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Title	A naturalistic approach to freedom and responsibility
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Description	SOCREAL 2013 : 3rd International Workshop on Philosophy and Ethics of Social Reality 2013. Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, 25-27 October 2013. Session 4 : Agency, Responsibility, and Intentionality
Citation	Proceedings of SOCREAL 2013 : 3rd International Workshop on Philosophy and Ethics of Social Reality 2013, 92-95
Issue Date	2013-10-25
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/55046
Type	conference paper
File Information	11Niikawa.pdf



A naturalistic approach to freedom and responsibility

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Background

Due to the rapid development of cognitive neuroscience and pathology, a difficult and urgent problem has arisen: How should we deal with crimes of patients with psychiatric disorders?

1. Difficulty of suppressing sexual desire
2. Schizophrenia
3. Kleptomania

Background

- Armchair considerations appealing only to our intuitions seem insufficient to form such a conception.
- We have established CORE-PhiB (Cooperative Research on the Concept of Responsibility by Philosophy and Brain Science)
- First, we need to clarify what are the conditions of acting freely.
- We attempt to naturalize free will.

Background

There are two worries here:

1. It seems that the existence of free will is incompatible with the scientific view of the world, regardless of determinism or indeterminism (Inwagen 2000; 2008)
2. It seems very unclear how cognitive neuroscience can be associated with the philosophical disputes over free will.

These suggest that perhaps free will cannot be, in principle, characterized in a naturalist way.

1. Can free will be naturalized?

The first worry: isn't free will incompatible with the scientific views of world?

"There are seemingly unanswerable arguments that demonstrate that free will is incompatible with determinism. And there are seemingly unanswerable arguments that demonstrate that free will is incompatible with indeterminism. But if free will is incompatible both with determinism and indeterminism, the concept "free will" is incoherent, and the thing free will does not exist" (Inwagen 2008, p.328)

1. Can free will be naturalized?

Terminology (Inwagen 2008, pp. 329-330):

Determinism: the past and the laws of nature together determine, at every moment, a unique future.

Indeterminism: the denial of determinism (in a scientifically admissible sense).

Free will thesis: we have free will with respect to a future action if and only if we simultaneously have the ability to perform that act and the ability to refrain from performing that act.

1. Can free will be naturalized?

An argument for its incompatibility with determinism :

1. The past and the laws of nature together determine, at every moment, a unique future (determinism).
2. If an act is determined (in the above sense) to be performed, then it is impossible that the act is not performed.
3. If it is impossible that an act is not performed, then the agent does not have the ability to refrain from performing the act.
4. If an act is determined (in the above sense) not to be performed, then it is impossible that the act is performed.
5. If it is impossible that an act is performed, then the agent does not have the ability to perform the act.
6. Therefore, it is impossible to simultaneously have the ability to perform that act and the ability to refrain from performing that act.

1. Can free will be naturalized?

An argument for its incompatibility with indeterminism:

1. It is not the case that the past and the laws of nature together determine, at every moment, a unique future (indeterminism).
2. It is the only scientifically admissible indeterministic view that if an act is undetermined, then how the agent acts on a given occasion is a matter of chance.
3. If how an agent acts on a given occasion is a matter of chance, then the agent does not have the ability to perform that act and the ability to refrain from performing that act.
4. Therefore, it is impossible to simultaneously have the ability to perform that act and the ability to refrain from performing that act.

1. Can free will be naturalized?

However...

- Many philosophers take it for granted that free will is necessary for our social practices involving responsibility.
- And many philosophers want to avoid conflicting with science.

How to deal with this troublesome situation?

Manuel Vargas (2009; 2010; 2013; forthcoming) proposes an interesting idea: revisionism about the concept of free will

1. Can free will be naturalized?

Revisionism about free will:

1. The fact that the concept of free will is incoherent only suggests that our natural and intuitive thinking of free will contains errors.
2. It is possible to revise the concept of free will so as to avoid such errors. The revision must be done in such a way that (1) the revised concept properly functions in relevant social practices such as blaming and praising and (2) the revised concept picks out the same thing as the original concept does.

1. Can free will be naturalized?

- How to revise? His own idea is that "Free will is the capacity we have to recognize and respond to moral considerations" (Vargas 2013, p.18).
- On this view, free will is compatible with both determinism and indeterminism, because it is irrelevant to these theses to have such a cognitive capacity.
- We agree to the idea that free will should be re-characterized as certain cognitive capacities.
- However, there is a methodological problem about the process by which Vargas re-characterizes the concept of free will.

