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# Exploring the concept of free will in the Anthropocene:

## How can it inform the discourses surrounding the concepts of responsibilities, societal influences and aiding others, particularly as tied to environmentalism?

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*Abstract*

*Society often assumes that the individual is rational and that choices and decisions are based on objectively assessing available information. There has been criticism of such views, particularly in ecological economics and psychology. However, the notion that the person makes their own choices and decisions, without foundational interference, remains. Influences, such as schooling, exist, but essentially, free will underlies the current notion of the individual person. This assumption is key to society. This article will seek to explore this underlying social notion. While not arguing for or against free will, it will explore what a society in which people abandoned the notion of free will would be like, specifically when dealing with the issues tied to the Anthropocene. How would this impact people's views of responsibility and emotional responses when considering environmentalism? This article will strive to demonstrate that, whether free will is real or not, acting as if it is an illusion could help create a thriving society, particularly when considering emotions and justice. It could even reshape discourse regarding ecological justice into healthier views.*

*Keywords: Free will, Anthropocene, environmental justice, responsibility*

A foundational assumption in our society is that the individual is rational and makes decisions based on objective assessments of information. Such assumptions have been criticised, including in the fields of ecological economics and psychology (Daly and Farley 2010). At its

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core, however, remains the idea that the individual makes their own decisions, free of interference. Certainly, influences exist, from schooling to family life, but ultimately, the individual is considered to make free choices. Free will is an implicit assumption underlying the modern conception of the individual. In fact, this assumption is so 'embedded in […] our way of understanding the world' that it is 'hard to imagine how we would be able to think of ourselves or others' without it (McKenna and Pereboom 2016: 1–2). Certainly, the discourse of individualism and, often implicitly, free will, is pervasive in society, including in economics (De Uriarte 1990). This article explores the assumption of free will. It does not argue for or against free will, but instead asks what a society in which people abandoned free will as a reality would be like, particularly for important issues in the Anthropocene. Specifically, what would it mean for justice and emotional responses regarding environmental degradation?

In this paper, as a shorthand, a society which believes free will is an illusion, will be referred to as a Free Will Abandoning Society or an FWAS. This study will strive to show that, whether free will exists or not, acting as if free will is illusory could itself be shaped to be beneficial to society, particularly in the Anthropocene. It will bring out, among other topics, interesting approaches towards corporations and capitalism itself, as well as in the relationships between the Global South and North and between humans and the nonhuman. The concept of ecological justice, which encompasses intergenerational, intragenerational and interspecies justice, will also be used to illustrate the potential positions/approaches of an FWAS.

**Defining Free Will**

As free will refers to different concepts, clarification is warranted. Here, contra-causal free will, sometimes called libertarian free will, is considered (Clark 2016). In essence, one's decisions are not fully caused (Clark 2016). While there are undeniably influences, the choices individuals

make are ultimately their own. Put succinctly, even with the same surroundings/influences, the person could have chosen something different (Clark 2016). Humans with free will can 'transcend cause and effect' in making choices (Stenger 2012: 15). This has sometimes been seen as a supernaturally given ability and often tied to the concept of evil, as discussed by Mackie (1955). Related to this, and as discussed by scholars, several religious concepts like redemption and sin seemingly require free will of some sort (Mole 2004). Furthermore, some have explored views in which certain mind components are deterministic, while others are outside/above general cause and effect (Scholten 2022).

Put simply, if free will is illusory, a person could not have made a different choice from the one they made (Clark 2016). Compatibilists offer other definitions of free will in which humans could still be said to have free will even if no different choice were possible (Kane 2005). For instance, if one chooses to do what one wants to do, even if this choice is entirely influenced by one's surroundings, one can be said to have free will (Kane 2005). Similarly, one can look at whether there are possible alternative choices. As some discuss, there can be a Pure Fatalism, 'the fatalism of the Oedipus', in which one is not able to choose the way one desires, such as when there is something forcing one's choice (Mill 1889: 601). However, there can be another form of fatalism, where one follows one's desires and makes the choices one wants but, ultimately, the desires are determined by outside influences and inherited leanings (Mill 1889). Others discuss how some redefine humanity, claiming it is the combination of the unconscious mind, which one does not control; and the conscious mind, which feels like it makes the desired choices, even when it does not (Stenger 2012). Similarly, some have free will existing in most cases, with brain damage/disease being a reason a mind might lose its ability to choose freely (Stenger 2012). The discourse around Phineas Gage could be a prime example of such lack of free will, as has been

