

Philosophy 101

Consciousness, Will, & Responsibility

May 29, 2014

Philosophy 101

Consciousness,
Will, &
Responsibility

Review

The Libet
Experiments

Sinnott-
Armstrong on
Libet

Exam Review

Review

Quiz

- ① T/F: The source requirement says that one must be the source of a decision to act if one is to be held responsible for the decision
- ② T/F: Libertarianism says that free will and determinism are compatible
- ③ T/F: Hard Incompatibilism says that there is no free will of the kind necessary for basic desert
- ④ T/F: Determinism is incompatible with the existence of choice
- ⑤ T/F: The principle of alternate possibilities denies that responsibility requires that one could have done otherwise

Review of Free Will

Freedom of Will: a capacity of an agent to choose according to her preference from amongst a set of relevant alternatives such that she is responsible for that choice or action

Incompatibilism

- An agent who is coerced or manipulated is (typically) not morally responsible for her actions
 - Where there is no free will there is no moral responsibility
 - Free will and coercion/manipulation are '*incompatible*'

Alternate Possibilities

The Principle of Alternate Possibilities: a person is morally responsible for what s/he has done only if s/he could have done otherwise (or chosen otherwise)

Source of Agency

The Source Requirement: If an agent is morally responsible for her deciding to perform an action, then the production of this decision must be something over which the agent has control, and an agent is not morally responsible for the decision if it is produced by a source over which she has no control

Determinism

Determinism: For any state of the subject, that subject's states are necessitated by the condition of its previous states plus the laws of nature.

There is Free Will

Libertarianism: determinism is false and there is free will

There is No Free Will – Hard Incompatibilism

Hard Incompatibilism: There is no free will of the kind necessary
for *basic desert*

Basic Desert: For an agent to be morally responsible for an
action is for it to be hers in such a way that she
would deserve to be the recipient of an
expression of moral indignation if she understood
that it was morally wrong, and she would deserve
to be the recipient of an expression of praise if she
understood that it was morally exemplary

Philosophy 101

Consciousness,
Will, &
Responsibility

Review

**The Libet
Experiments**

Sinnott-
Armstrong on
Libet

Exam Review

The Libet Experiments

The Efficacy of Conscious Willing

Libet asked his subjects to flex their wrists at any time they wanted and then report the location of a dot moving quickly around a clock face when they first felt the urge or intention to flex their wrists. Throughout this process, he recorded their neural activity (with EEG) as well as their wrist movements (with EMG)...That activity [called a 'Readiness Potential' or RP] ramped up slowly, reaching its pinnacle at the time when bodily movement began, and then fell quickly after movement...(Sinnott-Armstrong, 238)

The Efficacy of Conscious Willing

What was surprising was the order: The readiness potential with unplanned actions (type II RP) began around 550 ms before the hand movement (M) began, and the reported time of conscious will (W) was around 150–200 ms before the hand movement (M) began, so the readiness potential...began around 350–400 ms before the reported time of conscious will (W). This order suggests that conscious will does not initiate the readiness potential...This implication is surprising, because most people think that their conscious choice is what begins the process that makes their body move in such cases. (Sinnott-Armstrong, 238-9)

The Efficacy of Conscious Willing

- On one interpretation of the experiment, conscious willing is not casually efficacious in the generation of behavior
- Are there other potential functions for conscious willing with respect to action?

The Efficacy of Conscious Willing

Potentially available to the conscious function is the possibility of stopping or vetoing the final progress of the volitional process, so that no actual muscle action ensues. Conscious-will could thus affect the outcome of the volitional process even though the latter was initiated by unconscious cerebral processes. Conscious-will might block or veto the process, so that no act occurs. (Libet, 5)

The Efficacy of Conscious Willing

- According to Libet, the role of conscious willing is to *control* not *initiate* action

The role of conscious free will would be, then, not to initiate a voluntary act, but rather to control whether the act takes place. (Libet, 7)

The Efficacy of Conscious Willing

- Conscious willing may not play a causal role in the initiation of action
- Conscious willing may play a role in the 'veto' of an intention to act

Philosophy 101

Consciousness,
Will, &
Responsibility

Review

The Libet
Experiments

Sinnott-
Armstrong on
Libet

Exam Review

Sinnott-Armstrong on Libet

What Libet's Experiment Does Not Show

- All actions are determined
 - Libet's experiments examine whether conscious willings are causally efficacious, not whether willings in general are free/determined

What Libet's Experiment Does Not Show

- There are no such things as intentions or willings
 - The experiments only concern conscious willings or consciousness of will, not intentions or willings generally

What Libet's Experiment Does Not Show

- Conscious states (or conscious willings) in general are epiphenomenal
 - Appeal to conscious (distal) intentions seems necessary to explain why the subject's of the experiments were there in the first place and followed Libet's directions

What Libet's Experiment Does Not Show

- There are no casually efficacious 'proximal' willings or intentions
 - There are in action generally (e.g. willings may have 'veto' power)
 - Conscious willing may well play a role in the initiation of other kinds of actions

What Libet's Experiment Does Show

*What do Libet's results show? He showed that, in some cases, a conscious proximal will to move now does not initiate the brain activity (or RP) that begins the process that produces the bodily movement or action.
(Sinnott-Armstrong, 239)*

Conscious Willing & Legal Responsibility

- Our legal practices (e.g. the Model Penal Code) presuppose the causal efficacy of conscious willing for attribution of legal responsibility

