



Course Guide

PHIL100822016: *Self, Agency and the Will*

2019-20

Course Organizer:

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1. Course Aims and Objectives

This course is about mental agency. It examines the relations between mental agency, conscious will and free will. These relations will be examined from both scientific and philosophical standpoints; thus, one of the major themes of the course will be how to reconcile these two standpoints. Specific topics will include whether the will exists and whether it must be conscious, mental actions, introspection and the question of whether these findings have any consequences for our self-understanding as autonomous beings.

2. Intended Learning Outcomes

On completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Understand influential views on the nature of conscious will.
2. Understand influential views on the nature of mental agency.
3. Interpret empirical literature for philosophical purposes.
4. Demonstrate core skills in philosophy, including interpreting and critically engaging with philosophical texts, evaluating arguments and theories, and developing one's own ideas in response to the issues discussed.

3. Lecture Content & Readings

Background reading:

Clark, A., Kiverstein, J. & Vierkant, T (2013). *Decomposing the will*. Oxford University Press.

Bargh, J. A. and P. M. Gollwitzer (2001). The Automated Will: Nonconscious Activation and Pursuit of Behavioural Goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* **81**(6): 1014-1027.

Wilson, T. (2002). *Strangers to Ourselves; Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious*. Cambridge MA, Belknap Press.

Week 1 Introductory session and Libet

In this session we will have a look at some prominent empirical findings that seem to significantly undermine many assumptions philosophers have when theorizing about the mind. We will then home in on probably the most influential experiment in this literature. We will explore the problem of timing a conscious state. We will examine Libet's ingenious clock and ask ourselves what it is that this clock times and whether or not we can use it to find out anything about the timing of a conscious state.

Libet, B. (1985). Unconscious Cerebral Initiative and the Role of Conscious Will in Voluntary Action. *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 8: 529-566.

Recommended reading:

Dennett, D. (2003) *Freedom evolves*. London. **Chapter 8**

Soon, C. S., M. Brass, et al. (2008). Unconscious determinants of free decisions in the human brain. *Nature Neuroscience* 11(5): 543 - 545

Schurger, A., Sitt, J. D., & Dehaene, S. (2012). An accumulator model for spontaneous neural activity prior to self-initiated movement. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109(42), E2904-E2913.

Castiello, U. and M. Jeannerod (1991). Measuring time to awareness. *NeuroReport* 2: 797-800.

Haggard, P., & Eimer, M. (1999). "On the relation between brain potentials and the awareness of voluntary movements." *Experimental brain research*, 126(1), 128-133.

Lau, H., R. Rogers, et al. (2004). Willed Action and the Attentional Selection of Action *Neuroimage*

Fried, I., Haggard, P., He, B. J., & Schurger, A. (2017). Volition and Action in the Human Brain: Processes, Pathologies, and Reasons" *Journal of Neuroscience*, 37(45), 10842-10847.

Week 2 Libet the reactions

In this session we will look at some of the philosophical reactions to Libet's work. We will especially focus on the work by Al Mele.

Mele, A. Free Will: Action Theory meets Neuroscience. In C. Lumer (Ed) *Intentionality, Deliberation, and Autonomy: The Action-theoretic Basis of Practical Philosophy* (Ashgate, 2007), 257-272.

http://www.unisi.it/eventi/practical_philosophy/paper/Mele.pdf

Recommended reading:

Frankfurt, H. (1969). Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility. Journal of Philosophy 46: 828-839.

Slors, M (2015) Conscious intending as self-programming. *Philosophical Psychology* 28.1 94-113.

Claxton, G 1999. "Whodunnit?" in Libet et al (ed) *The volitional brain- Towards a neuroscience of free will*. Thorverton

Slors, M. (2019). Two distinctions that help to chart the interplay between conscious and unconscious volition. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10.

Passingham, R. and H. Lau (2006). Free Choice and the Human Brain. *in Does Consciousness Cause Behaviour*. S. Pickett, W. Banks and S. Gallagher. Cambridge MA, MIT Press: 53-72.

