

System Flexibility and Human Free-Will

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Thomas A. Burns PhD.

Klamath Falls, Oregon

Within an entirely connected, integrated and unified system, it would seem that conditions are so fixed that free/independent action [free-will] for any entity would not be possible. But the extent of flexibility within any system depends on the system's size and degree of openness. A very small system functioning at a single scale offers very little, if any, flexibility. An enormous system existing at many scales has much greater flexibility especially at the lesser scales within it. In addition, an open system allows for change and offers a much greater degree of flexibility than a closed, steady state system. Obviously, a large, open system is the most flexible and invites a significant sense of free-will – the view of having choices among potential actions. Of course, the sense of free-will is not absolute free-will in any system.

How does all of this apply to define “free-will” for humans at the scale of their existence as one recent, surface species on planet Earth? We now know that the totally materially and energetically connected cosmic system of our universe is so vast that at scale Earth does not amount to a single quark subatomic particle. Humans as an entire species are essentially “invisible” and individual humans are virtually impossible to find. We also believe our universe is expanding at an ever increasing rate, making it an open system at every one of its great many scales – thereby exhibiting significant flexibility at lesser scales like that at Earth scale. So, the degree of flexibility that pertains at the Earth scale is considerable, and humans tend to view their sense of free-will as a constant. In this context, the choices humans make in their mostly flexible situation rarely encounter Earth's system limits – until recently! Excessive human species population, unsustainable demand on resources, pollution degrading nearly all resources, comprehensive non-human species extinction, and climate change – all at the planetary level – have finally brought human “free-will” choices to system limits even at Earth's lesser cosmic system scale.

Ultimately, system flexibility is limited – even in vast open systems at lesser scales, and the false human belief in absolute free-will gets exposed. Modern humans have made spectacular advances technologically and in their knowledge of their physical cosmos. But they have become accustomed to their egotistical, free-will perspective and subsequent system abusive behavior. Humans now find themselves at the boundaries of their planetary system's flexibility. In time, can we humans adjust and operate respecting the limits of both our system's flexibility and our free-will? Or will our continued arrogance lead to the demise of complex society and possibly to our specie's extinction?