

# Why on Earth would anyone stop believing in Free Will?

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In my [previous article](#) I claim to hold the Hard Determinist position, and focus ***on the actual benefits and strengths*** of that position that I have so far realized – it is a collection of the “ah ha!”, reality-updating, epiphany moments that took me 10 years to realize after since adopting that viewpoint.

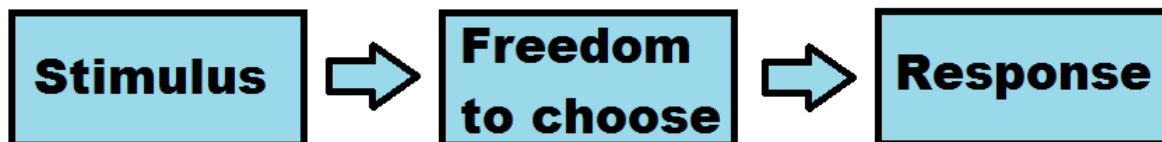
*This* article is dedicated to exploring the *subtle* shift in viewpoint that is required to go from Soft to Hard Determinism, as well as traps/pitfalls associated with the common notion of Free Will.

I admit **Subtlety** Is not the first thing that might come to mind when exploring the idea that there is no free will.

Please be assured, your reality is not under attack, only some terminology, and the change in perspective I am asking you to consider is regarding **only the smallest time scales we can imagine**.

## The common notion of Free Will

First let's agree on the common notion of Free Will, which is exemplified in the book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, where Franklin Covey states In [Habit #1 – Be proactive](#) that “we are free *because* we can make decisions”, and goes to draw the picture like below:



My issue with this approach is that it breaks causality. It assumes that ‘the stuff’ that happens inside the ‘freedom to choose box’ **is not** completely **determined** by outside stimuli. It also makes it seem like the Universe waits for us to make a decision and respond before reality resumes.

What's worse, is freedom to choose implies that even *if* given the exact same stimuli (truly hypothetical, because we can't travel back in time to ever get the exact same stimuli twice), "*I could have chosen (and done) otherwise.*" To point out *how ridiculous* that idea is, pretend for a moment you just gave a poor-performance speech: you forgot your lines, were nervous, didn't project and look at the audience, etc. **The next day you reflect on the speech – what are you more likely to think?**

A- "I could have done better (even without more preparation), but I just choose not to"

B- "I did not prepare well enough, which *caused me* to do poorly, so next time I need to rehearse more, get more sleep the night before, etc.."

If this example makes sense, and option A feels icky/strange– then I think we can agree on the overwhelming forces that guide our daily decisions, and that the issue is just the semantics of what we call free.

If you're still not convinced, see **Appendix A: problems with Free Will superseding causality.**

