

Goals:

- Introduce students to the concept of free will and get them to think critically about whether they are in control of their actions

Activity:

- Display two dessert items for the students to choose from - a peach and a chocolate cake. Once students make their selection, go around and have each person share their reason for why they made this choice. Inform them that they will all ultimately regret the choice that they made—those of you who chose the peach will feel dissatisfied with your choice, and if you chose the cake you will wish that you didn't eat such a large dessert.
- Could you have chosen otherwise? Could you have chosen the fruit instead of cake, or the cake instead of fruit? Why?
- The goal of this activity is to get them to think about the idea that people “could have” done something differently and to interrogate what phrase means
 - What does it mean to say that we can “choose differently”? What assumptions are you making in making that statement?
 - If they offer nothing, is it an assumption that you have the freedom to choose whether you eat the cake or the peach, that nothing up until the moment of your choice determines what that choice will be?

Definitions:

- Free will—humans act freely, can choose autonomously between different courses of actions
- Determinism—all events in the universe, including human decisions and actions, are causally inevitable, everything is predetermined

Discussion:

- What are things that are determined to happen in advance? Things that we know for a fact will happen?
 - If they offer nothing, we can add “the sun will rise tomorrow”
 - Are our actions determined in advance the way that the sun rising tomorrow is determined in advance? Or is there something different about our actions? Does it have to do with our ability to “choose”? Or is that choice an illusion?
- How much of our behaviors are we actually in control of and responsible for? How much is instinctual?
 - Humans often retroactively ascribe judgments of intentionality to their actions without really thinking about them (ex. walking, scratching an itch)
- Ethical implications: if everything we do is determined in advance and we can never have done things differently, are we responsible for our actions?
 - It seems that we can justify arresting people before they commit crimes if this is the case

- See if any of the students believe that free will evolves with age
 - Do infants have control? Do we have the same degree of control now that we did as infants?
- Does our discussion of free will so far make you think differently about the possibility that we live in a simulation?
- Do other animals have free will?
 - Unlike dogs, we can control our decisions and avoid food urges, for example.
- Are these topics worth talking about? How might you change your behavior if you were to find out that your actions are out of your control?