**Why I am not an atheist**

**Part Three: Free Will**

**Pastor Mark Schwarzbauer PhD**

**Family Worship Center 7-14-13**

The question from a parishioner… “If God knows what we are going to do then how is there free will?”

Free will is a big subject and relates to our discussion on atheism.

### Joshua 24:15 15 And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

**Part One: The Atheist and Free Will**

I. Sam Harris is a philosopher, neuroscientist and atheist who has authored 6 books against faith including “Free Will”.

II. Atheist Sam Harris says “If you pay attention, you can see that you you [sic] no more author the next thing you think than the next thing I say. Thoughts just emerge in consciousness. We are not authoring that that [sic] would require that we think them before we think them. If you if you [sic] can’t control your next thought and you don’t know what its gonna be until it arises, where is your freedom of will? The truth is we feel or presume an authorship over our actions, over ah [sic] and thoughts; over a certain channel of information in our conscious minds that is illusory. So so [sic] how can we be free as conscious agents if everything we consciously intend is caused by things we did not intend and of which we are entirely unaware? We can’t.” (Youtube video with SH speaking).

III. Sam Harris has spoken and written about “The Illusion of Free Will.”

“A person’s conscious thoughts, intentions, and efforts at every moment are preceded by causes of which he is unaware. What is more, they are preceded by deep causes—genes, childhood experience, etc.—for which no one, however evil, can be held responsible.” http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/life-without-free-will

IV. The logical question is since you are not responsible for your thoughts or actions why should we try to hold people accountable for what they absolutely cannot be responsible for? The Boston Terrorist Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's should be freed because as one supporter says… “He has the right to live his life. Let him live his life. He's only 19 years old”;[[1]](#footnote-1) even though he killed 3 people, injured 264 and 14 lost limbs. But according to Sam Harris, he is not responsible for his thoughts or actions.

V. “If we cannot assign blame to the workings of the universe, how can evil people be held responsible for their actions? In the deepest sense, it seems, they can’t be. But in a practical sense, they must be. I see no contradiction in this. In fact, I think that keeping the deep causes of human behavior in view would only improve our practical response to evil. The feeling that people are deeply responsible for who they are does nothing but produce moral illusions and psychological suffering.” http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/life-without-free-will

VI. “How can he see “no contradiction”? You need to understand to a material atheist only what is material is real. Although he co-founded “Project Reason”, in material atheism logic may be touted but is not inherent in it since logic is non-material. Chemicals cannot choose the outcome of their reactions. Therefore he does not have to be either logical or responsible for his statements.” Pastor Mark Schwarzbauer PhD

VII. Consider this secularist comment on Harris

Harris’ conclusion is, of course, that we don’t have free will as he supposes it is commonly understood: that given all the causes in play in a situation, we could have done otherwise (the libertarian, contra-causal conception of free will).[[1]](http://www.naturalism.org/Harrisreview.htm" \l "_ftn1" \o ") And he addresses the stakes involved right from the get-go: he couches the issue in the context of a nauseatingly horrific crime - the home invasion in Connecticut by two men in 2007. As you may recall, these two men first brutally bludgeoned the father (the only survivor), then raped and murdered the mother, and finally killed the two young daughters when they set the house on fire. Harris gives voice to most everyone’s worry when he writes that, without (contra-causal) free will,[[2]](http://www.naturalism.org/Harrisreview.htm" \l "_ftn2" \o ") monsters like these men are “nothing more than poorly calibrated clockwork,” and therefore they aren’t *really* responsible for their actions. They’re just damaged goods. http://www.naturalism.org/Harrisreview.htm

VIII. So Atheist leader Sam Harris says free will is an illusion. You ultimately have no real choices. Therefore, you are not responsible for your thoughts or actions. He also doesn’t see atheistic regimes that killed more than 140 million people in last century as responsible for their actions or as a consequence of atheism. Of course, he doesn’t think he has the free will to think that. At least here he is somewhat honest in his assessment of atheist ethics. Pastor Mark Schwarzbauer PhD

# IX. Ironically Harris, Dawkins and other atheist leaders claim to espouse reason and morality. Nietzsche said “Morality is neither rational nor absolute nor natural.” So where do they get it? Out of necessity “The unbeliever stands on Christian principles: logic, uniformity, and morality. But he denies that these are Christian principles.” ~ Lisle, Jason (2009-05-17). The Ultimate Proof of Creation (p. 30). Master Books.