Conscious Willing & Legal Responsibility

The Model Penal Code (MPC) Section 2.01: (1) A *person is not guilty of an offense unless his liability is based on conduct that includes a voluntary act or the omission to perform an act of which he is physically capable.* (2) *The following are not voluntary acts within the meaning of this Section: (a) a reflex or convulsion; (b) a bodily movement during unconsciousness or sleep; (c) conduct during hypnosis or resulting from hypnotic suggestion; (d) a bodily movement that otherwise is not a product of the effort or determination of the actor, either conscious or habitual.*

Conscious Willing & Legal Responsibility

- Libet's results suggest that quick, unplanned actions may be the result of automatic processes over which the subject has little to no control or 'veto' power
- Legal attribution of responsibility may need to take into account Libet's results

Conscious Willing & Moral Responsibility

- Is the causal efficacy of conscious willing necessary for *moral* responsibility?
 - legal evidence suggests that it is
 - examination of cases also provides support

Conscious Willing & Moral Responsibility

*Consider someone who is asleep but grabs a knife, walks into an adjoining bedroom, stabs her daughter, walks back to her own bedroom, and is completely surprised in the morning to find her daughter dead...many people would view it as morally unfair to hold real sleepwalkers responsible. Why? The answer seems to be that they are seen as lacking consciousness and, hence, control.
(Sinnott-Armstrong, 237)*

Conscious Willing & Moral Responsibility

- Presumption that consciousness is necessary for control, and that control is necessary for moral responsibility
 - presumes something like the Source Requirement

Conscious Willing & Moral Responsibility

- General consciousness is not enough
 - disorders such as Tourette's Syndrome and 'Alien Hand' Syndrome are examples in which consciousness is present but not causally efficacious, so there is no attribution of responsibility

Conscious Willing & Moral Responsibility

Imagine that someone plans to kill a rival by running him over at 9:00 as the rival jogs by his house. It is 9:00 now, but the driver thinks it is 8:00, since he forgot daylight saving time, so the driver decides to go buy breakfast. As he drives carefully out of his driveway, the jogger appears unexpectedly and is run over and killed by accident. The driver did will to kill the jogger, had that will at the time when he killed the jogger, and killed him in the intended way at the intended place and time. (Sinnott-Armstrong, 237)

Conscious Willing & Moral Responsibility

- Is the driver morally responsible for his rival's death?
 - No: the relevant intention was the driver's desire for breakfast, which accidentally resulted in the death of his rival
- For an intention to morally culpable it must be causally relevant

The Significance of Libet's Results for Morality

- Libet's experiments show that *some* acts of *proximal willing* are not obviously casually efficacious in the production of *certain kinds* of behavior

The Significance of Libet's Results

Various moves are available if an act does not seem to result from conscious will: Either (a) we cannot hold the person responsible at all or (b) we need to remove consciousness from the requirements for responsibility or (c) we need to specify that only general consciousness is required or (d) we need to stretch the "action" to include a prior voluntary act or (e) we need to reduce the legal effects of minimal or automatic acts (e.g., by mitigation). (Sinnott-Armstrong, 245)

Philosophy 101

Consciousness,
Will, &
Responsibility

Review

The Libet
Experiments

Sinnott-
Armstrong on
Libet

Exam Review

Exam Review

Format

- ① Argument extraction (2, 10 pts)
- ② Definitions (2, 5 pts)
- ③ Multiple choice (10, 3 pts)
- ④ Short essay (2, 20 pts)

Argument Extraction

Analyze the text and extract the argument in premise/conclusion form. Pick two of three:

There is no reason to think that there are any absolute moral truths. We can see this when we consider different cultural outlooks concerning what is morally required. For example, indigenous Inuit culture considered infanticide to be morally permissible. But modern American culture clearly thinks infanticide is morally wrong. So what's morally right or wrong is just a matter of opinion, which can vary from culture to culture.

Argument Extraction

- What's the conclusion of the argument?
- What support does the conclusion have?
- What material is essential to the argument and what is extraneous?
- Is the argument valid?
- Is the argument sound?

Argument Extraction

- ① If moral truths were absolute then they would not vary from culture to culture
- ② What's considered morally right or wrong does vary from culture to culture
- ③ \therefore There are no absolute moral truths

Argument Extraction

- is the argument valid?
 - yes: Why?
 - If $A \rightarrow B$
 - $\sim B$
 - $\therefore \sim A$

Argument Extraction

- is the argument sound?
 - no:
 - there could be cultural variance even if there were absolute moral truths
 - some cultures could just be getting things wrong—compare: “are there absolute truths about geography?”
 - the fact that some people believe the earth is flat is no reason to deny that there are absolute geographic truths

Definitions

Give the definition of the word. Pick **two** of three:

Physicalism: everything that could exist is either physical or depends on the physical

Multiple Choice

- ① Nagel's argument concerning consciousness aims to show what?
- A. *What it is like to be a bat*
 - B. *That physicalism is false*
 - C. *That we cannot understand how physicalism could be true*
 - D. *That physicalism is true*

② According to Block, a characteristic of A-consciousness is what?

- A. *There is something it is like to be A-conscious*
- B. *It is an intrinsic feature of a mental state*
- C. *It is a relational feature of mental state*
- D. *It is never accompanied by P-consciousness*

Short Essay

Write a *short* essay—two to three paragraphs. Pick *two* of three:

- Explain how the knowledge argument is a challenge to physicalism
 - explain what physicalism is
 - state the knowledge argument
 - state the challenge which the knowledge argument poses to physicalism