argued by past analysers of the—admittedly variably understood—narrative of this disabled individual (Kean 2015). Regarding deficient brains restricting free will, some suggest a spectrum with neurological states variably impacting free will (Amen 2005). Such compatibilist definitions are not the focus of this paper.

There is, however, another important distinction to elucidate, namely the difference between deterministic and indeterministic free will. Lack of contra-causal free will does not mean humans live in an entirely deterministic universe. With quantum physics' emergence, the former Newtonian understanding of causes and effects has changed. Notably, evidence argues that at the 'sub microscopic scale events appear to happen spontaneously […] not the direct result of a preceding cause [and so] certain events may not be directly caused' (Stenger 2012: 17). This applies to sub microscopic events like nuclear decays (Stenger 2012). For instance, consider a group of atoms of a specific isotope, each one capable of decaying into another form (Glascock 2014; Hobson 2016). It is not possible to predict when an individual atom will decay due to that event not necessarily having a direct, determinable, cause (Hobson 2016). However, one could calculate the probability that some atoms in the group will decay per time segment (Glascock 2014; Hobson 2016). Hypothetically, one could say that every hour, an atom in the group will decay, but not which specific atom will decay (Glascock 2014; Hobson 2016). So, at this scale, probability is the key (Glascock 2014; Hobson 2016). Thus, the universe is not a deterministic 'machine', with one action directly causing the other in a linear fashion (Stenger 2012: 16). As discussed by scholars, alternative, albeit minor, views exist, which argue for undiscovered causes (Mole 2004). However, an indeterministic universe does not automatically grant contra-causal free will. After all, if the probability leading to a specific cause isn't under the control of a person, such free will remains unattained (Stenger 2012). For instance, a robot that is built to follow 'random laws',

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would not be considered, by most people, to be free (López-Corredoira 2009: 452). This can be extended to elucidate the situation. For example, a robot is programmed to perform an action when a command is made. In a deterministic universe, a button is pushed and the robot performs an action. In the indeterministic universe, where probability is the key, the robot is programmed to roll a die and performs the action whenever a three is rolled (Gulack 2004). In either case, whether in the pure deterministic or indeterministic scenario, the robot doesn't choose its action in any meaningful way. Ultimately, if an act can be explained 'in terms of physical laws (even probabilistic laws)', there is no guarantee of free will (López-Corredoira 2009: 452).

Of course, this example glosses over the issue of scale, as most objects considered in discussing free will are too large to meaningfully follow the rules of the quantum realm (Kane 2005; Caruso 2013). Certainly, the 'moving parts of the brain' and the distances involved, are 'heavy [and long] by microscopic standards' (Stenger 2012: 17). As has been argued, the brain is a 'Newtonian machine' (Stenger 2012: 15). Generally, these examples offer a clear illustration of why an indeterministic universe does not grant free will.

**Why Explore Free Will?**

The concept of free will has a strange relationship with advocates for an ecological perspective. Such groups often seek to remove contemporary approaches to nature and the dominant Western discourse which arose, largely, from Judeo-Christian worldviews (Sessions 1987). The perceptions of man being superior to nature, chosen by God, imbued with His image, and given dominion over nature, are considered to be the key detrimental views in the current environmental crisis (Sessions 1987). Certainly, versions of religions, even Judeo-Christian ones, have fought against this, but these detrimental assumptions, as discussed by scholars, remain

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largely embedded in the discourse of believers and outsiders (Moe-Lobeda 2009; Perlo 2009; Young 2010).

