

I keep getting asked if there is such a thing as free will. Personally, I think the question is very misleading because it implies that free will is a kind of ultimate force. This is a reasonably easy concept to tackle. For instance, I can have the world's best free will, but that will never make me the world's best 100-meter sprinter. Immediately then we should recognize that at best free will is closer to limited will. That then should change the question to what we can do with limited will. Except it's even trickier than that.

For anyone to have conscious choice albeit limited will or free will, there must be conscious volition. The problem that presents is that scientifically, there is 0% evidence for that proposition. Absolutely none. The arguments for conscious volition tend to be philosophical in nature rather than based on scientific data. We could answer the question of is there such a thing as free will with a definite no. At least based on the scientific evidence thus far, where perhaps future research may shed more light on the subject.

Answering with a no is not the whole story though. The research to date points to the unconscious as playing a vital role in shaping our reality. For example, let's say a person consciously chooses to wear red socks in the morning. This decision is made unconsciously prior to the conscious decision; this is despite our conscious perception of 'choosing'. Mind blowing stuff! While choosing red socks has not been specifically tested, other selection type exercises have. In these instances, scientists can predict what people will select up to 10 seconds prior to the person consciously choosing. In these instances, the body or part of the brain knows before we consciously are aware of something happening. There are many different experiments particularly recent ones from neuroscience which all point to the unconscious being the reality shaper and decision maker.

The point is that there is a mechanism at our disposal which can really help us shape our life path. Conscious will turns into unconscious will or perhaps more accurately unconscious limited will. The lesson is that we somehow need to find a way to tap into the resource of the unconscious. It involves training the unconscious mind which may sound daunting but is doable. The real switch is learning to recognize how the unconscious works and having a relationship with it. It is the opposite of what we tend to do, where all the emphasis is on the conscious mind. Sometimes this can work, because one of the ways we might communicate with our selves is via repetition.

For instance, if we keep repeating that we are useless to ourselves eventually we will believe it and the unconscious will attempt to find situations where we can prove to ourselves that we are indeed useless. It's as self-defeating as it can get. I see this a lot in the psychotherapy work I do with individuals where often their life patterns are destructive and self-defeating. I see this a lot in other people outside of the therapeutic context so its

not just does who are in psychotherapy.

The good news is that repetition can work to our benefit just as well. If we repeat to ourselves that we are capable individuals we will eventually come to believe it. Often this is a slow and laborious process, but that's not the point. The point is that change is possible, and it appears that we do have some say in the direction our lives take.

There are many ways to establish a relationship with the unconscious. We could try EMDR which is a very powerful way of creating change. Hypnosis, dream work, altered states of consciousness, meditation are others. Even things like yoga and Tai Chi and massage are ways we can establish a deeper connection with ourselves. These are only a few of the myriad ways we can establish a relationship with the unconscious.

Back to the original question of is there such a thing as free will. I would have to say it is complicated!



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