

Joker Incompatibilism

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In this paper I present a synthesis of the language gap between normative language of free will, in a compatibilist sense, and physical incompatibilism. The solution is to treat normative language of free will as universally ironic with no counter-examples to dissolve the language boundary between physical reality and social reality. Basically, humans talk as if they have free will, when the actual meaning is always that there is no free will. This preserves the idea of free will in a world entirely absent of it, by joking about it without ever mentioning that the idea is meant as a joke.

Do humans have free will? This question has occupied philosophers for a long time. The basic problem is that the notion of free will does not make any sense in any accurate physical model of the world. Does the Standard Model of physics have free will? This idea sounds like a joke to a physicist. Yet, when it comes down to treating humans as responsible agents for their actions, the idea of free will refuses to die. Philosophers have tried to come up with some ways to think about this gap, without much success beyond encouraging philosophers to learn more science.

Humans is a species of animals that has the capability of lying and telling jokes. A joke is when a person says something but does not mean it in a literal sense, often to communicate something deep or non-trivial about the world. The problem is: Nobody takes jokes seriously. Jokes are often perceived to be the exception among the rule during communication. People who joke often are called comedians, which on average have higher IQ than the general population, but this profession is a clear minority. People who believe jokes literally are often perceived or portrayed as stupid by the larger population. In general, if one takes jokes seriously, then this is usually a sign of lack of sense of humor or delusion. So, what happens when humans use an idea consistently as a joke?

Recent studies of Joker Calculus suggest that natural language used by humans has the capacity to express layers of meanings. A layer (X, Y) is read X in depth and Y at the surface. A Joker is when $Y = !X$, such that $\text{Joker } X = (X, !X)$. For example, when somebody says “this is very clean” when entering a messy room, they say something that is meant ironically and what is actually meant in depth is that the room is messy.

In social reality, due to the complex relationships that humans have to each other, the idea of free will is so deeply embedded into how people perceive and interact with the world, that to get rid of this idea causes all sorts of problems, for example feeling trapped or powerless. One can compare the situation to when a child has a favorite toy and a grown up takes away the toy, the child starts crying. The idea of free will is like a favorite toy for a lot of humans and they do not like to be told that they have no free will.

In science on the other hand, there is no signs of humans having any notion of free will. All the data learned from experiments points consistently in one direction: There is no free will. In computer science, it is not possible in principle to create an algorithm that has free will. Why? Because the idea of free will does not make sense in the first place. Yet, since people get upset by the fact that they have no free will, they try to find ways to talk about it as if people have free will in a pragmatic sense, e.g. when it comes to laws, while the irony about laws is that they are put in place because people ought not to have free will, even if they had any. So, people do not have any free will in the first place, but there are also systems that treat people as if they had any free will and try to take it away from them. This is why people perceive losing the idea of free will as some kind of authority taking it away from them, when the actual situation is that they never had any free will in the first place. If people do not have free will, then authority does not make sense, as it can not take it away.

With other words, people perceive the lack of free will as the authority winning the game.

Of course, the idea that authority wins when people do not have free will, is just plain wrong. However, this fact does not prevent people feel that it is true. In order to save people from having one negative delusion, they are using a positive delusion to fight the negative delusion. This is where philosophers jump in and try to defend people's beliefs so they are allowed to believe in some notion of free will, vaguely defined enough for most people to give up upon trying discussing it with them, while distracting those who point out the obvious scientific fact that there is no free will, using various sorts of thought experiments which do not have anything actual to do with free will. Basically, this is just dressing up the delusion in new clothing and presenting it as fashion.