Conversely, the more ecologically minded seek to demolish these assumptions. For instance, humans are not seen as chosen and created by God, but instead resulting from evolutionary processes (Gulack 2004). Relatedly, man has no dominion over nature and actually has obligations towards it, which is worth protecting (Brown 2015). Regarding the future, expecting an external salvation, as seen in several traditional religions, is rejected (Brown 2015). Rather, it is beholden to humans to shape the future. It should be noted that religious advocates for ecological worldviews also exist, including some explicitly arguing for free will's existence (Daly 2016). It is useful to remember there are multiple perspectives, but a general trend has been outlined here.

Environmentalism is key for the Anthropocene, broadly defined as the epoch where humans are the major force shaping the planet (Malhi 2017). Philosophically, the Anthropocene suggests the need to acknowledge human responsibility towards the nonhuman (Malhi 2017). Notably, positive impact requires personal actions, along with collective actions, for example, policy interventions (Vaughan 2021). There is also an understanding that external factors can make individuals/communities better able to be environmental or implement environmental ideas (Broad 1994; Davey 2009; Vaughan 2021).

So, how does the suggestion that free will is illusory fit into the generally described ecological narrative? Initially, it seems to run counter to these views. Is it not contradictory to say humans must shape the future if they have no free will? As a seminal text in ecological economics states, if 'everything is determined then it hardly makes sense to discuss policy […] what will be, will be' (Daly and Farley 2010: 43–44). In fact, belief in free will and that 'our purposes are […]

independently causative in the world' appears to be a 'necessary presupposition for policy to make sense' (Daly and Farley 2010: 43–47).

Interestingly, some argue that not only is this not the case, but also tackling the question of free will follows directly from the previous attempts to remove past assumptions and create a sustainable society. For instance, Clark (2016: 368) sees belief in free will as a remnant of traditional religious beliefs, particularly the human soul, and an implicit way of seeing humans as 'little gods' and above the natural world, based on having an aspect of humanity not being the result of natural influences. Similarly, others see free will as the third predominant untruth to combat, the former two being God's existence and mankind's immortality, both giving humans a special status in the universe (Gulack 2004). It is generally accepted that most natural aspects of the universe are the result of past events. To then suggest that humans are free of this chain is a way of putting them, it is argued, above the rest of the universe (Clark 2016). As some discuss, if materials such as rocks are embedded into the universe, there may be no reason this should not also be true of humans (Reeve and Middlebrooks 2021). Interestingly, some have seen the need to cease believing in free will as akin to removing belief in the supernatural, with both considered necessary (Reeve 2013). Ultimately, these efforts can be seen as analogous to those of many ecologically minded groups.

Clearly, the interactions between the concept of free will and environmentalism are quite complex and require deeper analysis. What abandoning free will could mean for responsibility and emotions, such as empathy, with a focus on the current environmental crisis and ecological justice, will be discussed in subsequent sections.

**Free Will and Responsibility**

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Free will is often considered necessary for punishments to make social sense (Kelman 1981). Some argue society should act as if free will exists, even if it does not, so the legal system can be upheld (Kelman 1981). In a world accepting free will as illusory, how can one hold anyone responsible for their actions? In the discourse around this topic, criminals such as Leopold and Loeb are brought up as examples of what determinism can enable one to do (Daly 2016). Some scholars have argued that true disbelievers in free will should not believe in any legal punishment (Daly 2016). No criminal could be ultimately held responsible for their crimes (Kane 2005). This would apply to all, from the rapist to the embezzler.

In an FWAS, would the criminal justice system grind to a halt? Not necessarily. In fact, the concept that a criminal is not responsible for a crime, or less responsible, because their choices were not free, is not foreign to many systems of justice (Kelman 1981). Two clear examples of this are the legal concepts of subjective entrapment and provocation (Kelman 1981). Consider a case of entrapment, where an undercover officer convinces someone to commit a crime. The criminal might not be held accountable for that crime in court, because their choice to commit the crime was influenced by the undercover officer. And yet, the fact that they chose to commit the crime is undeniable (Kelman 1981). If contra-causal free will is real, they could have chosen to not commit the crime, even with the officer's influence. Thus, the concept of entrapment hinges on a view of free will being, at least in some situations, illusory (Kelman 1981). A more commonly discussed legal topic is provocation (Kelman 1981). Here, someone who freely chose to commit a crime is given leniency because of the surrounding circumstances that influenced them in their choice (Kelman 1981). Once again, the fact the criminal could have, with their free will, chosen a different path is implicitly deemphasised (Kelman 1981).

