

The Absence of Free Will: 7 Distasteful Implications

The irony in the free will debate is the seeming choice that its participants make to be included. And therein lies the first distasteful implication of the possibility that humans do not have free will: the choice we witness is a lie.

Free will debate participants, like any activity, are not really choosing to participate. They just are, as a matter of course, of cause and effect. Some previous cause created the natural effect of their debating free will. They had no choice in the matter. They simply did what was previously caused for them to do, like clockwork, but more complex. So what is the point in debating? There isn't one. And therein lies the second distasteful implication of the possibility that humans do not have free will: the choice to change your mind based on the results of debate is a lie.

In fact, the act of changing one's mind is not a choice at all. It's an effect of prior causes. That's it. So then, when you "choose" to think differently about something, you really didn't. It just happened, no thanks to you. Likewise, when you "choose" to save someone drowning, you really didn't. It just happened. And therein lies the third distasteful implication of the possibility that humans do not have free will: the choice to be a hero or to act virtuously is a lie.

People who don't have free will don't *do good*. They don't have virtue, they aren't compassionate, they aren't brave, and they can't become heroes. Is it heroic or brave or compassionate or virtuous for a lightning strike to splinter a branch, which dangles into a stream and diverts the baby Moses away from the waterfall and onto the shore? Of course not. Nor is this sort of thing, which happens in a more complex sort of way using human bodies, any more virtuous, *et al*, than was the branch, or the tree, or the lightning strike, or the rain clouds. And therein lies the fourth distasteful implication of the possibility that humans do not have free will: the choice to hurt other people or take their stuff is a lie.

People who don't have free will don't *do bad*. They aren't vicious, they aren't nefarious, they aren't criminal. Likewise the scenario above, but instead of diverting to shore, baby Moses was already heading to shore, and instead the branch diverted him to the waterfall, where he plunged to his death. Was the branch "bad"? No. Nor can we rationally consider any person criminal or nefarious or vicious for the "choices" they make that affect others in terrible ways. And therein lies the fifth distasteful implication of the possibility that humans do not have free will: our every experience is a lie.

Just consider this possibility for a moment. Everything you do gives every indication that you are in control. Your entire experience as a living being is filled with moments of seeming decision-making. Some decisions are more automatic than others, yes, but some

decisions can be incredibly difficult, nearly impossible, to make. The struggle is real and is felt. Major effort is often given to accomplish our chosen ends. We engage in the struggle because everything about it screams to us that we are in control.

Accidents happen. Our sphere of control is quite limited. And we can't simply make our bodies do whatever we want them to do. There are physical limitations to the choices we make. But for everything else, our entire sense of self is founded on the belief that we choose what we do with ourselves day in and day out. And therein lies the sixth distasteful implication of the possibility that humans do not have free will: disbelieving free will requires that each of us betray our sense of self, because it's just a lie.

Here's the paradox: if we have free will, then we choose whether or not we believe we have free will; if we do not have free will, then we do not choose whether or not we believe we have free will, so for those who believe they do, they can't help it. They will either be caused to change their belief in free will, or they won't. Others will either murder other people, like clockwork, or they won't. And therein lies the seventh distasteful implication of the possibility that humans do not have free will: there are no such thing as "people", nor "intelligence", merely complex automatons doing whatever "good" or "evil" thing they are programmed, by nature (ultimately) to do.

These seven implications send shivers down my spine.