



The Illusion of Free Will and the Prominence of Coincidence in the Films of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin

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Abstract

Two great masters of silent cinema—Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, although from two different milieus, seem to be aware of the fact that it is the unconscious actions or the coincidences that contribute immensely to whatever we become in our life. Sam Harris, an American philosopher and neuroscientist, in his book *Free Will* (2012), announces that freedom of choice-making is nothing more than an illusion. It is not only the choices that we make in our lives which are highly constrained, but also the consequences of these choices depend on many other factors—visible or invisible. The present article looks into the coincidences portrayed in the films of Chaplin and Keaton. The article establishes a proposition contrasting with the idea of freedom of choice in Sartre's Existentialism and offers a parallel between the idea propounded by Sam Harris in his book *Free Will* and the philosophy of these two filmmakers. Buster Keaton's *The Navigator* (1924) and *The General* (1926) while Charles Chaplin's *The City Lights* (1931) and *Modern Times* (1936) are the films that have been examined in the article as primary texts for drawing the conclusion.

Keywords: Illusion of Free Will, Coincidence, Charles Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Silent Comedy.