# X. If man is only material, then Harris is right ~ there is ultimately no free will as we are no more than a bag of chemical reactions. Therefore, “no one, however evil, can be held responsible.” But is man really only material? The Christian cries a resounding “NO!”

**Part Two: The Ultimate Test of Free Will**

1. Viktor Frankl.
   1. Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist.
   2. Married in 1941.
   3. In 1942, he, his wife and his parents were deported to the concentration camp of Theresienstadt, the walled ghetto.
   4. In 1944 he was moved to Auschwitz.
   5. Frankl was one of the few to survive the Holocaust, his wife, mother and father did not.
   6. In the suffering in these camps he came to the conclusion that flies in the face of Harris’s material atheism.
   7. "Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager" (A psychologist experiences the concentration camp) English title: “Man's Search for Meaning.”
   8. *“We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms -- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.*”
   9. Freud and Adler had been before him and his work was considered “third wave.”
      1. Freud taught that man was helpless in the face of biological urges.
      2. God and religion were considered negatively.
   10. Frankl instead promoted free will and responsibility.
       1. Frankl once recommended the Statue of Liberty on the east coast be complemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the west coast.
       2. *“Since Auschwitz we know what man is capable of. And since Hiroshima we know what is at stake.”*
   11. He taught that man also had a spiritual unconscious. “We now arrive at an essential revision of the prevalent concept of the unconscious, or more specifically, of its extent. We have to expand its limits because it turns out that there is not only an instinctual unconscious but a spiritual unconscious as well.”
   12. “Being human is not being driven but deciding what one is going to be.”
2. God has given you the free will and responsibility for your life.
3. The atheist like Sam Harris chooses to believe he has no choice so he can’t be held responsible.
4. What will you choose????

**Part Three: God and Your Free Will**

I. The existence of God leads to some wonderful consequences.

II. The reason for being.

A. You were created by a loving God (Gen. 1:27, Ps. 139:13-18).

B. Created in His image to have fellowship with Him (I John 1:1-4).

C. Therefore every life has great value (Genesis 9:6).

III. ***The meaning of life... You were created to have fellowship with God. You are or can be redeemed through the death of Christ to live for Him here.***

IV. Joshua 24:15 15“And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

1. This is free will… CHOOSE!
2. From Genesis to Revelation there is free will to choose.

V. Because you have a free will you WILL be judged and held accountable for your life.

VI. If God is all knowing and he knows our future, then how is that free will?

1. Knowing what you will choose is not the same as controlling what you will choose.
2. Example of Sari and soda.
3. He gives you a free will –See message Choices of Empowerment Available at [www.i-fwc.com/](http://www.i-fwc.com/)

**Closing…**

Reason 6. Leading Atheist Sam Harris teaches that free will is an illusion and therefore “no one, however evil, can be held responsible.” Although he sees in a “practical sense, they must be” held responsible he refuses to fully acknowledge the natural consequences of his teaching and is therefore not rationally consistent. His arguments are logically reductio ad absurdum. Although Free Will cannot exist for the material atheist the denial of its existence is absurd. I cannot deny logic, reality or responsibility; therefore, I cannot be an atheist.

**Discussion Items and Questions for Home and Small Group**

1. What are the logical and ultimate consequences for people believing that free will is an illusion and therefore “no one, however evil, can be held responsible”?
2. Why is Viktor Frankl’s experience such a powerful proof of free will?
3. Believing in the God of the Bible has some significant consequences. Share how these affect your life.
4. In your own words, explain how God can be all knowing and yet you can still have a free will.
5. Reread the 6 reasons Pastor Mark shared as to why he cannot be an atheist. Which one(s) are most significant to you?

1. http://www.foxnews.com/on-air/oreilly/index.html#http://video.foxnews.com/v/2540621641001/sympathy-for-the-devil-in-boston/?playlist\_id=86923 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)