

The Determined Will

Freya believes we have the freedom and Will to pursue our own ends, but Max argues this is a delusion because the future is already determined.

Stephen J Brewer, May 2020*

His free ebook “The Origins of Self” can be downloaded at www.originsofself.com

An old redbrick warehouse right next to the rail track dividing the city in two has become a popular downtown bar with a shaded patio alongside the track. On a humid summer’s day Freya and Max’s conversation is stopped for several minutes by the loud rumbling and squealing as a mile of shipping containers stacked two high, trundle past them.

Freya: Being that close to such a monster is an awesome experience, I just love it. What made you choose this fantastic bar?

Max: The short answer is I didn’t choose it; it was recommended by a friend and I thought it would be the sort of place you would like as well.

Freya: And what’s the long answer?

Max: I didn’t *choose* anything. Our being here was pre-determined by a string of past causes and events. How we came to live here, the history of the city, the building of the rail-track through the centre of this town, the heat of the day. The chain of cause and effect stretches into the past so in fact it was destined to happen.

Freya: I don’t know how you can believe such nonsense.

Max: Well you don’t believe you have Free Will do you?

Freya: The Will is not free, but we do have a Determined Will, a Will that’s determined to achieve our powerful animal ends to survive and reproduce. This means we’re free to choose the path most likely to achieve these goals. But of course, the path itself cannot be predetermined since the world and our relationships with it are much too complex.

Max: This concept of a Determined Will striving to survive is a delusion because everything we are is ultimately determined by the motion of inanimate objects that cannot feel desire, have goals, or the Will to achieve them.

Freya: Your mechanical view can’t apply to the living world. Just look around you; that wasp you’ve been trying to swat seems very determined to get at your drink and those ants are making a beeline for the crumbs on the floor and you seem very determined to pursue your tenureship. It’s obvious that you must overcome all

sorts of unforeseen obstacles to reach this end. This means everyone’s futures and therefore histories are the result of their choices.

Max: You only believe this because you rewrite history to show that what had to happen anyway was the result of your choices and goals. However much it upsets your beliefs, science has no room for anything, including living objects to have a purpose. There is no way to alter the universe’s unstoppable course.



Machines in motion

Freya: Just because the concept of Will doesn't fit your mechanical explanations of the world and life, it's no reason to deny the obvious evidence that these little beasts have a purposeful Will. You need to adjust your physical science to include this force, not deny what is obvious.

Max: All you are seeing is the operation of these animal's pre-determined inbuilt programs. You're simply projecting your own goals and desires onto to these dumb animals.

Freya: So how can we project our ends onto other animals if we don't have any goals to project? Do you think we are a special creation?

Max: No, just a self-deluded creation!

Freya: This means all the work you did for your Ph.D. thesis about quantum thermodynamics was all predetermined. There were no original thoughts nor freely chosen goals making you study for all those years then work 16 hours a day, no burning desire to prove yourself amongst other physicists?

Max: But I could only discover pre-existing objects and processes. If I truly created anything then my thesis would just be a work of fiction.

Freya: All these myriads of objects in motion collide and sometimes make new objects with new properties. After all, this process was supposed to produce us clever social animals with the delusion they have a Determined Will and the freedom to achieve their ends.

Max: Yes, that's how evolution works.

Freya: And that includes the occurrence of random mutations leading to beings with unexpected behaviours. These random events mean the future of life cannot be determined.

Max: You must drop the idea of randomness. In our determined universe there are no random events, just lack of knowledge. When we have all the facts then everything will be determined including how evolution could produce deluded machines programmed to think they are creative and have your "Determined Will".

Freya: But there is no end to your mechanical process and so it can produce an infinite number of objects some of which must have unforeseen properties and powers. After all, you claim this mechanical process produced us deluded machines, then it might be able to produce entities with real choice and freedom. This uncertainty means the universe can't ever be completely determined, can it?



A determined train of objects

Max: What your life-scientists fail to understand is there are no random mutations and no emergence of unpredictable properties. Because everything is determined, everything's predictable.

Freya: OK, so what's the aim of your deterministic mechanical science?

Max: To completely understand everything! There are only a finite number of facts and processes in the universe and once these are all known we will be able to determine the entire history and future of the universe. When this is achieved our work will be completed.

Freya: So, after all your researches and studies, you now conclude your hard work can't achieve its ends of knowing everything because in your deterministic world, the very concept of goals is itself a delusion. Now you've reached the conclusion that your work is itself a cycle of delusional nonsense, how can you carry on with it?

Max: That's easy, this machine is programmed to enjoy such delusions, just like it's programmed to enjoy eating and drinking.

Freya: Well here's the menu. So, what does your programme tell you to eat?

Max: Now this is a problem, does it choose a starter of nachos or wings or perhaps both!

See also "*The Purpose of Life, living to eat or eating to live*" www.originsofself.com/download.html

* Licensed for distribution under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License