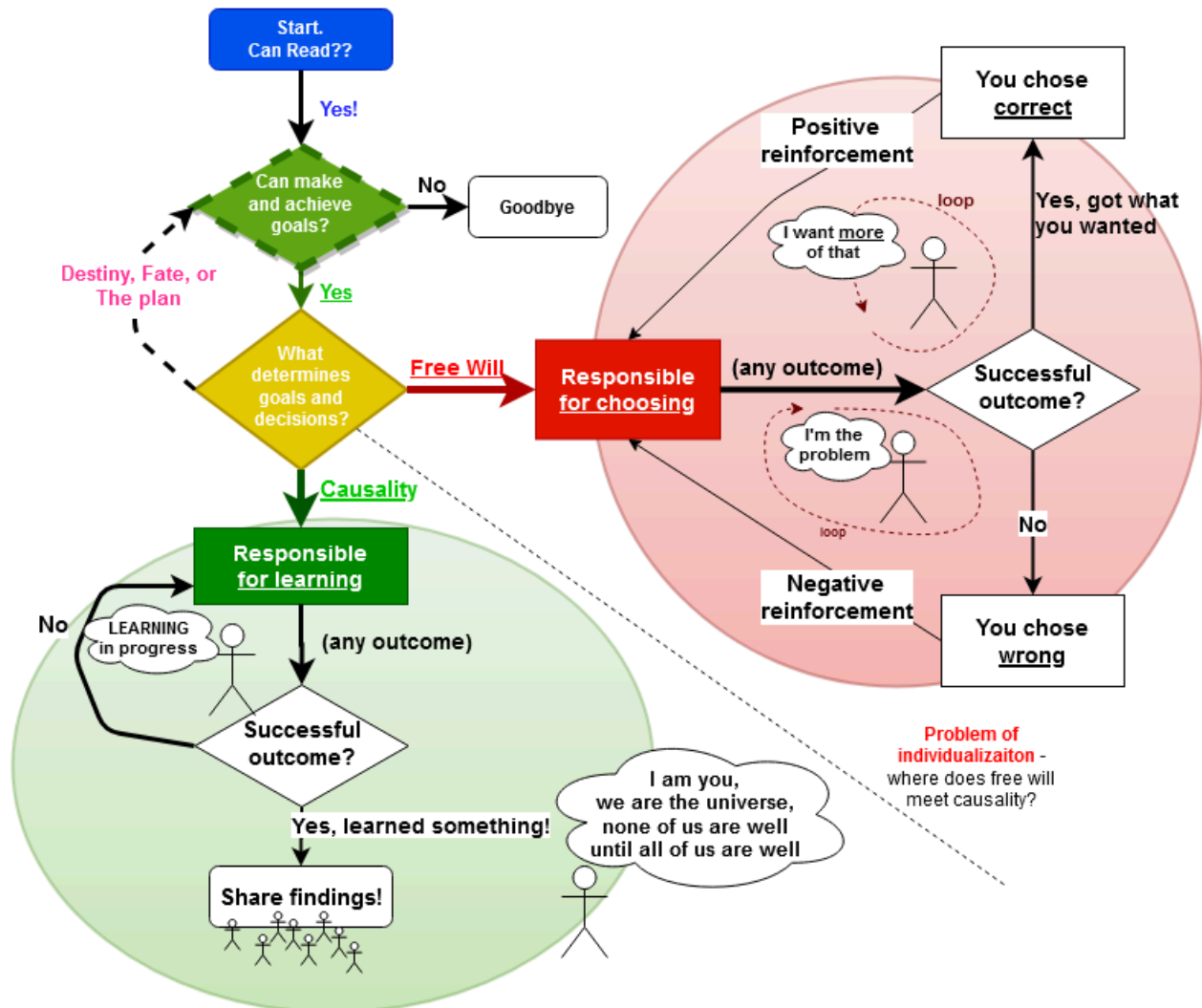
## The Solution of Hard Determinism

- 1) Stop insisting anything is free, we don't need free will to explain any event observed, or to see beauty, or have a meaningful life.
- 2) Call the experience of 'right now' **consciousness**, and *assume* it as deterministic, because every example we see of it appears deterministic.
- 3) We should appreciate (not be ashamed of) the fact that **we are aware of** the factors that determine our behavior, **so that we can learn from the past** to better guide our proactive efforts to change the future.

This might sound like a lot to take on, but it's a subtle distinction because both Soft and Hard determinists **agree** they **cannot change the past**, and they **agree** they **can proactively influence the future**. In other words, **we agree on the infinite past and the infinite future!** (give or take a few seconds, based when you think you free will takes over from reflexes/instinct)

**Let us celebrate our **consciousness and proactivity**. To all you free-willed ego-maniacs, I ask: Why is that not enough?**

## Ideas that **Unite** and **Divide**



The only difference is our perception of the time we call 'right now', and how much control we have over it.

- As a hard determinist, I accept *right now* is a physical process, I'm either prepared for it or I'm not; I either have the skills to succeed, or I don't (yet).
- For the soft determinist, there is a **notion of control over 'right now'** that gives 'will' a **final say** in actions made, regardless of the physical circumstances leading up to the event.

# Implications/misconceptions of Determinism

The deterministic view simplifies the picture a bit, because if consciousness is determined, it means there's not really 3 boxes in the picture, it's just 1 box, the Universe. It means if you looked 'under the hood' of conscious activity, you would see a complex network of interactions that together explain our actions, not too unlike what is presented in Disney's [Inside Out](#) movie.