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Of course, these examples aside, criminal justice systems tend to assume criminals freely chose to commit their crimes and could have chosen otherwise. However, the concept of entrapment and provocation do suggest the possibility that, by expanding such reasoning, a justice system without free will may be created (Kelman 1981).

The true crux in the free will/criminality debate, however, revolves around punishing the guilty (Harris 2012). How could one justify sending a criminal to prison if they are not accountable for their crimes? In truth, most concepts involved would not have to be drastically changed. One may consider the purpose of prisons. Criminals are incarcerated for several reasons, including separation from society (thus keeping others safe), rehabilitation so they can be reintegrated into society and, finally, as a deterrent to other would-be criminals (Harris 2012; Vierbergen 2015). These reasons would not be discarded in an FWAS. If anything, more effort would be put into rehabilitation if a criminal is seen as the result of negative influences rather than simply choosing crime (Earp *et al.* 2018).

One rationale for incarceration, often called retributive punishment, could become unjustifiable (Vierbergen 2015). This 'Retribution Theory' claims it is 'justified to punish a criminal because he deserves something bad to happen to him because he has done something wrong' (Vierbergen 2015: 35). In the standard discourse, the dehumanisation of offenders can be common (Bastian, Denson and Haslam 2013). Such reasoning might no longer work in an FWAS, since the criminal is not responsible for their crime and so does not 'deserve' punishment not geared to a good beyond simple punishment (Vierbergen 2015). This form of punishment is likely to be excised in an FWAS (Harris 2012).

**Free Will, Environmentalism and Accountability**

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Initially, being unable to hold people responsible for their crimes seems contrary to environmentalism's current discourse. After all, environmentalists tend to want to expand responsibility (Shue 1999; Okereke and Coventry 2016). For instance, holding the Global North responsible for their carbon emissions, which unjustly impact the Global South, is an ongoing struggle in the climate justice movement (Shue 1999; Okereke and Coventry 2016). The discourse certainly discusses the concept of responsibility, sometimes specified as 'historical responsibility' (Buchner and Lehmann 2005: 46).

However, if framed correctly, the concept that free will is illusory can be beneficial in the fight for environmental justice. Consider a hypothetical situation in which an oil company causes a natural disaster. A court case finds the CEO liable and they might even go to prison. The company, however, could continue to function, potentially with the same people in charge, at least at the lower levels. As scholars have discussed, when a crisis occurs, a common procedure is to assign blame to a specific individual, often as a scapegoat (Van Erp 2018; Van Rooij and Fine 2018; Catino 2023). Legal concepts like limited liability and bankruptcy protection have allowed corporations and many of the members that make them up, including stakeholders, to avoid fundamental penalties (Shearer 2010). As Shearer (2010) discusses, some corporations have managed to not only survive lawsuits, but even thrive after members were found liable for damages. The push to shift away from an individual being blamed is not novel and discussed at length by scholars (Van Erp 2018; Van Rooij and Fine 2018; Catino 2023).

In an FWAS, however, there may be a more satisfying and long-lasting approach than the current one. As the goal of justice would not simply be punishment, but rehabilitation, this rehabilitation could logically be applied to the corporation itself. In fact, it would have to be. After all, how the corporation was run was probably a strong influence in the CEO's decisions. Rather than seeing

him as a morally reprehensible individual freely choosing to commit malicious acts, their actions would be the product of the corporate culture in which they are embedded and how the corporation runs on a daily basis. Certainly, corporations can be sanctioned even now, but in an FWAS, this would be emphasised, with the rehabilitation of the structure of corporations as the ultimate goal. Reforming that structure becomes a paramount component of justice, just as reforming the individual criminal is in the justice system. Notably, several ethical systems within business and corporate culture have been identified (Miesing and Preble 1985; Shaw 1996). This includes the free market endorsing objectivist philosophy (Miesing and Preble 1985). As has been discussed, business systems/corporations can also be tied to capitalist views of the environment. This includes emphasising some components of Darwinian evolution, such as competition, while deemphasising others, namely cooperation (Goatly 2006). Shifting these views would fit well with corporate rehabilitation.