Sinnott-Armstrong, W, and Nadel, L., eds. *Conscious will and responsibility: A tribute to Benjamin Libet*. Oxford University Press, 2010. Soon, C. S., M. Brass, et al.

Dennett, D. C. (2004). *Freedom evolves*. Penguin UK. Especially chapter 8

Week 3 Wegner and social psychology

The experimental psychologist Daniel Wegner has carried out a number of striking studies which seem to show that our feeling of having acted freely is an illusion. We experience a thought followed by an action and we automatically jump to the conclusion that the thought was the cause of the action. In fact, Wegner argues that both our thoughts and the actions we take them to cause are the outcome of unconscious psychological processes. The conscious will, Wegner claims, is an elaborate magic trick caused by the same unconscious processes that issue in our actions. Could he be right?

Wegner, DM & Wheatly, TP (1999). Apparent mental causation: *Sources of the experience of will*. *American Psychologist*, 54, 480–492

Recommended reading:

D. Wegner (2003): The Mind's Best Trick: How we Experience Conscious Will. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 7.2, (65-69

Pronin, E. et al (2006) Everyday Magical Powers: The role of apparent mental causation in the overestimation of personal influence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91.2 218-231

Linser, K, and Goschke, T. (2007): Unconscious modulation of the conscious experience of voluntary control. *Cognition* 104.3 459-475.

Johansson, P., Hall, L., Sikström, S., & Olsson, A. (2005). Failure to detect mismatches between intention and outcome in a simple decision task. *Science*, 310(5745), 116-119.

Week 4. Wegner and philosophy

In this session we will look at some of the philosophical reactions. We will focus on the work done by Peter Carruthers.

Carruthers, P. (2007) The illusion of conscious will. *Synthese* 159: 197-213

Recommended reading:

Bayne, T. (2004) Phenomenology and the Feeling of Doing: Wegner on the Conscious Will. In Pockett, S, Banks, W.P, and Gallagher S. (Ed's) *Does Consciousness Cause Behaviour? An Investigation into the Nature of Volition*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

S. Gallagher (2004) Where is the Action? Epiphenomenalism and the problem of free will. In Pockett, S, Banks, W.P, and Gallagher S. (Ed's) *Does Consciousness Cause Behaviour? An Investigation into the Nature of Volition*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

E. Nahmias Agency, Authorship and Illusion. *Consciousness and Cognition* 14 (2005): 771- 785

Nahmias, E.. When consciousness matters: a critical review of Daniel Wegner's The illusion of conscious will. *Philosophical Psychology* 15.4 (2002): 527-541.

Bayne, T., & Pacherie, E. (2007). Narrators and comparators: the architecture of agentive self-awareness. *Synthese*, 159(3), 475-491.

Vierkant, T. (2015): How do you know that you settled a question?. *Philosophical Explorations* 18.2 199-211.

Week 5 The Phenomenology of Freedom

What does it feel like to act freely and does the phenomenology of freedom help us to decide what philosophical position we should hold? Richard Holton argues that there are two kinds of mental actions which are crucial to the phenomenology of freedom.

Holton, R. (2009): Determinism, Self-Efficacy, and the Phenomenology of Free Will. *Inquiry* 52

Recommended Reading:

Holton, R. (2009). *Willing, wanting, waiting*. Oxford University Press. (esp. chapter 3 on choice and chapter 6 on strength of will)

Nichols, S. and Knobe, S., 'Moral Responsibility and Determinism: The Cognitive Science of Folk Intuitions', *Noûs* 41 (2007), 663–685.

Nahmias et al., 'Surveying Freedom: Folk Intuitions about Free Will and Moral Responsibility', *Philosophical Psychology* 18 (2005) 561-584.

Monroe, A. E., Dillon, K. D., & Malle, B. F. (2014). Bringing free will down to earth: People's psychological concept of free will and its role in moral judgment. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 27, 100–108.

Monroe, A. E., & Malle, B. (2010). From uncaused will to conscious choice: The need to study, not speculate about people's folk concept of free will. *Philosophical Psychology*, 211–224.