The immediate utility of a non-broken causality is that when we ask the question "Why did so and so make response X?" we know we need only to **look at the causes** that lead up to that response.

However, the biggest hang up for people is the **sense of losing control** over the 'right now' moment.

For those people, consider that if I am correct for a second, while yes, your (old) sense of control is only illusory; acceptance of this fact grants a new sense of control; clarity to comprehend the whole system- to know there will always be a reason for every action, and to accept the unexpected. There becomes no situation you can't learn from.

Physicist [Sabine Hossenfelder](#) explains in [this article](#) that the following shifts in perspective may help you cope with life without free will:

1. **You never had free will**
2. Your story hasn't yet been told
3. Input matters
4. Understand yourself

It is common to presume that If the Universe is determined, then it is also **computable, or predictable** -- but is not!

The Universe, while determined, is vastly complex, and has uncertainty/randomness baked right in. For example, we have trouble predicting orbits with 3 or more LARGE bodies (the [3-body problem](#)) and trouble predicting how [water drips from a faucet](#). We also know we can't have perfect knowledge of even a single particle, thanks to the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. It is unclear how quantum buzz/randomness propagates up to the macro world that you and I live in, or that if what we consider random today might be explained by deterministic laws in the future.

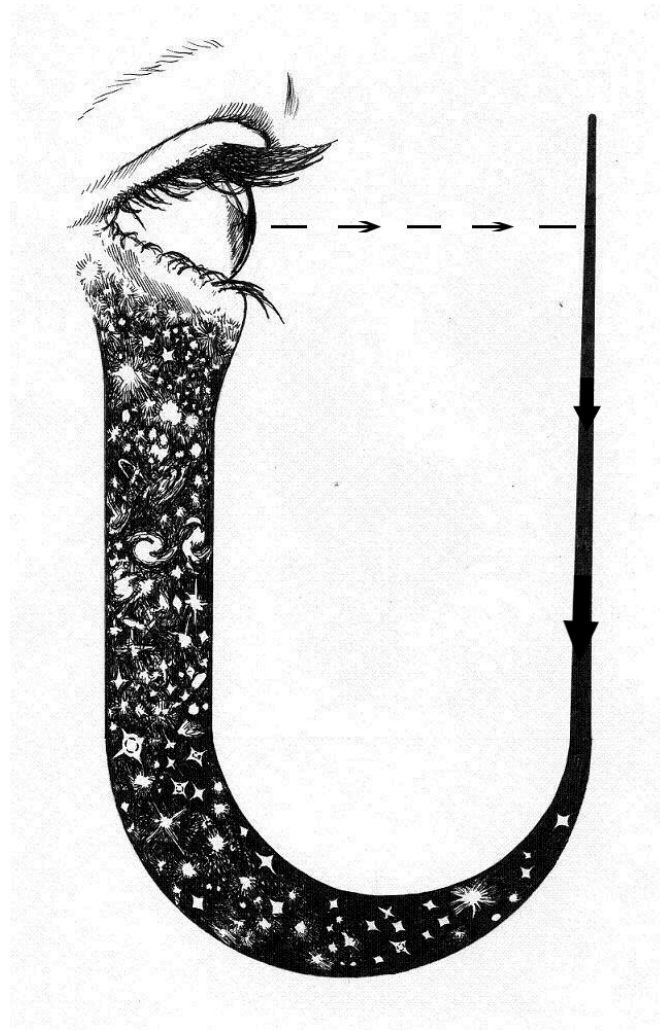
PBS Spacetime covers [Is The Future Predetermined By Quantum Mechanics?](#) -- If you believe in other observers, then you must accept that the wave function collapses all

around you (deterministically) but you can never tell what branch of the wave function you are in.

What about morality, identity and purpose?

I go into more detail in my previous article, but the main idea is that if we have no control over 'right now' then we are only morally responsible for the 'what we do next'. This implies acting morally *is* learning from the past and seeking to understand how your actions impact the future.

