

The Illusion of Free Will

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Organic material phenomena evolve under the assumption that they have free will. They search and hunt for sustenance which they consume to supply their energy needs. Their perceptual abilities serve this search function, and they control their movements to facilitate success. In humans, cognitive functions allow them to communicate, plan and coordinate their efforts. They regard themselves as being in independent control. Humans have become the most successful species on Earth, and we definitely assume we have free will.

Maybe, but maybe a lot less than we assume. Time to explore.

Let's start with the fact that our physical cosmos is enormous – a vast integrated system of planets, solar systems, galaxies, clusters, even multiverses. And as vast as this material system is, it is only just over 4% of reality. About 96% of reality is one kind of energy or another plus the true outlier – dark matter. So, the eight or so billion of us humans on tiny planet Earth amount to virtually nothing in the grand material domain and absolutely nothing in the 96% Big Picture. Humans individually – beyond nothingness! And, every one cell organism and Blue Whale shares this condition with us.

So, what does this “unfortunate” situation have to do with free will?

While we humans amount to “nothing” materially, we participate in everything because all of reality is one vast totally connected and integrated system. Even our material world is one thing with all solids and liquids connected by material gases – even very thin gases in space. There is no material vacuum and no true separation/independence among material things. In addition, energy is everywhere all the time in the form of waves connected and integrated as fields. Our cells have fields; our bodies are composed of progressive layers of integrated fields that participate in how our material bodies form and operate; our planet has a field, etc. There is no energy vacuum, and matter and energy are themselves totally integrated. Reality is ONE “Thing.” And we are included and participate – if at an infinitesimal level. In the grand sense, we are everything and everything is us. That is some consolation for our material predicament of being seemingly nothing.

So, in a completely unified reality, if nothing is separate or independent there can be no independent cause and consequent effect. We could say everything just vibrates together as one, and change is the result of vibration over time at

every scale. Free will is the illusion that the changes we perceive with our senses are the consequence of one independent thing interacting independently with another independent thing. But in fact those things are fundamentally connected however far apart they may be or how different in size or “nature” they may seem to be. The vibration of one participates in the vibration of the other however infinitesimally small the degree of that participation may be. Experiments in quantum mechanics demonstrate this fact conclusively.

So, how do we evolve with virtually all other material species devoted to the assumption of free will? The answer lies in 1) the extraordinarily limited nature of our senses upon which our minds depend and 2) the grand scale of the singular reality system. If our senses were acute to all material and energetic input from reality, we would not make the mistake, but we would also be so overwhelmed cognitively we would be incapable of virtually anything except nominal vibration itself. So, we have evolved committed to this basic error, and we survive and propagate to the tune of its key assumption of independence.

How do we get away with it?

Systems as vast as our cosmos are so large that they have a great deal of flexibility. Indeed the flexibility is so enormous that it does not shift significantly from its stable mode until something impacts at a system level. At every scale, each individual action is “felt,” but significant effects are not seen until smaller actions accumulate or a really large event occurs. As long as our actions remain within the limits of system flexibility, we can achieve pretty much what we want without “observable” effects. But we mistake the appearance of no consequence for our actions for no effect. And we mostly get away with it – until we multiply these actions beyond overall subsystem flexibility. Of course, the ecologically disastrous effect of human caused climate change is the premier example of our collective impacts over time being able to threaten the very survival of global complex society.

Free will is a fundamental mistake that has been incorporated as a guiding principle in human evolution and confirmed in all cultural worldviews because it supports biological survival and the limits of its assumptions are rarely exposed in a huge, surrounding, flexible planetary/solar/galactic system. We vibrate as One while we mostly act as the independent Many – with free will. And, up until recent history, we have gotten away with it. Free will has led unchallenged our very successful species evolution until the introduction of nuclear weapons and the global scale, long-term use of fossil fuels. Now we know there are system limits that require our respect because our only real option is to vibrate as One. Respect evokes responsibility and responsibility requires increased cooperation with one another as well as a symbiotic relationship with our supporting ecology.