

13 Free Will

The question of free will is not settled, it is confusing on its own, and nearly all discussions of free will add to the confusion by promoting agendas. I cannot straighten out ideas of selves and free will here but I might say enough so you don't fall prey to any added confusion, including what I add. Horses, apple trees, cardboard boxes, computers, running, TV shows, a song, scientific method, and many things are qualitatively distinct things for practical purposes. Likewise, the self is enough of a thing, in the sense of those things, so we can treat it as a qualitatively distinct thing. Free will is not as clear-cut as the other things. Free will is more like pretending, telling a story, and evaluating a movie. That does not mean free will is not real but it does mean free will is more open to confusion and argument.

Selves.

Please see Chapter Three on evolution and the previous chapter on selves. Qualitatively distinct things do not have to be absolutely distinct from the rest of the world. It is hard to draw a line between justice and mercy but that does not mean there is no justice and no mercy. It is hard to draw a line between love for friends, love for spouse, and romantic love, but that does not mean there are not distinct flavors of love. It is hard to draw a line between non-living things versus living things but that does not mean there are no living things. It is hard to draw a line between non-selves versus selves but that does not mean there are no selves.

A rock does not have a self. A worm likely does not have a self. A bird might have a self, especially a smart bird like a crow. A deer might have a self. Wolves, monkeys, some cats, and some dogs likely have selves. Chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans likely have selves although not as developed as a human self. Normal common people do not expect a sharp line between non-selves versus selves, and normal people expect selfhood to come in degrees.

We expect evolved selves to have the following evolved abilities. We grant selfhood to a thing to the extent the thing has more of these qualities and-or shows them to a greater degree.

-Recognizes that other beings come both as discrete beings, as individuals, and as types. There are both individual beings, and there are also plants, roses, badgers, chimpanzees, mothers, chess players, and thinkers.

-Recognizes that other individual beings have needs, goals, attitudes, emotions, etc.

-Recognizes that some other individual beings have intentions, and that intentions go along with needs, etc.

-Recognizes that the needs, intentions, etc. of other individuated beings often go along with the type of that being, but sometimes the expression of the needs, etc. is particular to that being. Almost all robins

like to eat worms; some robins prefer worms to bugs while other robins prefer bugs to worms; some particular robin might prefer chocolate chip cookies.

-Recognizes that some individual beings might have completely individual tastes.

-Recognizes that other individual beings differentiate themselves from their environment. They have a sense of "me" and "not me".

-Recognizes that other individual beings with intentions differentiate themselves from other individual beings with intentions. They have a sense of "me" and "those guys".

-Recognizes that it's self is an individuated being with intentions, similar to other such individuated beings with intentions. "I have a sense of myself apart from other things".

-Recognizes that it is like other sentient beings and they are like it. "I am like one of those guys who act with intent and self-knowledge. Those guys who act like that are like me".

-Recognizes that some other individuated beings with intentions recognize it as such too. "Some of those guys who act with sentience see me that way too".

-Expects to enter into relations, or deny relations, with other individuated beings on the basis of the intentions, needs, etc. of other individuated beings with intentions. "I can be friends with some of those guys who act sentient".

-Sentient beings often come in groups. I feel a part of a group with some other sentient beings, and might feel distinct from other groups. Evolved selves have a sense of "us" and "them".

-Evolved selves have a sense of the generalized other, that is, has a sense of the feelings, ideals, rules, actions, expectations, and attitudes typical of us.

-Evolved selves have a sense of morality, and appreciate art.

-Evolved selves have a sense of empathy.

-Many of these items imply free will, such as intentions, but do not absolutely require it.

Situational Free Will.

I do not know of any good analysis of the will in Darwinism, other science, philosophy, or theology. I did not look hard in philosophy or theology. Some Hindu and Buddhist treatises are specifically on the self and the will but I am not familiar enough with such work to comment.

Just as normal people do not expect a sharp line between selves versus non-selves, and allow degrees of selfhood, so also normal people do not expect a self to have totally free will in all arenas, and do allow a self to have varying degrees of free will in various arenas. Selves could only evolve with some limits on

their free will. A self need not have totally free will. Not having totally free will does not disqualify a being from being a self. A being with totally free will likely would not be a self as we know it, and certainly could not have evolved. The fact that freed will comes in degrees according to arenas does not undermine free will. We have enough free will to do most jobs that need doing. If the human self did not have some free will, we would have to pretend it did, as we do now sometimes. I think we have enough free will to sustain the justice system. I doubt enough people have enough free will, and are astute enough, to make modern democracy work.

While I believe people do have a lot of free will, I also believe in the reductionist scientific research program that seems to undermine all free will and might undermine the common sense idea of a self. I cannot reconcile these points of view at this time. I hope future thinkers make progress on these issues.

Ideas of the Will.

“The will” is not one idea. The list below shows various ideas that go into the idea of the will. It is easy to add items, or to reduce by seeing some items in terms of others, but I urge you not to do either quickly. I cannot describe the will without using metaphors, and I don’t want too. I cannot explain here why the fact that I need to use metaphors is important but I do wish to point it out. American English allows overlap between “will”, “want”, “wish”, and “need”. I do not try to impose a system on the language.

