

THE MYTH OF CHAOS: AGAINST THE SUPPRESSION OF FREE WILL IN THE NAME OF ORDER

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ABSTRACT

This article challenges the argument against free will that posits its acceptance would lead to societal chaos and immorality. The argument is formalized as a modus ponens, claiming that if people have free will, they will disobey laws, thereby creating disorder. By dissecting its logical fallacies and assumptions, this paper refutes the notion that free will inherently conflicts with societal order. Drawing on philosophical perspectives, particularly the concept of Rightly Ordered Appetites, free will is reframed as self-mastery aligned with moral virtue rather than unchecked autonomy. The discussion integrates Trianosky's analysis of virtue as the harmonious alignment of desires with ethical principles and explores the motivational role of free will in fostering prosocial behavior and personal accountability. Additionally, the application of Pascal's Wager to moral reasoning is critiqued for its reliance on presumption and coercion, highlighting the fallacies of slippery slope reasoning and appeals to force. Ultimately, the argument that free will leads to lawlessness is deemed both factually incorrect and logically unsound. Instead, belief in free will strengthens ethical agency and societal cohesion. However, the paper also acknowledges the persuasive power of fallacious arguments, especially when endorsed by authority figures or social conformity, emphasizing the need for critical examination of such claims.

Keywords: : free will; societal order; Rightly Ordered Appetites; morality; logical fallacies; Pascal's Wager

1. INTRODUCTION – THE MODUS PONENS

1.1 The Modus Ponens

In this article, I aim to refute a widely held argument against the existence of free will, which posits that its acceptance would result in a chaotic and immoral society. The argument can be formalised as a modus ponens:

- i. If people have free will, then they will disobey laws.
- ii. If people disobey laws, then society will become chaotic and immoral.
- iii. Therefore, if people have free will, society will become chaotic and immoral. (From 1 and 2)
- iv. We should avoid chaos and immorality.
- v. Therefore, people should not have free will.

1.2 Scope

The rebuttal proceeds by identifying logical fallacies underlying the argument. Moreover, free will is addressed with different perspectives among philosophers and psychologists, a nuance the arguer fails to acknowledge. A discussion boundary should be established to allow focused arguments. Free will is a multifaceted concept whose operational definition varies significantly across disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, and legal theory. For the purpose of this argument, free will is viewed through an axiological perspective, one that considers actions stemming from free will as inherently valuable and morally imputable (Chen, 2023), and is thus closely associated with self-regulation. Individuals employ internal monologue to guide their behavior and decisions, thereby supporting purposeful, goal-oriented behavior (Sheldon, 2024).

2. ARGUMENTS

2.1 The First Argument: The Trianosky's Rightly Ordered Appetite

In the context of the argument, free will can be addressed in the manner that it is self-mastery, and Rightly Ordered Appetite. That is, rightly-Ordered Appetite view of freedom involves acquisition of desires for the good as well as liberation from the despotism of base desires (O'Connor, 2014). This asymmetry thesis of free will is based on the ability to choose the True and the Good. If an agent elicits such capability, only then he can act freely. However, those who reject the Good choose freely only if they could have acted differently (Wolf, 1990). The objection of free will and compliance to laws in this context can be comprehended by applying moral arguments, most notably Formal Moral Argument, suggesting morality is ultimately authoritative, and its authority (often, divine entity, religious authority or governance body) is greater than other human constitutions or personal values.

In his 1988 article, "Rightly Ordered Appetites: How to Live Morally and Live Well," Gregory W. Trianosky explores the distinction between two categories of morally upright individuals (G. W. Trianosky, 1988): (1) those who exhibit virtue through a harmonious alignment of inner dispositions and (2) those who act morally despite experiencing internal discord. Here, genuine virtue arises from the proper ordering of one's desires and appetites in accordance with moral principles, without inner conflict or misalignment, thus fostering a profound sense of well-being as individuals achieve fulfilment through the congruence of their inclinations with their ethical commitments. The belief in free will is often associated with an amplification of prosocial behaviours and an elevated sense of personal responsibility for one's actions. Such a conviction appears to foster a moral orientation, compelling individuals to engage in virtuous conduct while refraining from actions deemed harmful or socially detrimental. This linkage suggests that belief in free will serves not merely as an epistemic stance but as a motivational framework that reinforces ethical agency and accountability (Caspar et al., 2017; Kasahara et al., 2019). Through this analysis, the centrality of cultivating virtuous dispositions as a means to attain both moral integrity and a fulfilling human life is made salient (G. W. Trianosky, 1988).