Deuschländer, R., Pauen, M., & Haynes, J.-D. (2016). Probing Folk-Psychology: Do Libet-Style Experiments Reflect Folk Intuitions about Free Action? *Consciousness and Cognition*.

Paglieri, F. (2013). There's nothing like being free. *Decomposing the will*, 136-159.

Vierkant, T., Deuschländer, R., Sinnott-Armstrong, W., & Haynes, J. D. (2019). Responsibility Without Freedom? Folk Judgements About Deliberate Actions. *Frontiers in psychology*, 10, 1133.

Vierkant, T. (2015). Is Willpower Just Another Way of Tying Oneself to the Mast?. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 6(4), 779-790.

Vierkant, T, "Responsibility and the Automaticity Threat", (2011) 8:2 SCRIPTed p184, <http://www.law.ed.ac.uk/ahrc/script-ed/vol8-2/vierkant.asp>. DOI: 10.2966/scrip.080211.184

Week 6 The Phenomenology of Automaticity

Is deciding really something we do. Does it not just happen to us? Galen Strawson argues that there are no intentional mental actions, apart from stage setting.

Strawson, S. (2003). Mental Ballistics or the Involuntariness of Spontaneity. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 103 (3):227-257.

Recommended Reading:

Wu, W. (2013). Mental Action and the Threat of Automaticity. In Andy Clark, Julian Kiverstein & Tillmann Vierkant (eds.), *Decomposing the Will*. Oxford University Press.

Hieronymi, P. (2009). Two Kinds of Mental Agency. in O'Brien, L., & Soteriou, M. (Eds.). *Mental actions*. Oxford University Press.

Shah, N. & Velleman, D. (2005): Doxastic deliberation. *The Philosophical Review*, 114, 4, 497-534.

Shepherd, J. (2014). Deciding as intentional action: Control over decisions. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Published online: 17 Oct 2014.

Vierkant, T. (2017) Choice in a two systems world: Picking & weighing or managing & metacognition. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*

Mele, A. (2009) Mental actions: A case study in O'Brien, L., & Soteriou, M. (Eds.). *Mental actions*. Oxford University Press.

Maoz, U., Mudrik, L., Rivlin, R., Yaffe, G., Adolphs, R., & Koch, C. (2015). Neural precursors of decisions that matter-an ERP study of the role of consciousness in deliberate and random choices. In *CogSci*.

Proust, J. (2013). Mental acts as natural kinds. In Andy Clark, Julian Kiverstein & Tillmann Vierkant (eds.), *Decomposing the Will*. Oxford University Press.

Week 7 Introspection

So perhaps we can't know our motivations or why we make the judgements we do, but surely we can know without the mediation of theory or inference what it is like to feel sensations and undergo conscious experiences, can't we?

Schwitzgebe, E. I The unreliability of naïve introspection. *Philosophical Review* 117 (2008): 245-73

Recommended reading:

Hurlburt, R.T. & Heavey, C.L. (2001) Telling what we know: describing inner experience. *Trends in Cognitive Science* 5.9: 400-403

Tim Bayne & Maya Spener "Introspective Humility." *Philosophical Issues* 20.1 (2011): 1-22

Eric Schwitzgebel "Introspection" *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/introspection/>

Schwitzgebel, E. 2011: Knowing your own beliefs. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 35 supplement, 41-62.

Johansson, P., L. Hall, et al. (2005). Failure to Detect Mismatches Between Intention and Outcome in a Simple Decision Task. *Science* **310**: 116 - 119.

Shah, N. & Velleman, D. 2005: Doxastic deliberation. *The Philosophical Review*, 114, 4, 497-534.

Irvine, E. (2012). Old problems with new measures in the science of consciousness. *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 63(3), 627-648.

Week 8 Introspection and Agency

If introspection really is as suspect as Schwitzgebel suggests, why is it then the gold standard in the automaticity literature. We are going to look at Tim Bayne's critical work.

Bayne, T. (2013). Agency as a marker of consciousness. In T. Vierkant, A. Clark, & J. Kiverstein (Eds.), *Decomposing the will*. Mahwah : Oxford University Press.