1. Strength and Power. “Will power”. The ability to resist torture. The ability to carry through something once begun. The ability to endure. The desire to endure. The ability to control bodily functions and other mental functions. “I will stop coughing”. “I won’t think about her anymore”.
2. Desire. “What is your will, sire?” “Your will is my desire”.
3. Choice. “I will have the eggs over easy”. “Do you want top or bottom?”
4. Creativity. “I will come up with a solution”. “I can see the idea taking shape”. “He willed the project into being.”
5. Denial and Refusal. “I will not”. It is easy to think of this category as a choice between this situation versus not-this-situation but it is not the same. This category represents rejection of this situation whether my rejection puts me into another situation or not.
6. Determination. “I want that job, and I will do anything it takes to get it”. “As a people, we must be free, and we will fight to the last man-or-woman to get freedom, if that is what it takes”. “I don’t care what happens to me, I have to see my work into the world”.
7. Existential Superiority. This point might be a variation of point one. When two beings have a contest of wills, the one that wins is the better, more powerful being, or superior being. The better of two beings is supposed to win a contest of wills. Parents should win a contest of wills with their children, although of course they don’t always. In the “Narnia” series, C.S. Lewis says the battle between the Ice Queen and Aslan the Lion was always a contest of wills at bottom. Aslan, the force of Goodness, wins. The revolt of the Devil against God was a revolt of Pride, that is, a revolt of the will. Good is supposed to win the

contest of wills, that is, to have the stronger will, even when evil is physically stronger. In most mythology, when evil wins the contest of wills, something is seriously wrong.

Despite the fact that the other categories cannot be reduced to the idea of choice, because of how the ideas of strategy and free will have been developed in biology and in current American pop culture, for present needs, it is useful to focus on the idea of will as a choice.

More on Situational Free Will.

Maybe some teenagers and Existentialists dream of being great warriors and being able to withstand any torture for any length of time, but that is not true of any normal person, and it is not what armies expect of soldiers. No normal person can resist torture for longer than a few days. Some people can withstand torture until they die, if they die in a few days. But, if torturers can avoid killing, eventually everybody breaks. In “The Maltese Falcon” by Dashiell Hammett, the hero, Sam Spade, is trapped in a room over night with enemies, and he has important information that they want. Spade makes it clear that, if they torture him, he will force them to kill him soon. So they leave him alone. Ascetics endure great hardship – amounting to torture – in pursuit of truth. The Buddha denied such methods are effective, and instead advocated a middle path of restraint and cultivation. The law recognizes coercion, knows that coercion sometimes cannot be withstood, and defines cases that qualify as coercion. If a thinker demands that the will be able to withstand anything in order to be free, then we do not have true free will. But I do not think course that is reasonable.

We are walking across a street when we can see that a car is not going to stop for the red light, and will hit us. So we jump out of the way rather than stand on our rights as a pedestrian. This does not mean we do not have free will.

Every personal relation involves negotiations and involves giving up some things. The movies and TV make fun of people who refuse to give up anything to sustain a relationship. The fact that we have to make compromises in relations does mean we do not have perfect freedom of will but does not mean we have no freedom of will at all. If your “significant other” loves vegetarian lasagna, then you learn to eat vegetarian lasagna. If your autocratic boss likes a cigar after lunch, you might have to learn to put up with cigar smoke on the restaurant terrace.

You are driving along through town when suddenly you are struck with the desire for a soda. You stop at the local convenience store, only to find it does not have your favorite flavor of organic Swedish raspberry sweetened with Cuban natural brown sugar. To get that, you would have to drive another half-hour to a specialty store. You don’t feel like making the drive today, so you buy a cherry coke here instead. This compromise does not mean you do not have free will.

The cat will not eat dry food every night. We have to give the cat wet food at least two nights a week, or we feel guilty when the cat goes hungry. The cat has more sense than we do. This does not mean the cat has free will and we do not. It does not mean the cat has a greater will than we do or that the cat is morally and existentially superior. Parents go through the same battle with children over vegetables. Parents do not win every case. Little Suzy gets ice cream despite some leftover broccoli. Parents have to pick which issues to turn into a contest of wills.

Picking Apart Sam's Free Will.

(1) When we give in to torture, we do not assent or consent. Choice is consenting. We can “hang” the idea of freedom of the will on this difference, and, to some extent, American law does this. A woman's consent is the difference between having sex versus rape. We use consent as a marker of free will. We use it even in situations where do not expect perfect freedom of the will.

(2) Modern biological argument about free will hinges on seeing that behavior conforms to a system that is governed by a rationale. The rationale is evolutionary success. The system can be any of our abilities such as looking for food or looking for a mate. We act to serve evolutionary success. Thus there is no free will at all; free will is only an illusion.

The modern biological argument is the latest (and best) version of a general argument about conforming to a system with a rationale. Any explanation of human behavior that shows how we conform to a system with a rationale can be used to undermine free will; the system does not have to be natural selection with evolutionary success as the goal. If we can explain behavior in strategic terms, or if we can find a system in which the behavior makes sense, then we can say have completely accounted for the behavior without invoking free will or consent. You will see what that means in the examples below.

In modern biology, the argument about conforming to a system with a rationale has considerable power because of natural selection. Organisms (people) who do not conform to the system (natural selection) and seek its goal (evolutionary success) are eliminated. Only people who do conform to the system with its goal live and propagate. The people who do live and propagate must have something “inside them” that gets them to conform to the system and to aim at its goal. Because of the mechanisms inside us, we have no free will.

The following examples work through these ideas. The examples use varying degrees of freedom in different arenas to show that absolute ideas of free will or no-free-will do not work very well, and do not accord with common sense. The examples show how the common sense idea of varying free will in varying arenas is enough for most purposes, and goes along with the common sense idea of the self.