1. Can free will be naturalized?

The problem: he does not justify the idea that the concept of free will is essentially associated with moral practices.

- It is begging the question to assume, without any argument, that there is such a necessary-conceptual connection between free will and moral practices.
- If there is not such a connection, then his revision of free-will concept alters the original subject.
- Given this, revisionists need to demonstrate that the revised concept inherits the essential or core element from the original one.
- All Vargas does is point out that there are philosophers who count the connection with moral practices as the essential or core element of the free-will concept. Insufficient!

2. Can free will be naturalized?

- To re-characterize the concept of free will, Vargas relies on the intuition that free will is conceptually associated with moral practices.
- Instead of appealing to an intuition of what free will must be, we begin with this question: In virtue of what do we judge whether or not our own act is freely performed?
- One plausible idea is to appeal to the phenomenology of free action (the sense of free action).

Justification:

General: It seems plausible that phenomenology has such a role in making judgments.

Specific: In experimental situations, we seem to judge whether our own act is freely performed, in virtue of the presence or absence of the phenomenology.

2. Can free will be naturalized?

Assume that we judge, in virtue of the presence or absence of the phenomenology of free action, whether or not our own act is freely performed. Under this assumption, it seems plausible to think that we can extract from the phenomenology of free action what free will is.

- The important question is: how should we extract the concept of free will from the phenomenology?

An armchair-philosophical idea is to introspectively read off the concept of free will from the phenomenology (Horgan, Tienson and Graham 2003). This does not work well!

2. How to naturalize free will?

A more naturalistic idea consists of six steps:

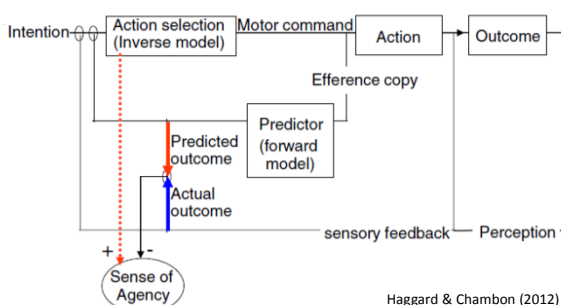
- (1) to plausibly assume that when we are in a state with the phenomenology of free action, the state represents the action as freely performed
- (2) to specify the conditions of occurrence of the phenomenology of free action
- (3) to clarify how the phenomenology occurs in the framework of cognitive neuroscience (in other words, to clarify what neural mechanism is responsible for the phenomenology).
- (4) to specify the representational function of the mechanism and then to identify what is represented by the mechanism in veridical cases as a free action.
- (5) to re-characterize the concept of free will as the capacity responsible for the production of such an action.

2. How to naturalize free will?

- Although we haven't conducted any experiment yet, there has been a bunch of relevant experimental data and considerations. It's especially important that there is evidence for the idea that an action-selection system and a comparator system is mainly responsible for the phenomenology of agency (sense of agency) (Haggard and Chambon 2012).
- On this basis, we have made a hypothesis that those systems are the core of the mechanism responsible for the phenomenology of free action.

2. How to naturalize free will?

This is a basic model of the mechanism for the sense of agency.



2. How to naturalize free will?

- It seems plausible to think that these systems **plus X** are the mechanism for the phenomenology of **free** action.
- Presumably, we can regard the mechanism as having a representational function: to represent whether an intentional act is performed.
- Given this, it seems permissible to assume that these systems **plus X** represent whether an intentional act is **freely** performed.
- We should investigate what the X is.

2. How to naturalize free will?

Two Important questions:

1. Can subjects phenomenologically distinguish between the non-free intentional action and **free** intentional action?
2. Can we conceptually make sense of non-free intentional action?
 - If we answer to both questions in negative, then we should identify the sense of agency with the phenomenology of free action (there is no X).
 - If we answer to both questions in affirmative, then presumably we can specify the mechanism for the phenomenology of free action.
 - If one is in affirmative and the other is in negative...

Conclusion

1. We have argued that (1) according to revisionism, the existence of free will can be compatible with the scientific views of the world and that (2) we may plausibly re-characterize free will in the naturalist manner, appealing to the phenomenology of free action.
2. In order to develop our program, we can take advantage of the literatures on the sense of agency.
3. As the next step, we should address these questions: (1) Is it possible to phenomenologically distinguish between non-free intentional actions and free intentional actions? (2) Is "non-free intentional action" conceptually understandable?

Thanks very much for your attention



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