In current corporate structures, free will can be considered an underlying assumption, with contracts given great importance. As such, they deserve explicit discussion. Ultimately, contracts are fundamentally about holding an individual responsible (Rand 1988). The person whose signature is on the contract is put under penalty if the contract is broken. At its most capitalistic view, the actions of an industry can be based on individual contracts/agreements (Rand 1988). In an FWAS, the situation becomes more complex and, possibly, more conducive to actual change. Instead of one signer being reprimanded for not upholding a contract, an entire system could be critiqued and reformed.

Such rehabilitation might even target capitalism itself. This can be hard to visualise. However, in terms of an FWAS, satirist Kurt Vonnegut offers a possible glimpse—the good and the potential bad—of a society which rejects both free will and a capitalist system (Vonnegut 2006). As in the

current capitalist system, those with privilege used it to amass financial power at others' expense (Vonnegut 2006). In his fictional society, such privileged people, who ignore that they are not making free choices, are seen in a detrimental way (Vonnegut 2006). There is also a sense of joy and jubilation when individuals reaffirm that humans do not have free will, because it means they won't deny the influences that have given them advantages in society (Vonnegut 2006). While that fictional society also, somewhat, knew the future, it remains an interesting understanding of what rejecting capitalism and privilege might be like.

**Targeting Ecological Justice and Responsibility**

One can now consider the three types of ecological justice, namely intragenerational, intergenerational and interspecies justice. Ultimately, the type of reasoning regarding rehabilitation could be applied in other areas of corporate society beyond the one mentioned above, including others impacting the environment. There is certainly no doubt that some industries have negatively impacted less fortunate humans, other species (including through biodiversity loss) and future generations (Rands *et al.* 2010; Muluneh 2021; Hasan and Tewari 2022).

The concept of ecological justice can also bring national actors into the discussion. For instance, regarding the Global North being held responsible for emissions of greenhouse gases which disproportionally hurt the Global South, a perspective of free will being illusory could be helpful. This dynamic between nations fits with both intergenerational and intragenerational justice. In an FWAS, the ultimate goal would be to compensate those suffering. Being directly responsible for the damage would be deemphasised and those who have the ability to help would be tasked with helping. To many, such a view may seem to be missing a key component of justice, namely holding specific people responsible. However, looking at the issue pragmatically, one of the stumbling blocks in forming/implementing international climate change legislation is the reticence to accept

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responsibility, which can result in inadequate mitigation efforts (Okereke and Coventry 2016). In their analysis of climate change discourse, scholars have pointed to the fact that actions are made difficult because different groups point the finger of blame at others (Broadbent *et al.* 2016). Certainly, these relationships have 'balkanized the global field of climate change discourse and enervated global negotiations' (Broadbent *et al.* 2016: 2). However, even without the aspect of responsibility, a functioning argument for climate justice and compensation is possible (Shue 1999). As in the fictional society mentioned above, abandoning free will could be tied to admitting unwarranted advantages/privilege and then helping compensate for this (Vonnegut 2006). Ultimately, those with the ability to help would generally also be those who became powerful through fossil fuel use, so the change might not be too drastic.

**Free Will and Emotions**

Another related realm in which free will is seen as important is the emotional realm, specifically, one's feelings of accomplishment or shame. Relatedly, there is the issue of why one should care about others, seeing as no one is actually responsible for their good or bad actions (Priddis 2017). As discussed by Priddis (2017), people feel concepts like praise would become meaningless if free will is rejected.