Sam goes to a garage sale, where he sees two bicycles priced the same. One bike originally came from the local huge chain department store and is of modest quality while the other bike is from a small maker in the Pacific Northwest with high-quality parts and a great design. Leaving aside moral considerations as to whether the seller will be cheated, Sam naturally decides to get the high-quality bike. Buying the other bike would be stupid. Has Sam acted freely? Sam would not buy without his consent. Sam acted to get the best buy; Sam acted according to financial wisdom, which is a system of thought outside of him; Sam acted strategically; Sam acted according to the rules of economic so as to maximize the value for his money, and to maximize his utility. Did financial wisdom compel Sam? In a way, it did. Sam's behavior is predictable according to the rules of economic logic. If financial wisdom did, in a way, compel Sam, can we say he is not free? Contrary to any ideology about free will, there is no easy answer, and freedom of the will comes in degrees. I think Sam did act freely. Most people would agree but would not want to waste time arguing about it. A biologist might reasonably disagree with me. An economist would

not care as long as Sam is predictable. In arguing for Sam's free will, I would use the idea of his consent, but I am not sure his freedom of will has to hinge on that alone.

Sam has \$200 to spend at the grocery store. He allocates the money to get the most satisfaction for his money (technically, he allocates the money to get the greatest utility from each marginal penny). Sam buys 5 pounds of hamburger, two loaves of whole grain bread, a bag of cherries, a variety of melons, carrots, milk, yogurt, and lots of breakfast cereal. Did Sam act freely? Did Sam's desire for the greatest satisfaction for the money somehow constrain him to act according to a system, a rationale, and so take away his freedom? Most non-biologists would say he acted freely. Now suppose Sam is diabetic, and he chose his food so as to control his blood sugar and so as to alleviate the symptoms of diabetes. Did Sam act freely? Sam acted with less freedom of the will but he still had considerable freedom within the limits of his budget and his disease to act freely. He could have chosen more whole grain pasta and less whole grain bread with the same result on his disease.

Sam has only \$20 and has to feed his whole family of five. Sam has to choose carefully what food yields the best nutrition and fullest bellies. Same has less freedom, maybe, in reality, little freedom at all. He is constrained by a system and a rationale. But we still think he acted freely. Largely we think he acts freely because he consents.

Sam now has \$200 again, but this time Sam refuses to choose any food colored white, such as white flour, white bread, pastries made with white flour, white rice, etc. He is free in his other food choices. Sam refuses to buy food colored white because he thinks refined food is bad for us, and white is a good criterion for refined food. I still think Sam mostly has free will, although some people will think Sam has given up a portion of his free will to a food fad. If you agree with Sam, likely you think he still has as much free will as ever, given the issues raised above about operating efficiently. Set aside whether you agree with Sam. Now Sam operates under not only the constraint of efficiency but also under the constraint of a system with a rationale. If you think that one erodes free will while the other does not, what is the basis for the difference? If you believe both erode free will, does operating under the constraint of any system with a rationale erode free will? If we always operate under the constraint of some system with a rationale, then we cannot have free will.

Now Sam refuses to buy food that is colored reddish, such as apples, carrots, some peppers, and even some lettuce. Sam is acting under a compulsion, yet still a system, for which there is a clear consistent rationale. Sam consents to his choices in this system. In this case, some people would say Sam is not free, even the people who previously said Sam was free when he chose not to buy white food. Consent alone is not quite enough to make for free will. The kind of system-with-constraint seems to matter in whether we say that we have free will. The effect of the system on consent seems to matter. There are no clear criteria for resolving these issues. A biologist would say Sam is not free in any of these cases because Sam acts under a system with a rationale.

This situation annoys philosophers and theologians. Sam can spend \$20 out of his \$200 in donations to the local food bank. Sam knows this is absolutely the right thing to do. There is no question. So Sam gets the food, and gives it to the food bank. Morality compels. Morality is among the most compelling of systems, with its own obvious rationales (good, greater good, rules, etc.) even if people do not completely agree on the rationales. Does Sam act freely when he acts morally? Yes, Sam could have chosen not to

act morally, and many people do choose not to act morally; but, when Sam feels the call of morality, and follows it, does Sam act freely? Maybe people who have a less keen sense of morality have a freer will - that opinion is in line with Romanticism and modern moral ambiguity. Keep in mind that we evolved a sense of morality, and usually following morality helps us to evolutionary success. There is no definitive answer. Again, a biologist would say "no". The answer has implications for what we consider a self, for the justice system, and for religion.

This situation annoys romantics. Sam falls in love. According to the prevailing romantic myth, Sam has no choice in the matter. Love chooses us, we do not choose love. When Sam falls in love, does Sam have free will? Is love like torture? If Sam has no choice in this matter, then why does Sam have free will in other situations in which he acts toward a rationale?

In fact, biologists can show that Sam is very likely to fall in love with particular kinds of people. If Sam is a boy, then Sam will fall in love with a girl who is likely to bear healthy children, and to rear the healthy children to their own evolutionary success. Sam and the girl are similar in socio-economic status, race, religion, intelligence, school record, and job history. Similarity in these factors, and others, contributes to evolutionary success. Large differences in these factors hurt evolutionary success. In that case, it is not that love chooses Sam; it is evolutionary success that chooses Sam. This is the general argument from biology. Sam operates under a system that guides his actions toward a rationale. Sam has little, or no, freedom of choice. Within the category of acceptable mates, Sam might choose Sally or Sue, but, in the words of a blues song, "there aint much difference between the two". If the difference is enough to Sam and Sally feel as if they have free will and are free selves, then fine; but that is only a convenient illusion that helps the drive to evolutionary success.

Recall the flight-and-fight response once again. When faced with a coyote, Rocky Raccoon fights about 60% of the time. When faced with the same coyote Timmy Raccoon fights about 40% of the time. They have to do one or the other, but they don't have to do one particular one, and they don't have to do it in any particular ratio. It seems as if there might be a system (that is questionable) but no obvious rationale. Does the variation mean that Rocky and Timmy have free will? Not necessarily. Natural selection will choose which one lives most of the time, and goes on to have children that act more like him. With many Rockies and Timmys to choose from, natural selection can choose the most effective ratio of flight to fight. We need not specify an exact brain mechanism, and we need not conduct extensive investigations to prove this is so, although biologists have in other cases. There is a system and a rationale, and Rocky and Timmy operate closely under its direction.

