

Does Aristotle's argument for time allow for free will?

When we make a choice or decision, according to St. Augustine, we make that decision based off of our memories. But is a choice based off of a memory, or other outside factor, really a choice? In other words, do we really have 'free will'? No, we do not have free will. If all of our choices are determined by past and outside events or circumstances, then it is not really us making those decisions, it is those outside circumstances that control the outcome.

Free will is the ability to make a choice independent from outside influences. This means that for a choice to be "free", it can not be influenced by anything besides us (no outside influences, the outside being outside of your consciousness). If something other than you influences the choice, then it can't be completely your choice, therefore the "independent from outside influences" is a vital part of the definition. For example, if I am looking to buy a car and my mom tells me that silver cars are better because they don't show scratches as much, and I remember my friend saying that silver cars look the best, and I buy a silver car- was that completely my choice, or could I have been influenced to make that choice? In that instance I did not have free will because of those outside forces that influenced my decision.

While you could say I could have chosen a blue car if I wanted to, regardless of those outside forces, even choosing that blue car would have been a decision based off of equally outside influences. Either way the decision would not have been completely my own.

For the purpose of this essay I will use Aristotle's argument for time. Time, according to Aristotle, is the "number of movement in respect of 'before and after' and is continuous since its

an attribute of what is continuous". This is relevant to the issue of free will because Aristotle sees time as objective, which allows for the notion of a before and after, a past (or present of the past) and future (present of the future).

St. Augustine in *Confessions*, Book XI, says that there is no past and future per se, but a present of things past (memory) and a present of things future (expectation). Memories are not the absolute truth of the past, but they are our selective perception of the past. We don't remember every moment we've experienced exactly how they happened. Expectation is also affected by our memories because we decide what to expect based off of our memories of similar experiences.

It has already been stated that we make choices based on memories. This is shown in the car example: no matter which car I chose it would have been a decision based off of prior experiences. But memories are our perception of the past, not the past itself. This means that our perception can be influenced. And it is, by the past events themselves. The order in which something happens can influence the memory, along with other factors. For example, if I had a good day but at the end of the day I slip in mud, the fall is most prominent in my mind due to its recentness, so if someone asks me how my day was I am more likely to say it was bad than if I fell earlier in the day and had the bad event overshadowed by good ones.

This shows that our perception of memories is affected by outside influences. So, if memories as they are formed are affected by outside influences, then anything based off of those memories is consequently influenced by outside influences as well. Therefore, because choices are based off of memories, they are not independent from outside influences. This means that we do not have free will. We have the illusion of free will, because we appear to have choices, but our memories have predetermined which choice we'll make.

Another way that we do not have free will is in our expectation of the future. Our expectations for the future affect how we experience the present. For instance, if I'm looking forward to a party because I went last year and it was really great, but it's only mediocre this time, I will be disappointed. However, if I had a bad experience last year and I expect it to be equally bad, but it is mediocre (better than expected) I will have a better time. In this scenario the party has the same result, but how we interpret it is changed by our expectations. But how are expectations formed? By memories; like with choices, we expect a certain outcome based on prior experiences. But if memories are not free from outside influences, then our expectations based off of them are likewise not free from outside influences. Therefore, we cannot experience the present "freely". In other words, we do not have the free will to choose how to experience the present.

Even a being or creature without memories does not have free will. When you take away memories, choices are made based off of instincts. While instincts themselves are not influenced by outside events or circumstances, the way in which the creature acts upon those instincts is. If a creature has the instinct to find food, then its choice on which way to walk is dictated by where food is. The outside influences here are the location around the creature.

I would also argue that, unlike the quote "man is born free, and everywhere else he is in chains" from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, we are never truly free. We are even born in chains, in the sense that from our first memory, every choice from then on, no matter how minute, will be influenced by those memories. Every decision and action can be shown to be influenced by a chain of other actions and decisions.

For example, I am choosing to write this essay. I made this choice because I signed up for this class. I signed up for this class because a girl from my RAG last year recommended it. I am

writing this specific topic because it was mentioned in class and I had heard about it before. It was mentioned in class because my Instructor chose to mention it. He did so because it is a topic of philosophy, which he studies, etc. It can be said that I am not freely, completely on my own, choosing to write this essay, but that a chain of events caused me to write this essay, and that this essay was added to that chain and may influence a future decision. Every action is a reaction to a past action.

Some people may claim that because memories are based on our perception of past events, and because our perception comes from us, memories therefore must come from us too, not being influenced by outside events since our perception is not an outside event. This train of thought would lead to the conclusion that there is free will, since nowhere in this chain is an outside influence introduced. I would disagree because our perception is entirely dependent on what it is we are perceiving, and is consequently influenced by it. A blue room (an outside factor) will be perceived differently than a red room, and therefore those outside factors have influenced that memory.

While the difference between a blue and red room might not make that much of a difference, there are plenty of cases in which our perception of a memory and the outside influences on that memory could have a large impact on a future decision. An example of this is that you have a great time visiting Durham, North Carolina, but you were really sick during the trip. If you were looking at the trip outside of your memories, not skewed by your perception, you would see that the trip was a lot of fun, but your main memory is of how you felt during the trip, which wasn't very good. Next time you plan a trip, you might not consider Durham as strongly because your memory of it wasn't a good one. That could have even more impacts,

because, if the trip was a week long, you are impacting a week's worth of memories, which will impact even more future decisions.

Another counter argument is that it isn't only our memories that influence our decisions. I will grant that that may be true on the surface level, as expectation and personality can also impact a decision, when you dig deeper you will realize that all of these stem from memories. It has already been shown how expectation stem from memories, but what about personality? Our personality is largely dependent on our memories, as events and their memories can change our personality and how we respond in certain situations. Therefore, even other things that affect our decision making are dependent on outside influences, and therefore do not give us free will.

To conclude, we do not have free will because free will is the ability to make a choice independent from outside influences and by the nature of our decision making it is impossible to make a choice that is independent of all outside influences. In a way free will itself is a contradiction. Free will implies a choice (or action, although an action involves a choice), but choices are inherently based off of memories. Something based off of memories involves outside influences, because everything in the memory is an outside influence. Something that has an outside influence can never be a choice singularly from an individual. So a choice can never be "free" or free from outside influences. Every action is just a reaction to a past action.