The position that argues in favor of keeping people's delusion about free will, is called compatibilism, the idea that free will is somehow compatible with scientific explanations. Compatibilism builds its arguments around unpredictability and non-determinism. In a nutshell, one distinguishes between various notions of non-determinism that allows, in a few cases, some room for interpreting what is happening as free will. For example, when rolling a dice, the person who rolls the dice has no free will over the dice. However, when drawing a picture, the person who draws the picture has free will over the picture, despite that the medium of expression and talent of the person limits how well this free will can be expressed. So, in some cases of non-determinism, there is no free will because the person has no control over things that behave like dices. In other cases of non-determinism, a third person who examines the final drawing can not predict exactly what the person was drawing. The intuitive notion that a person can make a drawing and control the outcome somewhat while other people can not control the process, is used as an argument in favor of free will.

Of course, if the position and velocity of every atom in the body of the person making the picture was recorded and simulated using the Standard Model of physics, the simulation would produce pictures that look similar to what the person was drawing. There will always be some error of measurement, together with quantum non-determinism of mixed physical states, as it is impossible in practice to record the exact wave-function of the system. However, there is no coincidence that the person produces a picture, nor any "magic ghost" in the machine that can not be explained. By repeating this simulation enough times, one expects there to appear a drawing very similar to the one the person produced in real life.

There are simply no additional facts about the world that can be explained in terms of free will that can not be explained by science. When using science alone, all the facts about the world can be explained and there is no need to add "free will" into the soup to make it taste better. The taste that the world is somehow better with free will, is purely a made up construct by the human mind.

The simplest scientific explanation is that there is no such thing as free will. This position is called incompatibilism, because it explains the gap between free will and science as that people who believe free will exist, are simply wrong.

Now, using Joker Calculus, there is a way to synthesize these two positions:

Joker Incompatibilism = (Incompatibilism, Compatibilism)

Instead of committing oneself to either incompatibilism or compatibilism respectively, one can construct a language bias that combines the two. At the surface, the way humans use natural language is as if free will exist in some sense. At the depth, there is no free will. What makes this language bias different is that when a person says something about free will, it is meant ironically. However, by carefully avoiding to say that this is used ironically, one preserves the idea of free will.

For example, when a person is punished for a crime according to the law, the judge can be a Joker Incompatibilist and sentence the person to jail, as a joke, but without saying that the prison sentence is meant as a joke. For a third person observing the trial, it makes no difference whether the judge genuinely believes in free will or is a Joker Incompatibilist. However, the judge can internally view his or her actions as practical jokes. Now, the question is: Does the judge behave immorally according to normative ethical perspectives. The answer is: No, because there is no actual free will!

Let us say that the judge does nothing wrong in this case, by sentencing a person to jail despite knowing that the person had no free will nor could act otherwise when committing the crime. Society as a whole reasons as if the person who committed a crime had free will and was responsible for the consequences. This might feel like a very absurd world to most people. However, the funny thing is that it is actually true, according to Joker Incompatibilism. If people suddenly became Joker Incompatibilist over the night, while not changing any of their actions otherwise, then the world would just be absurd while not changing in consequences.

On the other side, Joker Incompatibilists fully acknowledge that in reality, there is no scientific basis of free will. They view the world as more absurd than most people, because they know that a lot of stuff that happens socially has no basis in scientific facts, but it happens since humans share delusions. While internally it might seem as if Joker Incompatibilists behave unethically according to their own sense of morality, there is no crime being done externally. It is not a crime to find the world funny or absurd from a subjective personal point of view. Yet, Joker Incompatibilists do not commit to the idea that what people perceive as free will should be a scientific fact. They simply believe that whenever people talk about free will, it is meant as a joke, because there is no actual free will. This holds even when people talk about free will without realizing it is a joke.

Now, there seem to be a problem: How can we live in a world where people do arbitrary things out of delusional reasons? This is a good question. It is actually something that people ought to ask themselves, because scientific evidence points in this direction. Does the social reality make any sense? Science suggests “no”. The only way to synthesize the gap between the belief in free will and physical incompatibilism, is to treat the entire thing as a joke that people are not told is a joke.

It is easy to think of Joker Incompatibilists as immoral people, because they secretly think of the entire justice system and all situations where free will plays a role in society as jokes, but are they not just more honest about things as they are?

