

FATE AND FREE WILL



Anybody who practices the divinatory arts will, sooner or later, be confronted by the perplexing question of fate and free will. It's a subject that's frequently raised in readings and something many people ponder at one time or another. It's also at the crux of every scientific and religious debate questioning the nature of existence and the individual's role in determining his own destiny.

The dictionary defines fate as "a power regarded as predetermining events unalterably". Certainly many people experience extraordinary happenings, accidents or chance encounters which appear, with hindsight, to have been unavoidable or 'fated' to happen. This notion of fate provides a safety valve for humanity in which something supernatural and beyond human responsibility can be held accountable. This is compounded through science or religion's inability to provide any real solutions to the fundamental problems of the human condition.

The divinatory models endeavour to shed some light on the subject. The tarot contains symbols of fate such as Death and the Wheel of Fortune card, yet its message that spiritual liberation is attainable through self-sacrifice suggests that fate can somehow be negated. Palmistry has its own line of fate which, in addition to representing an individual's relationship with his surroundings, reveals (through lines that appear and recede) how fate can somehow be modified or changed. Astrology implies that although an individual's destiny is governed by the influence of the planets and stars at the moment of birth, the ultimate responsibility lies with the individual himself in his response to life's challenges. However, to go deeper into the meaning of fate, it's necessary to transcend the divinatory models and experience the reality direct.

Returning to the dictionary definition of fate, the question is: if everything is pre-determined, how can I, the individual, be responsible for what happens when it was 'fated' to happen anyway? The answer is revealed through the living process and brings us on to the question of free will.

The innocence of the newborn baby lies in its sheer vulnerability to the world. You could say that the fate of the child is predetermined by external circumstances as it wouldn't survive without the love and care of others to provide for its needs. As the child matures, its course is still quite firmly fixed while experience is gathered through the challenges of living. However, through the gradual development of the mind and emotional preferences formed through the experience of pleasure and pain, a selection process is activated within the child. This then leads on to the gradual absorption of the worldly notion of free will: that an individual is able to shape his future through making choices and decisions in accordance with his personal drives and aspirations.

When we look at this idea of free will, it reveals a major flaw – it appears to conflict with the idea of an omnipotent power that is responsible for every thing that happens in the world. If there is a divine will, what about all the injustice, poverty, murder and atrocities that are endemic in our global society? Is this just "fate" or could it be that I, the individual man or woman, have been given the right to perpetuate my own unhappiness and divided existence? The answer is yes. This is the price of man's treasured "free will". With over six billion of us asserting our own personal will at any given moment, the combined effect is a massive collision of conflicting forces and an uncertain world struggling to retain its equilibrium at a crucial point in its evolution.

The underlying cause of unhappiness in the world is the attachment to our emotional negativity and personal wanting. If we truly had free will, we'd be able to withdraw at will from any emotional suffering. But as it is, we're stuck with the problems of the human condition until the living experience reveals the way out.

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The key to it all is self-knowledge. The depth of self-knowledge in an individual determines his perception of reality and sense of purpose in life. At a point in the living process, perhaps a mid-life crisis or something equivalent, there can be a significant shift in perception that, for some, can signal a new direction and a search for a greater reality in the life. This marks the point where what was predetermined can be modified or changed in accordance with the responsibility taken for the life.

Free will is the echo of original freedom. The pain and pleasure absorbed through the experience of living enables the profound process of life to extract its virtue from matter into an ever finer degree of intelligence. Creation is the playground of time – a kaleidoscope of forms and forces which in its totality serves a grand purpose, with each individual a unique being contributing to its overall wonder.

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