Trianosky's conception of virtue offers a compelling reconceptualization of free will not as a mere capacity for unbounded choice, but as moral mastery, and thus provides a substantive counterargument to the claim that the existence of free will necessarily entails societal chaos. In other words, the exercise of free will, when parallel with a rightly ordered appetite, is not anarchic but rather intrinsically directed toward the good. In this view, the cultivation of virtuous dispositions through the exercise of free will is not only compatible with social order but actively contributes to its flourishing. Individuals whose wills are governed by reason and oriented toward the good naturally align their actions with the principles that sustain communal harmony. Thus, Trianosky's analysis challenges the presumption that free will leads inevitably to chaos, offering instead a vision of free will as the foundation for an ethically harmonious society (G. Trianosky, 1990). Although developed from distinct traditions, psychological findings align with the Rightly Ordered Appetite view in suggesting that belief in free will plays a vital role in sustaining ethical dispositions and social order. Disbelief in free will not only undermines personal responsibility but may also erode the moral foundations necessary for communal harmony (Clark et al., 2014; Vohs & Schooler, 2008).

2.2 The Second Argument: Pascal's Wager argument

Argument quoted above suggests agents to inhibit free will because it is a rational behavior to avoid two unwanted consequences. Before describing fallacies, we should note that this is also an unwarranted rationale for morality. This can be explained by adapting Pascal's Wager argument.

By applying three Pascal's Wager premises in the context of morality and law, we can state the following:

- I. It is better to believe in the law and adjudication than it is not to believe.
- II. If one course of action is better than another then it is rational to follow that course of action and irrational to follow the other. Therefore,
- III. It is rational to believe in the law and irrational not to believe.

There are problems with the reasoning in Pascal's Wager. This argument attempts to justify belief in certain rational course of action in line with predefined set of morally accepted values, even if there is no evidence that they are morally right. Agents cannot simply choose beliefs on command, nor should they be expected to adopt beliefs without rational justification. Several logical fallacies based on presumption and irrelevance can be adapted to explain the basis that this argument is fallacious and highly implausible. The arguments falsely assume that immoral and chaotic society will be the implication of free will, therefore committing slippery slope fallacy. The argument claimed that to avoid the bad consequences, one must agree that freedom of will should not be allowed. Note that slippery slope occurred in two premises. Not only had the argument failed to provide plausible justification for consequence, but it is also an attempt to persuade using threats whereby unpleasant consequences of disagreement are deliberately inflicted. By agreeing to free will, one deemed to be immoral and in supportive of chaotic situation. The argument is appealing to force, and therefore fallacious.

3. CONCLUSION

This paper argued that the initial modus ponens argument is not only logically flawed but also misrepresents the nature of free will itself. Free will is not a threat to societal order but an ally, and a precondition for genuine moral agency. Trianosky, now backed by modern psychology and compatibilist theory, argues that a truly virtuous person has desires (appetites) that are properly aligned with moral values. These ideas form a strong and credible counterargument to the claim. At a time when personal autonomy is increasingly controversial, defending the role of free will is not just a philosophical stance, but a socially responsible one.

In essence, it is unwarranted to say that, given the freedom to choose, humans tend to disobey laws and create havoc. Although such argument is logically fallacious and factually incorrect, its persuasive prowess cannot be underestimated because acceptance of arguments regardless of its plausibility is highly dependable on various factors, such as authority, and arguer's relationship with agent. It is also feared that when majority subset of a social group agrees to this argument, it increases the probability of bandwagon effect.

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