So, what looks like free will in the case of Sam falling in love or Sam choosing groceries might not be so free. Natural selection (system) gets rid of all the Sams who do not choose groceries most efficiently so as to maximize evolutionary success (rationale) whether or not, right now, we can specify a mechanism in their brains that leads to the right choices. There is no need to evoke free will; evoking free will does not help explain; evoking free leads to confusion; so there is no free will. Consent is irrelevant as long as Sam follows a system with a rationale. Consent might help Sam to maintain the illusion of his self-hood, to fool himself, better fool others, and so act more effectively. This conclusion too is the position of the modern deterministic biologist, and this is where deterministic biology, deterministic chemistry, and deterministic physics meet.

I do not have a rejoinder yet I continue to believe in enough free will in the common sense way. I only point to the instances above where we allowed Sam some degree of free will, and used consent and choices as criteria.

Interlude: Biology is Not the Real Problem; Physics Is.

Modern biologists have shown clearly that people act along the lines of evolutionary success, as, for example, by picking suitable sex partners, marriage partners, friends, allies, jobs, living situations, etc. We act and think according to what would have worked in our evolutionary past, and what still largely works today. That constraint makes it seem as if we have no free will. In fact, though, biology allows a lot of leeway in the implementation of strategies, and it allows a large scope for learning, especially among people. Think of it like this: biology directs us to choose from among a category, so in that sense we are not free; but within the category we have a lot of scope for choice, so in that sense we are free. We don't make friends with violent thugs but we still do have a lot of choice in who we actually pick as friends, and we learn a lot about what kind of people make good friends for us as individuals. That leeway is enough room to squeeze in enough free will to satisfy most of my needs. The fact that we are biologically constrained not to befriend a violent thug but instead we are biologically constrained to make friends among a thousand other people from our culture, socio-economic class, and interests, is enough to satisfy my needs for free will. The fact that we are biologically constrained to marry within our set but can still choose from among hundreds of potential spouses in our set is enough to satisfy my needs for free will. The fact that the cat is designed to eat meat instead of vegetables but prefers salmon over stew beef is enough to satisfy my idea of free will in cats. In the future, there will be argument over how large this window really is, but, for now, it is enough for me.

The real problem is the underlying determinism of physics and chemistry. Suppose not choosing Sam the violent killer as a friend is explicable directly in terms of biology but choosing five particular people among a hundred other much nicer possibilities for a friend is not explicable directly in terms of biology. Still, when I make up my mind, I also make up my brain. My brain chemistry is at work, and so is the physics of my brain chemistry. Change happens in my brain physics when I decide to hang out with Bill instead of Bob. That change in brain physics is determined by natural laws. Even within the category, we do not choose as we think we do. That seems incompatible with free will. Our brains are determined by physics, and so are our wills; so we have no free will, and we are not selves in the sense that I want. I cannot resolve this issue in a way that definitely leaves room for common sense free will and the common sense self.

It might seem as if there are two levels (physics and biology) each with its own kind of determinism, and that there is more possibility for free will at the "higher" level (biology); but really there is only one level with one kind of determinism and no free will. Biology is part of physics, and the determination of physics applies to biology as well. Apparent differences are only due to convenience in thinking, and apparent free will is only an illusion arising from convenience in thinking. If choosing Bill instead of Bob is a matter of brain physics, then so is not choosing Sam (biological level). If choosing Mary as a spouse is a matter of brain physics, then so is choosing among women who are in our age, cultural, religious, and economic categories (biological level). Biology could be rendered in terms of physics if biologists were thorough enough. So determination at the level of biology is only another aspect of determination at the level of physics. It is all determinate and it is all determination of the same kind.

This idea is likely true but not very useful. It is just too hard to turn all of biology into physics. It is easier to think in terms of the “higher” level of genes, individuals, strategies, reproduction, natural selection, types, and outcomes, just as it is easier to think in terms of a higher-level computer languages such as Pascal, Java, or Perl than to think in terms of “1” and “0”. That is what biologist do. The convenience of thinking at a “higher” level than physics, such as biology, opens the door to confusion. When we argue at a “higher” level, we seem to leave open a window for free will. It appears as if we have some freedom. But this conclusion is not necessarily so. It only seems so because scientists have not reduced biology to physics in a way that makes it easy to do biology. This idea has become a dogma in modern science. In this situation, all I can do is to re-assert I think we are free enough, and self enough, despite the apparent determinism.

Some thinkers, in particular anthropologists, have argued the opposite way, for a separation of levels, and so that higher levels dominate lower levels. The determination of physics-and-chemistry does not apply at the level of biology, the determination of biology does not apply to mind, and the determination of mind does not apply to culture-and-society. Each level has its own laws, which the laws of lower levels cannot explain. The laws of any upper level dominate the laws of any lower level. This argument is a mistake. There is no good reason why the laws of a lower level should not apply to a higher level, and many good strong reasons why they should. There is no good reason each level has its own laws that automatically supersede the laws of lower levels. Culture has to obey mind, mind has to obey biology, and biology has to obey physics. Often it is convenient to think in terms appropriate to each level without worrying about relations to other levels, as biology does with physics, but that is not the same as believing each higher level is independent of all lower levels. Despite some good intentions, on the whole, the argument for the power of higher levels is an attempt to escape science, and should be fought. Moreover, the autonomy of higher levels usually leads to no free will at all. When culture-and-society dominates biology, it leaves no room for free will.