As far as identity – **we are forced to confront Eternity and see ourselves as the entire causal chain of events of the Universe.** We make our own purpose, but finding beauty every day, and increasing consciousness locally seem to be worthy goals to me



**The Wheeler Eye**, from a paper called [Beyond the Black Hole](#), by John Wheeler.

# Appendix A: problems with Free Will superseding causality

## Everyday Life

When asked, '[Hey Bill Nye, Do Humans Have Free Will?](#)', Bill Nye avoids a direct answer to the question, but does point out a multitude of deterministic stimuli that seem to impact our responses, and examples in science that depend on determinism to be successful.

I would like to start off by adding a few more examples below:

- Simple inputs, like our **breathing rate** [dramatically affect our behavior/outputs](#) in deterministic ways, triggering fight or flight, etc.
- Conscience is not localized to one area! [Split Brain hemisphere experiments](#) show our lobes can function and communicate independently. What's even more shocking is the two brain lobes can still communicate with each other after lobes being split, **through external senses!** For example, one lobe (usually the left) is controlling speech of a subject, and the other lobe controlling motor function. When the subject has their hands on an object they cannot see (say a square) and asked "are you touching a square", the subject might say "No" or "I don't know" because physical touch not internally connected to speech, but then the hand holding the square might start communicating and thrashing about on its own as if to say, "wait, it IS a square!"
- Tests on reaction human time shows it only takes ~0.2 sec to respond reflexively with our pre-programmed responses, and ~1-2 sec to respond with a consciously willed response [Harth, E. (1982). *Windows on the Mind*],

It would seem if we take these results seriously, that we should draw a line **between free will and reflex**, at about 1 second of time. How much time do you typically take to reply to people in a conversation?

## The Problem of Individualization

Most people believe causality to some degree. If you say it affects everything, except your free will, i.e. if you believe that Free Will exists outside of physical existence, you have the burden of trying to understand **where the influence of the Universe stops, and where your Free Will takes over and decides**. The problem of individualization arises when trying to perceive a boundary between causality and free will, or when .

Whatever your sense of identity and will, **you should be able to describe what is means to be you**, and have it hold up to questions such as:

- Would I still be me if I had all my memories erased?
- What if I had every atom in my body replaced? (this happens multiple times throughout an average lifespan)
- Am I the same person I was yesterday? Or a second ago?
- Where is my 'will' located, what makes me go?

The Problem of Individualism [1][2][3] arises when you try to get too specific with describing what 'you' (or some object) *really is*.

- "So and so criteria (e.g. specific arrangement of particles) defines what it is to be /me/"
- "X action is free willed action under one condition but not free under other conditions"

[Socrates](#) used the problem of individualism (and logical prowess) to force anyone who made such assertions into "aporia", **an improved state of still not knowing** what to say about the subject under discussion. Some great examples of this are on [socraticmethod.net](#).

## Physics

Einstein's **special theory of relativity** [shatters the common notion of time](#) and forces us to conclude that **time is not objectively real** because what is observed will always depend on your frame of reference.

We know this theory is correct, because we must calculate and adjust for time dilation in order to make cellular communication with satellites. Once the idea of a [spacetime](#) and [causality](#) are unified and accepted, it becomes hard to break and reconcile with Free Will.

Physicist [Sabine Hossenfelder](#) goes into the many **physical issues with free will** in [this video](#).

Also consider that physics has unveiled that [causality has a fixed speed](#), and this is what governs the speed of light, and defines the [smallest possible time interval](#). What's the frame rate of our universe?  $1.855 \times 10^{55}$  FRAMES per second – how many 'right now' moments have passed in the reading of this sentence? There is no TIME for free will to occur, because there is no well defined right now between 2 observers.

In the quest to understand the quantum world we have learned that particles, their mass, and all of the fundamental forces of nature are derived FROM group symmetries, [gauge theory](#), and the **principle of least action**. It gives the beautiful notion that causality is guided by harmonics and geometry.

PBS SpaceTime covers what the common quantum interpretations imply for free will in [this video](#). My key takeaway from this video is that the (free will) [Copenhagen view](#) is not **compatible with a shared reality** - its belief implies that only your reality is real.

My personal view of these two interpretations is below:

