

Analysis of Video By Sabine Hossenfelder ("You Don't Have Free Will But Don't Worry")

Post by "Mathitis Kipouros" of July 30, 2021 at 7:20 AM

One of the links on this thread: [Sabine Hossenfelder - Why the Multiverse Is Religion](#)

Took me to a website where Sabine H. wrote about why free will is inexistent. After the pleasant surprise we had with the other two videos [Cassius](#) I thought it may have been an error but I did find out this video later on:

https://youtu.be/zpU_e3jh_FY

It seems to me that this "paradox" (because, of course, we perceive free will with our senses, but she states we're being fooled) falls a bit into what was talked about in this episode.

I think she's taking the theory of what differential equations, math and physics could describe and confounding it with what we actually experience.

It's a bit disappointing, after the talk we had about her other videos.

I hope [Martin](#) could give an opinion on this.

This part of my reply is less about paradoxes in general and more about the specific apparent "paradox" of free will.

I like Noam Chomsky's very pragmatic response to the question, which can be seen in this video:

<https://youtu.be/J3fhKRJNNTA>

Also, this:

"QUESTION: What about the problem of free will? If genes play a crucial role in structuring the mind's abilities, is free will an illusion?

CHOMSKY: Well, that's interesting. Here, I think, I would tend to agree with Descartes. Free will is simply an obvious aspect of human experience. I know — as much as I know that you're in front of me right now — that I can take my watch and throw it out the window if I feel like it. I also know that I'm not going to do that, because I want the watch. But I could do it if I felt like it. I just know this.

Now, I don't think there's any scientific grasp, any hint of an idea, as to how to explain free will. Suppose somebody argues that free will is an illusion. Okay. This could be the case, but I don't believe that it's the case. It could be. You have to be open-minded about the possibility. But you're going to need a very powerful argument to convince me that something as evident as free will is an illusion. Nobody's offered such an argument or even pretended to offer such an argument.

So where does that leave us? We're faced with an overwhelmingly self-evident phenomenon that could be an illusion even though there's no reason to believe that it is an illusion. And we have a body of scientific knowledge that simply doesn't appear to connect with the problem of free will in any way.

QUESTION: Do you think that science will ever solve the problem of free will?

CHOMSKY: Personally, I don't think so. People have been trying to solve the problem of free will for thousands of years and they've made zero progress. They don't even have bad ideas about how to answer the question. My hunch — and it's no more than a guess — is that the answer to the riddle of free will lies in the domain of potential science that the human mind can never master because of the limitations of its genetic structure."

(From: <https://chomsky.info/198311/>)

There's also this video, still on the topic of free will:

<https://youtu.be/py-PJKzQIw>

By the way, at around 2:15 of it he describes something similar to the canon of truth but not exactly the same.

Post by "Cassius" of July 30, 2021 at 7:40 AM

it's going to take some time for me to read the details of that but thank you camotero! Your recent contributions to the forum have been outstanding and I really appreciate them!

As to Hossenfelder I noted the video you mentioned when I was checking out her YouTube site, along with her video on creating new universes, which also seemed to be less impressive than the others we've mentioned. As to the baby universe video, however, I thought she was indulging in far too many "coulds" that seemed to be close to contradicting her viewpoint in the first video you posted, plus her eventual position still seemed to separate her when she even specifically disputed Lawrence Krauss's definition of "nothing" - which I thought was a good thing and a ray of hope.

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2126-analysis-of-video-by-sabine-hossenfelder-you-don-t-have-free-will-but-don-t-worr/>

I hope when we dig into the details of her free will position we will be able to identify why and where she goes awry and fails to follow the example of Chomsky and others. Most of the time it seems to me that people get hung up on the fact that we are obviously influenced by factors that were beyond our full control in the past, so they obsess on that and fail to accept that there are some things under our control. But of course I haven't seen her video yet so I will wait for further comment.

Post by “Don” of July 30, 2021 at 7:57 AM

I need to read more Daniel Dennett but here's his interesting take on the "illusion" of free will:

<https://youtu.be/vBrSdlOhIx4>

There's also this conversation <https://aeon.co/amp/essays/on-...go-head-to-head>

Post by “Cassius” of July 30, 2021 at 8:04 AM

Very good video thank you Don! I know our friend Ilka Vouristo over at the Facebook group is a fan of Dennet as well.

Post by “Martin” of July 31, 2021 at 8:49 AM

Here is my first response to the video of Sabine Hossenfelder on free will:

Reductionism combined with hard determinism excludes the possibility of free will. It seems that is essentially what she correctly presents in the video. She knows math and physics much better than I. Therefore, it surprises me that she makes a number of contradictions/mistakes which mislead her into reductionism and hard determinism:

Science has provided what is probably our best methodology to understand the world and act in it by applying scientific models in analogy of using maps to find our way. However, she is promoting reductionism, which means in that analogy that she is confounding the map with the

territory.

She follows hard determinism by claiming that everything has been predetermined since the big bang. Later on, she correctly refers to quantum indeterminacy but overlooks that it contradicts the hard determinism she just claimed before.

It seems she implies that there is no evidence that free will exists because we cannot turn back time and make a different decision. However, that same reason constitutes no evidence that free will does not exist.

I have repeatedly read claims by professors of theoretical physics that classical thermodynamics already rules out hard determinism but I do not understand the reason. I guess that lack of understanding is why the reference to emergent properties to justify the existence of free will does not convince me. She does not address that path to free will. Therefore, it seems that she does not know that reason either :-).

One of the statements where I agree with her is that quantum indeterminacy does not directly support free will because we cannot influence quantum indeterminacy. In my view, quantum indeterminacy breaks hard determinism and thereby may enable free will but it is not obvious how beyond that precondition that hard determinism is ruled out.

One aspect which she does not cover is that free will has connotations of a supernatural soul. Therefore, agency is a much better term for what we claim in Epicurean philosophy based on the observation that different individuals take different actions even when all circumstances appear to be the same. Once we put our mind into something we put in a lot of effort in making the goal happen. A person who has resigned to a predetermined fate is less likely to put in a lot of effort. Agency seems to be compatible with Hossenfelder's differential equations determining the immediate future from the presence if a random term from (quantum) indeterminacy is included.

I did not watch the video on Noam Chomsky. I agree mostly with what is quoted from his interview when using free will in the sense of agency except that I expect that eventually, neurophysicists, neurologists or the like will eventually come up with a good model and possibly a suitable redefinition to describe what we feel like Chomsky to be free will/agency.

Post by “Titus” of August 2, 2021 at 8:49 AM

I didn't read the thread, but I have to mention that there was a German author on Epicurus and Hellenistic philosophy named Hossenfelder. Sabine could be his daughter or some kind of relative.

Post by “Cassius” of August 2, 2021 at 8:52 AM

OMG that would be VERY interesting. We'll have to see if we can track that down as I would be interested to know his perspective on Epicurus too (tagging [Martin](#) to be sure he sees this)

Post by “Joshua” of August 2, 2021 at 8:41 PM

I used to follow Sam Harris with some regularity since he occupies the intersection of the so-called 'New Atheism' and Buddhism, and I had at that time a foot in both camps. Denying Free Will was a regular subject in his mental universe, and I also have friends who are of that opinion. I never really fell in line with it.

For one thing, the denial of Free Will is useless to me in trying to figure out *how to live*. Indeed, it appears to reduce the question to something like nihilism.

My course has been to accept Free Will based on the observation of lived experience (like Chomsky), but to assume at the same time a diminished capacity for it in other people. This is a purely consequentialist and an entirely fanciful assumption; if I assume that others in some degree lack Free Will, it opens the door to compassion and forgiveness rather than anger, and hatred. It allows me to refrain from attributing motive to others for choices I see as wrong, which is always risky, and it prevents me (to a degree) from putting myself above others.

Every decision we *do* make is subject to a kind of 'force-diagram', where culture, habit, education, knowledge, experience, peer pressure, preference, risk, and reward all cooperate to indicate a *likely* response—but it is not, in my view, a *necessary* response.

Quote

VS9. Necessity is an evil, but [there is no necessity to live under the control of necessity](#).