Biologists and other thinkers sometimes mix up the determinism that is clear in biology (avoiding the violent thug, or marrying a nice person of the same kind) with the determinism of physics (every act is a matter of brain physics). In their own minds, thinkers likely make the distinction, but they do not convey it well in their writing, and so sometimes they confuse people. When you read about free will or culture, figure out what level the thinkers are writing about, the kind of determinism that might apply at that level, and the relation of determinism at that level to the basic level of physics. Because, so far, not everything has been reduced to the laws of physics, if you think you see some freedom at higher levels, you are free to choose to go on believing it.

Absolutely Godfrey.

We have now cut off Sam’s free will. It might help to put the situation in perspective if first we look at the opposite person, a being with absolute free will. Then we can reverse the process by starting with a Sam who has little free will and gradually giving Sam more free will.

The name “Godfrey” comes from the movie “My Man Godfrey”. Godfrey has absolutely total free will. When most people think of absolute free will, they think it means a self can do whatever the self wishes without restraint and without regrets. If Godfrey wants to eat ice cream until he pukes, he can. If he

wishes to get up early everyday to do schoolwork, hold down a job, and go to church twice a week, he can. In fact, having absolutely total free will means more than this. The results are not always what we expect. The results are more like the absolute skeptic than like a really good guy with a lot of stamina.

Godfrey can withstand any torture, if he wants. Godfrey can also tell the torturers whatever he wants, if that is what he wants. Godfrey can be moral if that is what he wants, or immoral. Godfrey is not subject to any system or any rationale. If Godfrey were subject to any system or any rationale, Godfrey would not have absolutely free will. Because Godfrey need not follow any system, we cannot tell what Godfrey is doing or why, unless he feels like telling us. Godfrey need not have any reason. He need only will to do it. In fact, if Godfrey does have a reason, and he feels as if the reason compels him, then he is does not have absolutely free will. If Godfrey walks around the street shooting puppies, he does not have to tell us why, and he does not have to have a reason. If he does have a reason, he need not follow the reason for any longer than he wills to follow the reason. Suppose we have heard there is an outbreak of rabies, and we think that is the reason why Godfrey is shooting puppies. But it might not be the reason, and we need never find out.

Godfrey is not a self as we think of a self. Godfrey is more like a demon or a strange God than any self we could possibly be comfortable with. Godfrey could never have evolved. If Godfrey can create worlds through his will, I am not sure I would like to be part of those worlds. I am not sure I would like to live in a world with Godfrey.

When we think of a being with a lot of free will, we do not think of Godfrey. We think of a being that can engage in common activities to the extent that he-she wishes, and of a being that has the characters listed above. We understand that working within an activity restrains the free will of the being but we do not hold that very much against the free will of the being. Arthur is such a free being. Arthur works hard to promote morality. Arthur wants friendship and love to work, and works hard to make them work. Arthur understands the modern economy, and works hard to make that succeed. Arthur has learned to have patience with people who do not understand as much as he does. When Arthur gets ill, he endures the pain and discomfort. He does not complain, and he does not cause discomfort to his friends and loved ones. Arthur certainly works under systems with rationales but we do not think of him as less free.

For an attempt to merge Godfrey and Arthur, and for many interesting comments on the will, see the work of Arthur Schopenhauer, especially "The World as Will and as Representation" and some of his essays. Schopenhauer mistakenly thinks a being with absolute free will would will a world much like what we see, but he makes a lot of interesting points along the way.

Rocky Raccoon: Variability, Consent, and Freedom.

It helps to work upward from simple cases of free will to more complicated cases, this time to see if we can sustain (bolster) freedom of the will rather than pick it apart. I do not argue for absolute freedom of the will but for a limited kind of freedom that some people will not consider freedom of the will at all. This limited free will is based on the fact that much variation is normal in nature, and that natural selection does not always restrict our behavior. Natural selection leaves a window within which variation shows, and within which we can be limited-but-practically free even if not metaphysically free. The first ten items

in the list below try to find some “wobble room” for free will within the limits of a system with a rationale. The eleventh point asserts that “system with a rationale” is irrelevant. The twelfth is a bonus.

Rocky Raccoon fights 60% of the time against a coyote while Timmy fights 40% of the time, George fights 80%, and Frank fights 20% of the time. There is no intrinsic right and wrong here. There is only what works over time in natural selection, and how natural selection finds a way to get descendants of Rocky, Timmy, George, and Frank to react most effectively. We might expect that natural selection would eliminate all this variability so that, eventually, all raccoons would fight about 50% of the time, but this is not true. (Technical Note: The following is based on multi-person games with probabilistic strategies, and on results from decision rule theory.)

1. For reasons that are too hard to go into here, natural selection can sustain situations in which people vary in their abilities as with the raccoons. The population in general does not gravitate toward 50% but remains in a mixture with some individuals at 80, 60, 40, and 20 percent.
2. Rocky and the other raccoons really are not determined in particular cases, and so are not really determined at all even if, overall, there is a stable ratio in their alternatives. The fact that Rocky fights in 60% of cases means that we cannot predict for sure that Rocky will fight in any particular case. Rocky, and every other individual raccoon, has a lot of internal variability.
3. Internal individual variability comes, at least in part, because of population variability, and vice versa. Rocky is like a mix of George (80%) and Frank (20%). Timmy is like a mix of Rocky (60%) and Frank (20%). Because Rocky and the other raccoons fight in mixed proportions, the population stays mixed too; because the population stays mixed, Rocky and the other raccoons fight in mixed proportions.
4. Many abilities (traits) are like this, such as the search for a mate. They are the end result of some variability and mixture. Even simple things like eye color can be the result of mixed tendencies.
5. All organisms that might be selves have an incredible number of traits with an incredible mixing. By “incredible” I mean “incredible”. The number of possibilities in any normal human being is more than the number of atoms in star.
6. Rocky has to assess each particular coyote before fighting or fleeing. If Rocky and all raccoons could perfectly assess all coyotes, then Rocky, and all other raccoons, would not have a flight or fight response at all. They would not need one, and so would not have one. Rocky, and all other raccoons, would fight or flee according to the coyote. The fact that they act in some mixture means the situation with the coyote is fuzzy. There is probability in the flight or fight response, and in many traits, because there is some fuzziness in nearly all situations. When there is fuzziness, what we do is not a determined response to the particular situation but is a guess. A guess is like a choice, it is like an exercise of free will. The choice in each particular situation is like an exercise of free will in that particular situation even though there is an overall pattern to the choices over time. The fuzziness and guessing inherent in all situations interacts with the above factors to reinforce them.
7. Usually almost any choice is better than no choice. Rocky just has to get on with things, especially when faced with a coyote. The worst thing Rocky can do is just stand there. Even if flight might not be