At the very fundamental level, praise and blame require a society that can agree on what is good and what is bad. Some suggest this fundamental step would be difficult in an FWAS (Priddis 2017). However, others argue that it is still possible, by focusing not on causes, but on the preferred 'state of affairs' (Priddis 2017: 27). For instance, consider an earthquake that causes a rockslide that destroys half a town (Priddis 2017). The townspeople could see this as a bad result, since it is not their preferred result. Conversely, if the earthquake and rockslide did not hit the town but revealed a vein of gold, the townspeople would consider this a good event (Priddis 2017). If an

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individual in an FWAS discovers some gold in a long-abandoned mine and shares it with the town, they would likewise see this as good (Priddis 2017). What is key is that in an FWAS, neither the earthquake, the rockslide, nor the miner are considered to have free will, but what matters is whether the result is a preferred state of affairs or not (Priddis 2017). Others have used the analogy of a furnace, which functions well or poorly due to outer influences, including construction material (Clemens 2022). As such, an FWAS could still agree on what would be good or bad, even being able to apply a free will independent consequentialist reasoning.

Social movements like Effective Altruism (EA) can act as inspiration. In their discussion/critique of EA, scholars have emphasised its focus on preferred state of affairs/consequences, rather than gut emotions and what may seem to be, initially, natural choices (Pendergraft 2021). An FWAS would also focus on the preferred consequences, deemphasising what may feel naturally and emotionally correct. Even the Land Ethic, key to environmentalist rhetoric, could act as inspiration (Leopold 2001). The focus would be on flourishing nature as the preferred state. The poetic Land Ethic discourse, particularly regarding the views/actions of nonhumans, including mountains, could be a good entry point (Leopold 2001).

Even if an FWAS can agree on good and bad outcomes, what would become of praising good works and blaming bad actions? The current understanding of praise would not be viable, although a variant could be developed (Priddis 2017). Seen from a different perspective, however, this could be a positive thing. Lack of belief in free will could lead to a greater sense of humbleness (Earp *et al*. 2018). A person wouldn't consider their success as being due to their own abilities, but rather resulting from past and contemporary influences (Earp *et al.* 2018). For many, this may seem a depressing thought. However, as a poetic quote from Albert Einstein illustrates, it can be not only humbling but also act as a link to the surrounding world. As he states bluntly,

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> I am a determinist. […] My own career was undoubtedly determined, not by my own will but by various factors over which I have no control […] I claim credit for nothing. Everything is determined, the beginning as well as the end. (Quoted in Earp *et al.* 2018: 8)

He even strongly argues that he is embedded in the universe, stating that all 'is determined for the insect as well as for the star. Human beings, vegetables or cosmic dust, we all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible player' (Quoted in Earp *et al.* 2018: 8). Turning to blame, one can also see benefits. Citizens in an FWAS might show greater compassion and less blame towards each other. As Kane (2005) discusses, some people may be more humane towards those who caused them harm as they would understand the perpetrator is not ultimately responsible. The often-detrimental emotion of 'Moral Anger' would become unjustifiable (Vierbergen 2015: 32). Relatedly, accepting that there is no free will can help tackle common arguments meant to justify not aiding those in need. In a capitalist society, for instance, a poor person's state may be seen as the result of their own failing and bad choices (Clark 2006). Their suffering is their own doing. Such a view would be discarded in an FWAS. Some argue that certain clearly detrimental emotions, like self-loathing, would be diminished in an FWAS (Priddis 2017). Ultimately, some see the rejection of free will as the 'great eraser', because it can reduce people's level of judgment towards others as well as towards their own guilt (Ogletree and Oberle 2008: 103). As such, an FWAS could decrease detrimental emotions, while emphasising positive ones.

**Free Will, Environmentalism and Feelings**

As this section discusses emotions, it is useful to consider emotions linked to the environmental crisis. For instance, emotions such as 'eco-shame' and 'eco-phobia' have arisen, or become more dominant, in the environmental crisis (Cianconi *et al.* 2023: 214–15). While some

emotional responses can be useful, several emotions can have detrimental results, including 'eco-shame', 'eco-guilt', 'eco-phobia', and 'eco-paralysis' (Cianconi *et al.* 2023: 214–16). For instance, 'eco-shame' can lead to denial rather than actual 'eco-friendly behavior' (Cianconi *et al.* 2023: 214). In an FWAS, focusing on preferred states of affair, rather than blame, these detrimental emotions could be deemphasised. Of course, as discussed above, an FWAS would not seek to be emotionless, but rather emphasise emotions such as humbleness and wonder.