Perhaps instead of trying to convert Joker Incompatibilists back to people living in delusion, one could have a philosophical debate about free will and how this idea influences society. On one hand, when science says that humans do not have free will and on the other hand, society refuses to give up the idea, what choice is there but to embrace the entire thing as a joke, without necessary telling anyone because of serious social repercussions?

From one perspective, one can think of Joker Incompatibilists as sadists who enjoy outcomes that happens as practical jokes, but causes harm to other people. However, one can also think of Joker Incompatibilists as victims who are trapped in an absurd world full of delusional people. The idea that Joker Incompatibilists are somehow immoral, is just another delusion, like free will. There do not have to be any significant differences in how such people go about their lives. If society as a whole decides to change drastically using scientific knowledge as basis for their decisions, then this is another scenario. As long as this does not happen, there is no particular reason to persecute Joker Incompatibilists for their views: They have simply embraced reality as described by scientific evidence and the social reality of people having delusions.

Whether the world becomes better or worse from using scientific evidence, one can not blame or give credit to Joker Incompatibilists, because there is simply no free will. However, one can blame or give credit as a joke.

Imagine a defendant who testifies under oath. The defendant says that he or she is innocent because they could not have acted otherwise, since there is no free will. Lying under oath is a crime, so according to the law, if the defendant says otherwise, then by scientific evidence the defendant is lying and should be punished. However, since there is no free will, the defendant had no choice but to lie under oath. This is a problem, because it makes no sense to uphold the law if by consequence the law is undermined. The problem is not what the defendant believes, but that the law did not make any sense in the first place, since there was no free will to either uphold or break the law.

If the defendant says “you are all delusional!” to the rest of the court then technically, the defendant has not lied because this is what scientific evidence suggests is true. However, the judge might react negatively to such statements and sentence the defendant to jail time for disrespecting the court. Now, the defendant might complain about this absurdity, but there is no reason to blame the judge either because there is no free will. The defendant is not able to gain social status by realizing the truth about free will being non-existent, because the rest of the social world behaves as if free will exists.

In order for society to change, both sides of any social process must be able to recognize that there is a problem to be solved. As long society moves along pretending that free will exist, there are very few options that make sense. In this situation, Joker Incompatibilists are not actually making a very bad nor immoral choice. They acknowledge scientific reality, that there is no free will, but at the same time they relate to the everyday society around them in a respectful manner. Therefore, Joker Incompatibilists should not be treated as immoral members of society.

It is also not clear in which direction society should move, given that it chooses to act on scientific knowledge about the non-existence of free will. According to good practices of justice, this direction should be debatable and present arguments from multiple perspectives. There might also be ways to improve the justice system without necessarily changing the belief in free will. If there are a lot of low hanging fruit, then one could wait until these have been picked before continue with finer use of language that allows people to coexist while not having a need for expressing their personal beliefs in free will in order to fit in. Overall, making improvements to justice systems is a good direction whether people believe in free will or not.

Perhaps most people might become Joker Incompatibilists, without needing to change how justice practice works, as long it is understood that the way people talk about free will is meant as a joke. People might design oaths that take into account that the way language is used is not meant to be interpreted literally, but is a historical coincidence leftover due to the slow pace of change. Over time, people might change how they speak about free will in everyday scenarios, while the use of language in court stays closer to the traditional form. These phases of transition might even be planned carefully, for example by introducing sections of trials where it is not assumed that people believe in free will.

An alternative is that Joker Incompatibilism will remain a fringe language bias, which resurfaces from time to time in limited social circuits. This will be like a world where people live in delusions about free will, wake up from time to time and gradually let themselves sink back into comfortable delusions. One can argue in favor of a such world as sleep being a necessary activity of being alive and nobody can stay awake all the time while remaining healthy as humans. In a such world, it is important to not label Joker Incompatibilists as dangerous individuals, because it might lead to discrimination without basis in ethical consequentialism. In any case, there is no free will.