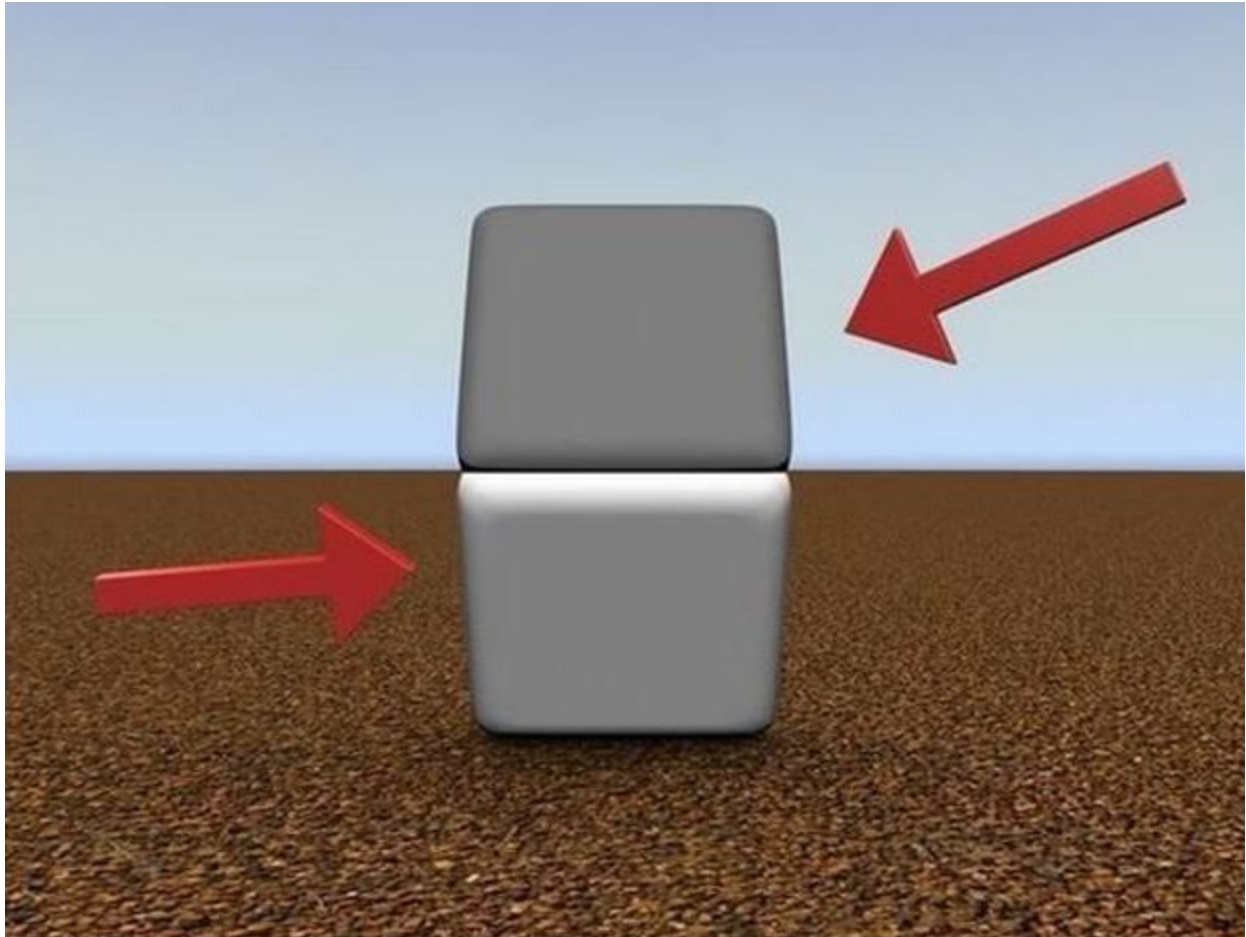


Free Will Vs Determinism

In modern US society, and from my experience pretty much everywhere in the world, most people assume that we have free will. Initially this is very easy to accept as, after all, haven't I been making choices since I can remember? It certainly does *feel* like I am making one right now in writing this essay. But the way we as humans perceive things isn't always infallible, as we know from things like this:



The blocks certainly look the same color, but put your finger over the line between them and you'll quickly see that they're actually the same color. As we can see from this, how we initially perceive things is not always how they actually are when we search deeper. To counteract this, I will use both science, which, [assuming you take it for granted that the outside world exists](#) and are fine with evidence [that can never be proven](#), is the best idea that we have for how our universe works and simple logic, which doesn't require that trust you need to put in science, to explore this problem.

I'll begin by approaching it from the scientific perspective. When we look at physics, at least on a macro scale (I'll get to quantum later) we can see that every effect must have a cause. When you lay a bottle on a table, it doesn't simply fly away randomly without some force acting on it. This goes for everything that exists in the physical world In the same way, we, as humans, are

made of matter and only matter. No facet of physics would lead you to believe that when matter is made into the form of a human, it can suddenly [act without cause](#). In the same vein, when a cause leads to an effect, it is (given proper understanding of science) predictable. When I swing a bat at a ball, I can surely say that the ball will go flying, and if I knew the exact velocity I sped the bat up to, the air pressure, where on the ball I hit, and many more variables I could exactly predict where the ball would end up. From this point, it is reasonable to assume every other interaction in the universe behaves in the same way, where, given enough information on the physical realities, you can exactly predict the outcome, including inside of our bodies. Given that information, it would appear that free will is impossible, seeing as if we have enough information on the circumstances that the person is in, we can exactly predict what they will do and will continue to do into the future, meaning that they do not have free will.

The one caveat to this conclusion given our current understanding of science however, is quantum physics. Now, considering that I am not a physics major, you may be doubting that I understand quantum physics well enough to say what I'm going to say here, which is probably true. However, I asked my brother, who is a physics major, to look this over for me which should give me some more credibility. In quantum physics, at a very basic level, at the tiny scale that quantum studies, outcomes are based on probability, and are [not perfectly predictable](#). This throws a wrench in my earlier theory, as if the matter actually behaves in a probabilistic way, then that essentially signals that matter could have a degree of free will, as it decides which of the probabilities to fall into. However, there is still [a system of determinism](#) that you can make from this point, if you want to read a bit more.

The non-scientific reasoning I have is something that, while not disproving free will, certainly makes it harder to believe in, for me at least, and comes off as somewhat paradoxical. I originally read about this in the book [The Conspiracy Against the Human Race](#), a book which I would highly recommend for anyone who wants to learn about philosophy they'd probably never hear about otherwise, or likes lovecraftian horror. Preamble aside, the reasoning is this. Let's say that you are in a position where you can choose two condiments, let's say salt and pepper to top your food. Right now, you are in a state of mind where you are craving salt so you choose salt. Would you, in that exact circumstance with that exact same mindset of craving salt with that exact same decision in front of you ever make a different decision? Even though you feel like you made the decision to choose salt and you could have chosen pepper, your state of mind at that point of time at the time would always have chosen salt there. Even if you do believe that this decision which would've been made the same way every time you in that state of mind were placed in those circumstances was free will, doesn't the fact that it's completely predictable take away all of the meaning from that free will?

I hope you enjoyed reading my thoughts on free will. for a few years I was a pretty set determinist. However, my relatively new understanding of quantum physics has thrown a wrench in this belief, once again carving out a scientific niche that could allow free will to exist. Because of this I no longer have a set belief in one direction or the other. The question of free will is a fun one, and I hope by reading this you are slightly more informed.