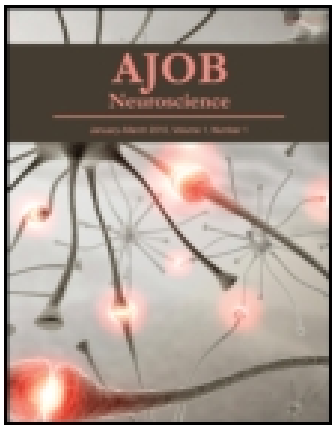

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Freedom Is as Freedom Does: Neuropragmatism, Neuroethics, and Free Will

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challenges the agent has to deal with. In this sense, the evolutionary perspective might be fruitful if inserted into a mechanistic framework. A mechanistic view of free will assumes a methodological naturalism and considers the agent as inserted in the material world and part of it. It does not presuppose supernatural capacities (while not excluding them a priori as ontological naturalism does) to justify freedom on bases other than empirical observation.

According to Mele, two forms of free will can be distinguished. The so-called *modest free will* is defined as follows: "having the ability to make—and act on the basis of—rational, informed decisions when you're not being subjected to undue forces is sufficient for having free will" (Mele 2014, 78). *Ambitious free will* results instead from adding deep openness to modest free will. In this case, "free agents have to open to them alternative decisions that are compatible with everything that has already happened and with the laws of nature" (Mele 2014, 79). An evolutionary perspective on free will would be thus compatible with a nonmetaphysical view, a view that is noncommittal about deep openness.

In this sense it would also be possible to account for personal responsibility in terms of degrees of freedom as defined by Dennett's analogy. In fact, an agent that in a specific situation had the possibility to act differently from what she did can be considered responsible for her actions. The natural endowments of our species, following from evolution, are roughly the same for any individual, and criminal law builds its default position on liability on this very basis. However, for the single individual, pathologies or environmental conditions may limit the available degrees of freedom and in such cases it would be unjust to attribute responsibility and following punishment for behaviours that the subject could not control. Ultimately, if the evolutionary perspective on free will wants to be relevant and save personal responsibility, it has to deal with the general idea of alternate possibilities, albeit inserted in a mechanistic framework made up of limiting circumstances and material causes—including the machinery and the functioning of the brain.

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Freedom Is as Freedom Does: Neuropragmatism, Neuroethics, and Free Will

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Banja's (2015) evolutionary stance on free will equates its sensible meaning with freedom, "a capacity to intend and execute behavior(s) that the organism understands to be in his or her best interests" (7). Freedom is confirmable where this capacity can be observed. Akin to the way that a capacity for a certain behavior done skillfully can be operationally defined and observationally confirmed, testing for behavior done freely would be a task falling to behavioral psychology. The role of neuroscience, or neuroethics, isn't so clear. Why would freedom be anywhere in the brain, after freedom is appropriately situated with behavior? Involving the brain too centrally may be both a strength and a weakness; neurophilosophical inquiries are still needed (Mele 2015).

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Pragmatically defining free will in an abverbial manner (intentional behaving conducted freely) guarantees that any moderately indeterministic or entirely deterministic world is hospitable to it. Debating dogmatic conceptions about preset futures, mental powers, and uncaused wills seems so unscientific. Science-minded thinkers such as Dewey and Dennett disregard notions of contracausal free will, and couldn't show surprise at brain science's inability to detect opportunities for an aloof will to function somewhere in the brain. As neuroscience learns even more, neither neurophilosophy nor neuroethics should be watching out for the "essence" to freedom in the process. Must freedom still be in the head? Neuroethics should be wary about crediting a brain with harboring "intentions" or "volitions," making "choices" with a "will," or grasping "understandings" about its "interests" and "values." Brain science is transforming, replacing, or abandoning folk psychological notions about internal matters with alacrity (Brass et al. 2013; Desmurget 2013; Filevich et al. 2013; O'Doherty 2014; Uithol, Burnston, and Haselager 2014).

Neuropragmatism and its facility with pluralistic methodologies is the neurophilosophical approach best suited for grappling with this issue (Solymosi and Shook 2014). According to neuropragmatism, behavioral psychology comports with folk psychology's utility at an interpersonal level, without either of them having to satisfy reductions to subagent neural levels. The coordinations of social conduct needn't be comparable or reducible to the synchronizations of brain regions or the syncopations of connected neurons. Banja's reasonable definition and its terms can receive suitable elaborations meeting folk psychological expectations while remaining flexible about linking those terms to neural correlates. Relieved of any duty to determine freedom's neural nature, neuroethics can manage neuroscientific debunkings or deconstructions of "mental" factors involved with freely conducted behavior, while abstaining from hasty verdicts against free will, autonomy, and responsibility.

