what he did right? Of course not, but knowing the law of human causality... we could have at the very least predicted his future behavior, his dreadful (but perhaps necessary) choices.

The law of human causality informs us that our choices do not belong to us; they are not entities which we can claim ownership of. That every decision is governed not just by time (the present and the past), the varied beings we meet. But by everything in existence, directly or without direct... influences our decision, at that crucial moment of

decision. That because of what happened at A, if B occurs... you will chose C.

Imagine all this as if it were a maze, it tricks you by giving you many varied choices... while at the same time knowing which is the right path. But the universe never makes us take a wrong turn, cause it gives us the light in the past so that we can see the future.

Everyday life presents us with choices, tricking us into thinking there are many choices... but because of your fingerprint of choice - who you truly are, your choice, just like you has always been unique. Learn to separate illusion from real... and understand why that choice was real.