better than fight in this case, both are worse than nothing, and so flight is better than nothing. Rocky has to choose even on the basis of poor information and uncertainty. Natural selection does reward making some choice over not making any choice, and so Rocky is part of a system with a rationale. But, in this case, natural selection does not reward either choice so much as any choice, and need not reward either choice strongly. Some choice is important, and it need not be any particular choice, as long as it is not a really stupid choice. So, Rocky has some leeway in how he acts within the system with a rationale.

8. This point is a variation on the idea that any choice is better than no choice. People face situations more complicated than “fight or flight”, such as whether to marry Sue, Mary, Jane, Sally, Tiffany, or any of a hundred other possibilities. Not choosing, or choosing very late, is worse than not choosing the one absolute best. So we choose the best that we find within a range within a time. We exert our will to make a choice of practical best when the absolute best is not obvious. Biologists have developed a system with a rationale that can explain many of the choices that organisms, including people, make under these conditions. So biologists argue that free choice plays no part. The system-with-rationale does not explain all choices, but I do not wish to base my idea of free will on discrepancies between the system with actual choices but rather on the fact that we choose under uncertainty. Even if we have a system to make choices under some uncertainty, we still make choices under uncertainty, and we still deal with uncertainty, and that is a kind of free will.

9. A biological reductionist also can explain away the following source of free will but I like it anyway. Often we have to judge people (and machines such as cars) not on the basis of obvious appearance or recent performance but on the basis of the quality that we think underlies mere chance. The ability to make this judgment is what makes a good sports scout. This distinction fuels battles between teenage girls and their parents over boyfriends. Financial market consultants make their reputations by pointing out the cases like this where they succeeded, and by overlooking the cases like this where they failed. The really good guy in a cowboy movie looks scruffy. If there were no signs at all of underlying quality, then there would be no basis to take a chance. If the signs alone were enough, then there would be no judgment, and people would not vary much in their ability to assess signs. Of course, natural selection picks people who consistently make the right judgments on the smallest of signs, so a biological reductionist can argue that free will and judgment play no part. I think enough uncertainty prevails, and the cases are important enough, so that we do make judgments “out of the blue”, that is, with free will.

10. All important systems-with-rationales are incomplete and inconsistent: morality, marriage, the law, medicine, sports, business, friendship, etc. The fact that natural selection controlled the evolution of a system-with-rationale does not mean that the system is complete and consistent. Biologists argue just the contrary; they argue that we are a pastiche of distinct ad hoc mechanisms. Anger is inconsistent within itself. Anger is inconsistent with affection. Emotions are inconsistent with social rules. Morality is not consistent; good often varies with the public good. These problems within and between systems cannot be straightened out, yet we have to act anyway. We have to choose. Often we must choose. Not all the choices that we make out of the misty borderlines are cases of free will but some probably are, and this misty land of indeterminacy is fertile ground for free will.

(Technical note: some thinkers refer to the fact that all systems, of the most important kind [Russell-Whitehead], must be incomplete, an idea that developed in the work of Kurt Godel. They argue that no systems are determinate, thus there is no single overarching system-with-rationale that governs human

action, and so there must be free will. That is not the point I am making here. That point does not need to be made here. That point deserves to be argued, but to do so here would only confuse issues. I am arguing that all evolved real systems that we do have, such as morality and emotions, are in fact incomplete and inconsistent, whether or not they have to be in theory.)

11. The standard explanation in Christian theology of the relation between goodness and free will is that we freely choose to act well. Goodness does not compel us to act well just because it is a system with a rationale. This explanation is not necessarily contrived mumbo-jumbo. Just because we go along with a system that has a rationale does not mean we do not freely choose to go along. We obey traffic laws even when we don't have to, partly out of habit, but partly out of free will. We decide to have sex or not. We decide to go along with a "wave" at a sporting event. We decide to go with our friends to a bar. We decide to join a flash mob. We decide to testify against a violent criminal even when we fear retaliation. Especially when a system-with-a-rationale is beneficial, as with traffic laws, it is hard to tell if a person goes along because of an inner compulsion to follow the system-with-a-beneficial-rationale or because of free will. Here biology invokes its argument that natural selection eliminates people who do not go along, rewards people who do go along, and there has to be some mechanism "inside us" that makes us go along, so there is no free will. We "choose" to act morally, because in our evolutionary past, acting well succeeded, and the mechanism that caused our ancestors to act well lives on inside us. The biologist disagrees with the theologian. There is no way to settle this argument.