Such negative verdicts typically rely on a contentious abstract principle proffered as common sense. Banja mentions the "could have acted or chosen otherwise under identical conditions" condition for free will. This condition is best ignored by psychological or neuroscientific research. No scientific standpoint would conceptually delineate free will's essence and then empirically ask whether nature can accommodate it. Neuropragmatism recommends abduction.

Natural willing is suggested by natural facts: Many complex organisms appear to be purposefully choosing among behavioral options, so these self-regarding organisms are managing environs willfully. Among willfully chosen behaviors, some are freely chosen: Humans are observed to be deliberately conditioning each other to choose specified kinds of conduct, so self-regarding intelligent humans are (sometimes) willfully controlling their conduct freely. If, as cultural anthropology recounts, a further subset of freely controlled conduct is attached by human societies to responsibilities and then to moral expectations, then natural free willing and freely responsible conduct are linked, and the freedom of moral decisions is naturalized. If evolutionary forces have molded us to be sentient creatures culturally compelled to be free, then free we are. Freedom is as freedom does.

For us intelligent humans, in the absence of envisioned options, we don't hold ourselves responsible for conduct. From a public perspective, if a person consciously chooses from options of how to behave, however the factors to that choice may be unconsciously caused, responsibility gets attributed by the rest of us (Shepherd 2012). (Exceptions are few—medical excuses now have public acquiescence.) From a subject's perspective, people correlate reduced or absent options about what to do with less confidence in free will and control (Feldman, Baumeister, and Wong 2014). These perspectives, objective and subjective, agree that unless we are anticipating options for our actions, control and responsibility lessen or vanish. Intentions that matter have to be prospective (Szpunar, Spreng, and Schacter 2014). People are expected to choose among envisioned optional actions, so that our interests, choices, and actions are "up to us" or "voluntary." Responsibility, and hence morality, cannot be naturalized unless internal controls, intended prospects, and optional conduct are naturalizable. The brain evidently supplies its measure of control over behavior; the optionality to interesting prospects and intended conduct is the real issue. Clarifications to Banja's definition of freedom are needed.

First, "understood" prospective interests are subjective: They are whatever one happens to consider as interests, not interests that knowledge verifies or wisdom endorses. Second, interests are "best" in an expansive sense. If Danielle altruistically helps her grandmother, intentionally harming her self-interests overall, can she do so freely? "One's best interests" should include the way that I can act from a good interest that I approve, and not merely from self-interests seeming best just for me. So far, we are talking about the capacity to execute behaviors that are intended; these intended behaviors are prospectively regarded as fulfilling interests; and those interests to be fulfilled are self-evaluated interests already self-valued as good. A third issue awaits: A person deliberately drinking alcohol to excess, while believing wholeheartedly that those excessive drinks cannot be a best interest, cannot freely drink? That seems counterintuitive; weakness of will or self-inflicted abuse can be displays of freedom.

So amended, we formulate "Freedom": Person P has freedom where P is executing a behavior B while anticipating B as conducive to prospected interest(s) of P's, and P is intending (at least weakly) to do B since those interests are (while acting) valuings as good by P.

This view of Freedom has four impressive merits. First, determining whether a person acts freely comes after ascertaining whether an act is done with enough anticipation, intention, choice, and control. How freely a responsible act was done is secondary, looking next to key aspects such as uncoerced interests and thoughtful anticipations. Second, Freedom evades worries about "couldn't have

done otherwise." Where responsibility attaches to an action, its freedom isn't voided if P's control over conduct ultimately springs from causes that couldn't have been otherwise, or whether P aims at an outcome that really could have been otherwise, or whether P's valuation of an interest couldn't have been otherwise, and so on. Third, Freedom is applicable within any naturalistic worldview, and within a world strictly deterministic, or deterministic while some events lack causes, or a fairly indeterministic world.

Fourth, most importantly for neuroethics, Freedom isn't reliant on isolatable mental states or neural processes aloof from causal influence or immune from scientific elimination. Freedom doesn't require the psychological or neurological existence of intracranial intentions, anticipations, ideas, sentiments, values, choices, volitions, wills, and the like, and it doesn't demand that such matters come under subjective control or stay aloof from causal influence. Freedom ain't in the lone head, as far as neuropragmatism can tell. Neuroethics needn't feel responsible for dubious mind/brain inventories in order to constructively deal with voluntary action and freely autonomous conduct.

Freedom presumes that behaviors of free agents display anticipatings, prospectings, intendings, valuings, choosings, and achievings, and that social agents display sophisticated manners of willfully fulfilling responsibilities. Led by biological and psychological studies into intelligent organisms engaging their environs with those modes of behavior, including free behavior, brain science specifically explains the neural matters involved, in the novel terms it may require. If it is freedom we want, it's only natural.

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