Post by “Martin” of August 3, 2021 at 4:35 AM

Malte Hossenfelder was a German professor of philosophy (1935 - 2011). Among his works are publications on Kant, Epicurus, the history of Hellenistic philosophy. Wikipedia claims that he identified imperturbability as the common goal of Epicurus' philosophy, the Stoa and Skepticism.

Sabine Hossenfelder was born in 1976. Her father died at the rather young age of 42, so he was not Malte.

I found no information on whether Sabine is a relative of Malte or whether she knows about him.

Post by "Cassius" of August 3, 2021 at 6:54 AM

Thank you Martin! Unless that last name is extremely common, the parallel would seem unlikely to be total coincidence - maybe he was an uncle or something.

If he identified "imperturbability" as the "common goal" then that might explain why Sabina might not have taken much interest in the details of Epicurus (of course that comment is pure speculation).

Post by "Don" of August 3, 2021 at 7:01 AM

Thanks, Martin! I see Malte doesn't even have an English Wikipedia article. Here's the relevant passage Martin references in the originals and in English via Google translate:

In seiner mehrfach wiederaufgelegten Geschichte der hellenistischen Philosophie führte er die drei hellenistischen Schulen [Stoa](#), [Epikureismus](#) und [Skepsis](#) auf die gemeinsame Überzeugung, bzw. auf das wünschenswerte systematisches Grundprinzip zurück: nämlich den "inneren Zustand" der [Seelenruhe](#) zu erreichen.

In his history of Hellenistic philosophy, reissued several times, he traced the three Hellenistic schools of Stoa, Epicureanism and Skepticism back to the common conviction or the desirable systematic basic principle: namely to achieve the "inner state" of peace of mind.

Post by "Titus" of August 6, 2021 at 6:17 AM

[Quote from Martin](#)

I found no information on whether Sabine is a relative of Malte or whether she knows about him.

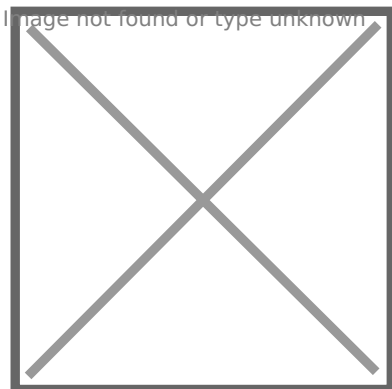
A map overview of Germany based on phone book entries lists the name Hossenfelder 34 times.

[Hossenfelder](#)

It seems the name originates from the state of Hessen (where Sabine is from). Nearly all other entries are from urban areas, so I think some Hossenfelder's moved there in the past. So there is very possibly a connection, the other question is how close they were.

Post by "Cassius" of August 6, 2021 at 7:47 AM

Not that it makes any difference at all but I always find words interesting. What does the "felder" indicate? Something indicating "field-worker" in the distant past, or something like that? So a long-ago reference to "field-worker from Hessen?"



[What does Felder mean in German?](#)

English words for Felder include field, panel, array, area, pitch, court, pane and open country. Find more German words at wordhippo.com!
www.wordhippo.com

Post by “Martin” of August 6, 2021 at 9:37 AM

Most likely, Hossenfelder means someone from Hossenfeld. I do not know whether there is or was a village with that name.

Post by “Martin” of November 12, 2021 at 5:28 AM

Malte Hossenfelder's book "Epikur" is in the library of Cologne. I read it there and wrote a review at:

Thread

[On Malte Hossenfelder's book "Epikur"](#)

Malte Hossenfelder's book (Verlag C. H. Beck oHG, Munich 1991, 3rd., updated edition, 2006, ISBN 978-3-406-54122-3) is one of a series of the publishing company on thinkers. Apparently, the publishing company limited the size of the book and thereby the level of detail.

The book depicts Hellenistic philosophy as the origin of individualism and Epicurus as the most prominent pioneer of individualism. It is a good introduction to Epicurus' philosophy when the reader is on the alert for some...



Martin

November 12, 2021 at 5:18 AM

His much bigger book on Hellenistic philosophy would be needed to go more into details of his reasoning but that book was not in the library.