12. People change, hopefully for the better, sometimes for the worse. One day Phoebe is a stockbroker. The next day she is a professional masseuse who sings "Smelly Cat" badly in the local bar. One day Barney wears all natural organic fiber clothes and tries to save the planet. The next day he wears tailored suits, works for Goliath Bank destroying the planet, and exploits women as much as he can. I hope we all "see the light" at least once in our lives, even if it is only a small light, and even if the light fades quickly. It is easy to rationalize changes in terms of a system with a rationale, and so to explain away free choice. Part of the fun in watching Phoebe and Barney is to see how they switched from one artificial system to another while search for satisfaction. To use the same explanation for both the before and after seems contrived and circular. Sometimes the easiest explanation is just the obvious common sense explanation that people do choose to change.

Probability, mixtures, guesses, huge numbers, systemic contradictions, making a choice even if it is not the one best choice, and changes, do not by themselves do not get around reductionism and they do not guarantee freedom of the will. But they all help. They leave space for free will.

When Rocky decides to fight in any particular case, he is not always sure beforehand (determined by a system with a rationale) and we are not sure. Rocky decides when the case comes up. The fact that, over many cases, Rocky fights 60% of the time does not determine that he will fight in this case. When Rocky fights, he feels as if he decided to fight, and that he consents to his decision. Not only does Rocky feel this way, but the other raccoons that see Rocky fight feel this way, and Rocky feels the assessment of the other raccoons about him. Whether he acted freely in any absolute sense is not as important as the fact that Rocky feels fairly free in his decisions about fighting, Rocky feels as if he can give consent or withhold it, and that the other raccoons feel the same way about Rocky and about themselves. That is the easiest way for an evolved self to handle this kind of issue.

Rocky does not exercise his freedom of the will generally and absolutely, like Godfrey. Rocky does so in kinds of situations, within limitations inherent in the situations, such as fighting, foraging, courting, and walking along having a good time. The situations are typical of raccoon evolved nature. The amount of free will that Rocky has in a particular situation depends on the situation. Rocky exercises various degrees of free will in various situations according to raccoon evolved free will. This is like Arthur, and this is how we think of Sam and other humans.

Back to Sam.

Sam likes the color blue more than the color orange. There are few consequences to his evolutionary success due to liking blue more than orange, and so we can say that Sam exercises free will in his choice. There might be some deep underlying genetic-brain-or-learning reason why Sam prefers blue to orange, but we need not care, and likely we will never find out. We can accept that Sam freely chooses blue, and that he consents to blue.

Sam likes bananas better than apples. Sam likes golf better than football. Sam likes films noir more than romantic comedies. Sam picks some of his friends on the basis of shared tastes. The same comments apply.

Sam will not fall in love with just anybody but he is not thereby limited to only a few best mates. Even in the category of “right” mates, Sam has thousands of candidates. Biology cannot determine the one single best mate for Sam. Sam has to choose. Sam has to choose somebody even if it is not the ideal perfect imaginable somebody because eventually time will run out, and some choice is better than no choice. Sam can even stray outside the box a little, as, for example, marrying a plumber or marrying a princess instead of marrying a young professional woman with a degree. When Sam chooses “the one” among the large range of possibilities, he feels as if he has chosen freely, and he feels as if he consents to his choice. Because there were many possibilities, he did choose. This might not be perfect freedom of the will but it is free enough.

Sam has to choose in the market to get the most for his money, but, even within that constraint, there are a lot of choices. I know it can seem as if the market is one dreary aisle after another but compared to most alternatives, there are a lot of choices. Sam has to choose within a time frame, even if he does not choose the absolute best item that he might possibly have found if he had time to check every item in this store and in all competing stores. Sam has to buy cereal, and he chooses to buy generic cornflakes at \$2 a box even though there is a slim possibility he might have gotten a better deal on generic raisin bran at another store. Within the need to use his money most effectively, Sam really does make choices, and really does consent to the choices that he makes. Sam makes choices with consent even if he makes pretty much the same choices over time, even if he acts within a system according to the rationale of the system, and even if he is somewhat constrained.

Back in 2002, when Apple introduced its line of small electronic consumer goods such as the iPod, Sam bought Apple stock even though, overall, the company had recently suffered losses. Sam held on to his stock through the series of iPhones and Tablets, and did very well. Sam congratulates himself on his judgment and his free will.

Sam has a small garden in his back yard. Sam and his wife dearly love their raspberries. Sam saw the small child of a poor family stealing raspberries from the garden, and stealing other food that was more for nutrition than for taste, such as tomatoes and corn. There is no absolute system-with-rationale to guide Sam here. Sam has to choose.

Sam likes to play folk tunes on the guitar. He plays them too fast, but he likes them that way.

As selves, we understand the situations and actions of other selves, at least somewhat. We assess the degree of free will according to situations. We are happy to see Sam as acting freely at the supermarket or in the mate market. We also know that, if somebody kidnapped Sam's daughter, that Sam would not have the same freedom of the will. We would not hold that against Sam, Sam's free will, or free will in general.

Enough Free Will, One.

Situational partial free will is consistent with evolved selves, or at least with the evolved delusion of free will. We expect people to assert free will when they can (or to assert the evolved delusion of free will), to assess how free they can be in particular situations, to evolve the ability to assess situations according to how much free will they can assert, and to assert it in those situations. We expect people to evolve not to assert free will when they likely cannot, and when they might be punished for trying. The biologically-based reductionist idea that people have no free will at all goes against the idea that people have of their selves. It goes against the evolved idea of a common sense self. That does not mean it is false – people delude themselves even on major issues – but it does set up an awkward issue in which people without free will usually defend their legal rights. It makes us think in terms of absolute free will versus no free will at all, and I think that dichotomy confuses the issue so that it is insoluble. It impedes correct Darwinian understanding both of free will and of the illusion of free will.

