

# Philosophy 101

Consciousness, Will, & Responsibility

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Philosophy 101

Consciousness,  
Will, &  
Responsibility

**Review**

Review  
Questions

The Libet  
Experiments

# Review

## 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

# 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.

- ① Is free will compatible with determinism?
- ② Is determinism true?

# 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*'
  - Is determinism similar enough to coercion/manipulation to threaten free will?

# 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

# There is Free Will

**Libertarianism:** determinism is false and there is free will

- How do we explain freedom of action?
  - Are free actions indeterminate?
  - Are free actions miracles?



# 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

## Strawson's 'Basic Argument' against Free Will

- ① You do what you do because of the way you are.
- ② To be morally responsible for what you do you must be truly morally responsible for the way you are – at least in certain crucial mental respects.
- ③ To be truly responsible for the way you are, you must have intentionally brought it about that you are the way you are, and this is impossible.
- ④  $\therefore$  You cannot be truly morally responsible for what you do, because you cannot be truly responsible for the way you are.

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Experiments

## Review Questions

## Question 1

The source requirement says that

- A. we have free will*
- B. moral responsibility depends on being able to do otherwise*
- C. control is irrelevant to moral responsibility*
- D. responsibility for a choice requires that one be the appropriate source of the choice*

## Question 2

Determinism says that:

- A. we cannot make any choices*
- B. our choices are not causally effective*
- C. the state of subject, plus the laws of nature, necessitate the future states of the subject*
- D. we are free*

## Question 3

If determinism is false then we have free will

*A. True*

*B. False*

## Question 4

You cannot be truly responsible for the way you are because

- A. you cannot do otherwise than you do*
- B. determinism is true*
- C. determinism is false*
- D. in certain crucial respects you cannot have intentionally brought it about that you are as you are now*

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Review

Review  
Questions

The Libet  
Experiments

# 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