One can also consider more directly environmental responsibility and emotion. For instance, the cognitive dissonance of 'Context-Sensitive Thinking' in environmentalism, as articulated by Nagarajan (1998: 279) would diminish. In such faulty reasoning, an environmental emotional mindset is present in one activity, but subsequently ignored (Nagarajan 1998). There is an overall lack of environmentalism (Nagarajan 1998). By emphasising preferred environmental states, rather than emotions, such cognitive dissonance would be combatted. This would similarly work favourably in the 'Not-In-My-Back-Yard' emotional response (Smith and Klick 2007: 2).

Furthermore, regarding blame, an FWAS that deemphasises blame and emphasises reaching preferred states of environmental affairs, could prove beneficial. Consider the 'Free riders' discussed regarding airplane travel and climate impacts (Westerby and Haga 2022: 33). Such participants saw little issue with flying, despite emissions released, because they blamed others, such as corporations, for the climate crisis (Westerby and Haga 2022). Similar reasoning has been put forth by some agriculturalists who use environmentally harmful methods (Duchesne and Lemoyne 2009). If an FWAS removes the emotion of blame and focuses on desired environmental states and actions, such groups could be encouraged to take more ecological perspectives.

**Targeting Ecological Justice and Emotions**

The three types of ecological justice can now be targeted to better understand the situation of an FWAS. An FWAS may be useful when dealing with environmental issues like climate change, in which the links between the environmental issue and the harm done to people is often indirect and hard to trace (Jamieson 2016). While the difficulty in identifying/holding institutions legally responsible for environmental damage has been an ongoing issue, it is particularly difficult here (Shearer 2010). How would an FWAS act in such matters? Some offer the example of natural disasters and disaster relief (Clark 2006). Most people, including strict capitalists, would see helping the victims of natural disasters as moral and would react with the emotion of compassion. They may disagree on how to help, as is made clear in some free market rhetoric, but the notion of helping those affected is generally there (Beisner *et al.* 2006). After all, the natural disaster was nobody's fault, being caused by an outside environmental event. The victims are not responsible for their suffering (Clark 2006).

In an FWAS, however, this imperative to help the natural disaster victims could be extended to other victims (Clark 2006). No one is ultimately responsible for their suffering, whether they are directly hit by a hurricane, indirectly affected by climate change or even suffering from poverty without known links to climate change (Clark 2006). This would fall squarely in the realm of intragenerational justice. The imperative to help and the emotional response of compassion would be just as strong. Furthermore, aid would go to those needing it the most, regardless of circumstances.

Intergenerational ecological justice can also be addressed. Certainly, there can be emotional tension between current young individuals and the older, yet still living, generation (Shaw 2018). After all, many environmental issues were exacerbated by the older generation. Unfortunately, the discourse has often been unhelpful. For instance, in explorations of the Fridays for the Future

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discourse, 'blame' has been a key part of the social media communication analysed (Boulianne, Lalancette and Ilkiw 2020: 213). Similarly, a study of YouTube comments for videos of activist Greta Thunberg showed many ignored the actual climate change information, attacking other aspects, such as the activist's age (Park, Liu and Kaye 2021). More generally, regarding the generations, scholars have discussed how adults can show cognitive dissonance and consider the younger environmentalists as 'naïve and immature' (Cianconi *et al.* 2023: 218). In response, the younger generations can experience anger and 'feelings of betrayal' (Cianconi *et al.* 2023: 218).