I don't want absolute free will for humans. I don't want us to be like Godfrey. I want varying degrees of free will in the activities that people normally engage in. I can't assess if we are totally determined at the subatomic level. Even if we are, I don't see how to get from that level of determinism to the kind of action and assessments that we have to do as evolved selves in the normal world. Free will remains a practical mystery. We have to assume free will until we can absolutely explain it away. Until we can show how a shift in a quantum state determines my preference for pomegranates, we have to assume some free will. We still have to act well for the sake of our loved ones, people in general, and for the sake of goodness. For our life, we can safely assume the degree of free will that we do assume.

I don't know if situational free will is enough to satisfy theologians or enough to refute reductionists, and I don't care. I care that it is enough so I can continue to feel like a self, and it is enough so we can carry on with the usual needs of life.

I think situational free will is enough free will so we can face God when we die. We have enough free will in cases of morality, empathy, and working hard to build a better world; and those are what count most with God.

I don't know if people in general have enough free will to make modern democracy succeed. Some of us do. Many of us do not. Many of us are too easily manipulated by selfishness, jealousy, political parties, media, peer pressure, fear, and advertising. I can think of ways to separate the likely competent citizens from the likely incompetent citizens but here is not the place to argue the issue. To argue this issue requires accepting that a lot of people just are not competent, and so it means eroding one of the ideals of modern democracy in order to make the rest of modern democracy succeed. It does not mean giving up the idea of situational free will or giving up the idea of personhood.

Situational free will is like the freedom to compose music or play music within a musical system-with-a-rationale such as the Western twelve-tone system with a tonic key ("key of B flat") or even without a tonic key. The composer-or-player cannot choose any note to follow any other note or to go along with any other note. The choices are quite restrictive, and the rules can be elaborate. Yet even within the system-with-a-rationale, there is tremendous freedom of will and creativity. If there were not, we could not have the almost infinite amount of music that we have. Within a restrictive system-with-a-rationale, Johann Bach and Thelonius Monk both can create. Other arts are similar. What adds much to the interest of any art, and gives any art much of its character, is not the absolute freedom of the artist, but the play between the limits of the medium and the striving of the artist's will within the medium. Telling a story is not just relating events. In the long run, mathematical intuitions have to be proven. That does not mean novelists and mathematicians are not free.

Enough Free Will, Two.

Suppose we are only a bundle of traits without any free will in the sense that ideally most of us hope for. Suppose we are ultimately deterministic, that is, we are ultimately machines. Not only that, we are self-deluded machines, and often self-contradictory machines, too. Even in this situation, I see a role for what I think of as free will.

Imagine we are a machine like this: Most choices, in most arenas can be made directly with rules, such as, for example, in the eating arena, to eat an apple but not eat a stone. Other choices in other arenas are made by first generating a set of possibilities, then evaluating the possibilities by the best rules that natural selection can provide. For example, when meeting a new person for the first time, first we have to think up possibilities for what to do, then evaluate them, and then do something. Inside us, we have a random possibility generator. We might have a distinct random possibility generator for various distinct arenas such as social events, foraging for food, mate hunting, etc. That is not relevant here, so imagine we have one general-purpose random possibility generator for any arena. The random possibility generator is not the same in all people. The random possibility generator likely is not really random but is governed by a set of rules, like the pseudo-random number generator in a computer. That also does not matter for here. The evaluation rules also vary between people. All this is like a composer plinking away at a piano until he-she finds a set of notes with promise, and then develops them. As far as I care, this situation is enough free will.

The fact that we are self-contradictory machines opens up a giant set of possibilities for spaces in which free will might operate. This issue is similar to the fact that all important interesting systems must be incomplete. The topic is too big to go into here.

Even as machines, we are complicated, variable, interesting, nearly-unique bundles. Despite that we might be machines, or maybe because of that, God is still interested in us and in how we turn out. Especially we might be interesting if we have various unique random possibility generators, various unique sets of possibility evaluators, and big holes opened up by self-contradiction. It is like the interest that a “motor head” shows in his-her cars and in how the owners drive them, or like the interest that a programmer has in his-her games and in how people play them. When we die, the ideas expressed through the physical shell still remain, just as the program still remains even though the computer is turned off, and just as the program still remains even though it is erased from this computer. As long as the idea of the program remains in the programmer’s head, the program remains. God will still evaluate us after we die. God will evaluate how his handiwork turned out. The illusion of free will is one of the abilities that he gave us. God will evaluate what we have done, and how we have used our illusion of free will. If, in the end, that is all it turns out to be, that is still enough selfhood and free will for me.

Robot Free Will.

This section restates a situation that computer scientists call the “Turing Test”, after the great computer scientist, Alan Turing, who first devised it. A human interacts with another being by means of computer terminal. The other being might be a human or a computer. If the human can’t tell the difference, then there is no difference. The computer is as much a person as the human.

Imagine a robot. The robot does not have to look like a human; it does not have to be an android; it can be like R2D2. The robot can solve all problems about as well as a human, can tell individual humans apart, can tell individual machines apart, has personal tastes, and can seemingly choose within limits. Within those limits, humans cannot tell what constrains the robot’s choices. For example, the robot might prefer to interact with cars rather than heavy equipment but, within the category of cars, the robot has idiosyncratic preferences such as for electric cars rather than fuel cell cars; and we can’t tell why. The robot has some contradictions. For friends, it prefers cars to heavy equipment, and prefers heavy equipment to standard computers, but prefers standard computers to cars. It likes early Impressionistic painting, such as Turner, to German Expressionism, and likes German Expressionism more than Gothic, but prefers Gothic to Impressionism. People can carry on a conversation with the robot for as long as either party wishes to carry on the conversation.

As far as I am concerned, even if the robot is entirely determined at the level of physics, the robot is a person, has some free will, and would be somewhat interesting to God. This is the quandary posed by the great movie “Blade Runner” and by more science fiction works than I can count.