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Book Review *Free Will* by Sam Harris  
Judeo-Christian Thought Across the Disciplines  
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Fall 2019

### Free Will Does Not Exist, at Least According to Sam Harris

Sam Harris does not believe in free will. In his book, *Free Will*, (Harris, 2012) Harris builds a case against the idea of free will. Harris first explains that just as we do not have control over our heart beating, we do not have control over our thoughts or future intentions. It all just happens. Harris believes that freedom is an illusion and this is evidenced by the scientific fact the brain decides what it will do before an action is made. As we do not know what is going to happen next, we are not in control. Therefore, there is no free will.

Harris states we cannot choose our thoughts anymore than we can choose what someone else will say next. Our thoughts merely emerge in our brain. It is an illusion to think we author our own thoughts and feelings. Harris attempts to bring science into the argument against free will by relying on brain scans of brain activity. According to Harris, in a brain scan, future thoughts and actions can be detected before they are thought or acted upon. Harris asserts we cannot be free because every single thing we do and think is decided before we are doing or thinking it. Where is the free will if it is predetermined? Not only do we not have control over these thoughts and actions, we had no intention of making the thoughts and actions. Harris explains, "How can we be "free" as conscious agents if everything that we consciously intend is caused by events in our brain that we *do not* intend and of which we are entirely unaware? We can't." (Harris, 2012, p. 25). Our thoughts simply appear.

Another bedrock of Harris's argument is the assertion that all of our decisions are not based on free will, but rather on a culmination of our lives so far. Harris opens the book with the

telling of a brutal murder/rape/kidnapping home invasion. He argues the murderer rapists had no free will, but committed the crimes because of who they are, their childhood events and prior experiences. If one of us were that person, cell for cell, we would also commit the crimes. This removes all sense of morality in one's decisions. The person had no choice but to commit the crimes. From this assertion, Harris concludes there is no reason to punish people for crimes. They could not control their actions. This results in more empathy and less hatred for people.

The hole in Harris's logic is that he bases his argument on the supposition that if we are not in complete control and do not know all of the factors that determine our thoughts and actions, we cannot experience free will. The fallacy is that there is no reason to base lack of free will on the fact we do not know all the factors that determine our thoughts and actions and that we may not be in complete control of our thoughts and actions. It is a bit of a chicken and egg. Did free will supply the thought and action to put in place the thought and action? Or did the thought and action occur without any prior thought and action.

Another tear in the fabric of Harris's views is the existence of a God. Harris, of course, is an atheist. If we believe an almighty God is in some way impacting our thoughts, actions and desires, then things do not just happen as Harris expounds. Harris's ideas make more sense if the reason things happen is *because* of God. Harris states that we have no control over our decisions, thoughts and actions. He argues this is all because of who we are, not because we consciously chose that decision, etc. However, what if everything happened because of God? Why isn't God the arbiter of free will instead of our past, our genes and our upbringing? Maybe we don't have free will, but the idea of God watching and protecting me to guide my decisions, thoughts and actions makes me feel happy, safe and loved.

Harris, S. (2012). *Free will* (1st Free Press trade pbk. ed.). New York: Free Press.