Such resentment would be logically untenable in an FWAS, as each generation would not be ultimately responsible for their actions. There would be no logical reason for animosity between generations, which should encourage cooperation. In either case, those who are in positions of power, which would generally be the older generation, would still be tasked with contributing more to environmental aid. They have more that they can contribute. When looking at future generations, it would be understood that their choices will be a result of the social and environmental influences with which they are raised. It therefore becomes imperative for the current generation to establish the right influences to achieve an ideal future society. To paraphrase Vierbergen (2015: 30), an FWAS would 'not focus on mistakes made in the past, but on the changes that can be made in the future'.

Regarding interspecies justice and emotions, one can look at the field of Human–Wildlife Conflicts (HWCs), which occur when there are conflicts between the needs of nonhuman animals and those of humans (Distefano 2005). Much of the harm felt in HWCs is based on perceptions of the events and of the nonhuman animals (Distefano 2005). Furthermore, as has been discussed extensively, blame is often placed on the wildlife for seemingly being, purposefully, behind the conflict (Peterson *et al.* 2010). In an FWAS, rehabilitating such erroneous, often emotional, views would

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be the focus, while removing ideas of ultimate blame. This is not just theoretical, as efforts to educate the public about HWC misperceptions have been discussed and implemented for various wildlife (Kahindi 2001; Samarasinghe 2014; Marchini 2015). Furthermore, attempts to reduce the perception of 'blame' placed on wildlife, including through language modification, have been discussed (IUCN SSC HWCCSG 2020; Yahya Haage 2023). Such efforts would become key in an FWAS.

One can even target empathy directly when discussing such ecological justice. Buddhist discourse can be a source of inspiration for such efforts, particularly regarding empathy towards nonhuman animals, key to that religion (Kemmerer 2012). Briefly, as Buddhism rejects the existence of an ultimate Self, it sees the human mind as a result of outside influences and Self-grasping (Gunaratna 1968; Quyet, Lan and Phuong 2022). This can be seen as analogous to an FWAS. Buddhism also emphasises feeling kindness to all beings, including nonhumans (Kemmerer 2012). This suggests a model in which an FWAS could still feel empathy towards other beings. As discussed by scholars, Buddhism also embeds humans in the universe, so that the differences between humans and nonhumans are extinguished (Reeve 2013). In fact, academics arguing for the nonexistence of free will have seen Buddhism as a potential model for this very reason (Reeve 2013). The embeddedness is not only seen in Buddhism, but could also be argued when considering the mental and physiological similarities between humans and nonhuman animals. Just as nonhuman animals are embedded in reality and influenced by outside forces, so are humans. Such links, although not explicitly discussing free will, have been extensively explored (Darwin 2020; Dawkins 2004). Some may see such links as bleak, but to many, it brings a sense of beauty and wonder (Dawkins 2004; Wilson 2006).

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Another analogous environmental reality that could be used as a model is the holobiont. The holobiont, arguing the person consists of the human body and its microbiome, can embed humanity into the environment (de Fleuriot Perry 2019; Crawford 2022). This could potentially help remove some of the perspectives of free choice. Society has limited control, currently, of how the microbiome affects the human (Postler and Ghosh 2017). The inclusion of the microbiome into free will discourse is not that far-fetched and could be an extension of the concept that the unit of focus for free will is the combination of the unconscious and conscious mind (Stenger 2012). Interestingly, a political perspective, particularly anti-capitalism, has been seen as an unavoidable result of accepting the holobiont and, in so far as it is the result of diminishing individualism, might be a component of an FWAS (de Fleuriot Perry 2019).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is undeniable that an FWAS would be different from the current society. Certainly, this will be the case for the structure of the justice system, how societies determine what is good/bad and, finally, how citizens envision blame and praise. However, as argued here, these changes, if applied correctly, may in fact be beneficial, particularly regarding environmental issues. Whether it's rehabilitating environmentally destructive corporations and potentially capitalism itself, increasing group cohesion or aiding those in need, a well-organised FWAS could make positive strides. Certainly, this could be true for each ecological justice component. As the Anthropocene requires both individual and collective changes (Vaughan 2021), the FWAS outlined here offers useful perspectives. Perhaps it is time to challenge the deeply held belief in free will and emerge better for it. The Anthropocene appears to be a time of reinvention (Malhi 2017), could this be the next step?

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