Recommended reading:

Vierkant, T. (2012). 'Self Knowledge and Knowing Other Minds: The Implicit/Explicit Distinction as a Tool in Understanding Theory of Mind.' *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 30 (1): 141-55.

Proust, J. (2000). Awareness of agency: Three levels of analysis. In. T. Metzinger (Ed.), *Neural Correlates of Consciousness*, pp.307-324. MIT Press.

Clark, A. (2007). What reaching teaches: Consciousness, control, and the inner zombie. *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 58: 563-594.

Hall, L., & Johansson, P. (2008). Using choice blindness to study decision making and introspection. *Cognition—A smorgasbord*, ed. P. Gärdenfors & A. Wallin, 267-83.

Irvine, E. (2013). Measures of consciousness. *Philosophy Compass*, 8(3), 285-297.

Week 9 Media Violence and Automaticity

In this session we want to examine Hurley's interesting claim that cognitive science can show that we have to reconstruct practical policy decisions in the light of the cognitive science results. Could it be true that these results show that responsibility for our behaviour resides perhaps far less in the individual and more in the society we live in?

Susan Hurley (2004) By-passing conscious control: imitation, media violence and freedom of speech In Pockett, S, Banks, W.P, and Gallagher S. (Ed's) *Does Consciousness Cause Behaviour? An Investigation into the Nature of Volition*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Recommended reading:

De Bruin, B. (2008). Media violence and freedom of speech: how to use empirical data. *Ethical theory and moral practice*, 11(5), 493-505.

Prinz, W. (2004) Free will as institution in In Pockett, S, Banks, W.P, and Gallagher S. (Ed's) *Does Consciousness Cause Behaviour? An Investigation into the Nature of Volition*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Banks W.P. (2004) Does Consciousness cause misbehaviour In Pockett, S, Banks, W.P, and Gallagher S. (Ed's) *Does Consciousness Cause Behaviour? An Investigation into the Nature of Volition*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Kaplan, L. (2004) Truth and/or consequences: Neuroscience and criminal responsibility In Pockett, S, Banks, W.P, and Gallagher S. (Ed's) *Does Consciousness Cause Behaviour? An Investigation into the Nature of Volition*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Greenwald, A. G., D. E. McGhee, et al. (1998). "Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition: The implicit association test." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology **74**: 1464-1480.

Freeman, A. (1999) Decisive action- Personal responsibility all the way down. in Libet et al (ed) *The volitional brain- Towards a neuroscience of free will*. Thorverton

Week 10 Morality and Automaticity

Finally, the big one: Does what we learned about automaticity make it necessary to re-evaluate ourselves. Have we learned that we are not autonomous? Manuel Vargas' work examines that challenge.

Vargas, M. (2013) Situationism and Moral Responsibility: Free Will in Fragments. In Andy Clark, Julian Kiverstein & Tillmann Vierkant (eds.), *Decomposing the Will*. Oxford University Press.

Recommended Reading:

Levy, N. (2014). Consciousness, implicit attitudes and moral responsibility. *Noûs*, *48*(1), 21-40.

Nahmias, E. Autonomous Agency and Social Psychology M. Marraffa, M. De Caro, and F. Ferretti (Ed's) *Cartographies of Mind: Philosophy and Psychology in Intersection* pp.169-87

Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: a social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological review*, *108*(4), 814.

Vierkant, T, Hardt, R. (2015): Explicit Reasons, Implicit Stereotypes and the Effortful Control of the Mind. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 18.2 251-265.

Levy, N. (2014). *Consciousness and moral responsibility*. Oxford University Press.

Arpaly, N. (2002). *Unprincipled virtue: An inquiry into moral agency*. Oxford University Press.

Week 11 Revision and discussion week

4. Assessment Information

The course is assessed by a 1500 word mid-term essay (35%) and a 2500 word end of term essay (60%).

5% will be assessed by work in the autonomous learning groups. Each group will prepare questions for the seminar which will then be discussed in a small group during the seminar and then reported back to the whole class.

