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The Distinction between Freedom and the Lack of Freedom is the Distinction between Free Will and Determinism in the Movie ‘ The Adjustment Bureau’
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The Adjustment Bureau is a movie that questions the existence of freedom in the lives of mankind and tests their ability to make their own choices. The movie shows that a mysterious ‘ organization’, the Adjustment Bureau, has determined every human’s future from before itself; it makes sure that they act according to the plans set for them. This makes one doubt whether humans make their own choices or whether those choices are already made for them. It also makes one ponder about whether free will is present in this world or whether the world is dominated by determinism.

A philosopher, Immanuel Kant, stated that “ ought implies can”; it makes sense to say that one should only do those things which one ‘ can’. Thus, morality presumes free choice and will. Similarly, this movie plays with the concept of man’s ability to make his own choices. The Adjustment Bureau has planned every human’s future from before, and if that future is not being followed, it changes the way people reason-by altering some aspects of their brains. This makes people only make those choices which the Bureau had wanted them to make all along, so that they are in accordance with the plan pre-determined for them by the Bureau. It is here when one realizes that maybe the only real choice that man has in his power to make is to either choose the plan set for him or not. The movie’s protagonist (David Norris), after accidentally finding out the plan set for him, chooses the latter; he goes against the Bureau’s scheme by pursuing his love for a ballerina (Elise

Sellas) (Fisher et al 2011).

As this decision deviates David from the path set by the Bureau-or in other words, determinism-, the Bureau sets out to add obstructions in his way, but in the end relents to his wishes. This brings out the debate on whether the movie is ruled by free will, determinism or both. Free will asserts that it is one's independent choices that lead to one's behavior, whereas determinism asserts that everything that happens is caused by a measurable determinant. The presence of the Bureau depicts determinism; David's first meeting with Elise was predetermined by the Bureau in order to influence him to change his speech and revive his career. However, the movie also shows free will; David ignores the Bureau's plans for him by following his freedom-the path of love (Kalat 2011).

This gives one the impression that both free will and lack of it are encrypted into the movie. However, there is a possibility that David's 'free will' could have been an illusion all along; one of the agents of the Bureau once told him that he did not actually have free will, he only had an 'appearance' of it. This could explain why the head of the Bureau accepted David's choice in the end, instead of forcefully changing his way of reasoning. Thus, one can say that there is either freedom or lack of it; free will and determinism cannot co-exist (Baer et al 2008).

One believes that one has the power of making one's own decisions. However, in the movie 'The Adjustment Bureau', it is suggested that there is a possibility that those decisions are taken only because they are in accordance with pre-determined plans. Those plans have been set by the Bureau beforehand. Moreover, free will and determinism are two opposite aspects; they are not compatible and thus cannot exist alongside each other.

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