

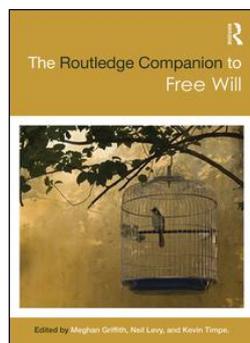
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FREE WILL AND THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF AGENCY

Tim Bayne

Introduction

For most of the twentieth Century, questions concerning free will were approached from the perspective of metaphysics and the philosophy of language, and the conscious aspects of free agency—what it's like to experience oneself as a free agent—received cursory attention at best. Things have changed over the last decade or so, and there is now a lively and rapidly growing literature devoted to questions that lie at the interface between the phenomenology of agency and accounts of free will.

Four sets of questions dominate this debate. The first set of questions are *analytical* in focus. What exactly is the phenomenology of agency? Does it have representational content? If so, what is its content? The second set of questions concern *etiological* matters. What gives rise to the phenomenology of agency? What role might the phenomenology of agency play in accounting for folk conceptions of free will? The third set of questions are *epistemic*. What role might the phenomenology of agency play in justifying claims about the existence of free will? And the fourth set of questions are concerned with *constitutive* matters. Might the phenomenology of agency be necessary for free will in some way?

Analytical Questions

Our everyday perspective on agency involves both beliefs and experiences (Bayne and Pacherie 2007). Not only do I *believe* that I am the agent responsible for the production of these sentences, I also *experience* myself as the agent responsible for their production. Although questions concerning the nature of folk psychological beliefs regarding agency are not irrelevant here, our present focus is on agentic experience.

The literature on agentic experience contains references to many kinds of conscious states, including (among many others) 'the experience of deliberation,' 'the experience of decision-making,' 'the experience of intentionality,' 'the experience of mental causation,' 'the sense of control,' 'the sense of effort,' 'the experience of choice,' and, of course, the 'experience of freedom' (Wakefield and Dreyfus 1991; Bayne 2008; Horgan et al. 2003; Nahmias et al. 2004; Pacherie 2008). Just how these various terms are

related to each other is something of a vexed question. What is clear, however, is that at the heart of the relationship between free will and the phenomenology of agency is the phenomenology (or experience) of freedom.

We can begin by distinguishing a *background* phenomenology of freedom from a *focal* phenomenology of freedom. The background phenomenology of freedom is arguably a fairly ubiquitous, albeit recessive, component of one's everyday conscious experience. It involves the sense that one is an agent with the capacity to exert a significant amount of control over one's mental and physical environment. One can enjoy experiences of this kind even when one is not acting. Although it is not without interest, the literature on the phenomenology of free will has paid relatively little attention to the background phenomenology of freedom, and has instead concentrated on *focal* experiences of freedom. Such experiences arise in contexts of deliberation and decision-making, and—to a first approximation—are characterized by the sense that one is now 'making up one's mind'—that one has the power to settle matters that are currently open.

Why think that our awareness of freedom is really experiential as opposed to taking the form of a purely cognitive state such as a judgment? The answer is provided by considering a free will sceptic—that is, someone who believes that they do not meet the conditions required for the possession of free will (whatever they might be). It seems perfectly conceivable that such a person might nonetheless *experience* themselves as exercising free will.

Not only does this consideration motivate the idea that there is a phenomenology of freedom, it also motivates the idea that the phenomenology of freedom has *representational content*. (Indeed, it also motivates the idea that the phenomenology of freedom is at least somewhat independent of belief.) Experiences of freedom are not 'raw feels' that are merely caused by or correlated with (putatively) free actions, but are instead states that represent certain actions as free. In much the way that visual experiences represent objects in one's environment as instantiating various properties (e.g., being in motion), so too experiences of freedom represent one's actions as instantiating various properties. And just as the contents of visual experience can be at odds with the contents of explicit judgment, so too the contents of agentive experiences can be at odds with the contents of explicit judgment. Although non-representational conceptions of the phenomenology of freedom are possible—for example, one could think of such states as simply the conscious aspects of the exercise of free will—I will assume the representationalist account in what follows. (From the representationalist perspective one should refer to experiences *as* of free will, but in the interests of readability I will drop the qualifier.)

How might we capture the representational content of experiences of freedom? For present purposes, we can identify a state's experiential content with its veridicality conditions: that is, what the world must be like in order for the experience to be veridical. Thus, a central project for those interested in the analysis of experiences of freedom is to give an account of its veridicality conditions.

Now, one might assume that in order to be legitimately described as an experience of freedom, an account of an experience's veridicality conditions must refer to all of the necessary conditions on freedom. For example, if free will requires the absence of a certain kind of luck, then an experience of free will would need to represent the absence of that kind of luck. If correct, this assumption would raise acute questions about the very possibility of experiences of freedom, for it is far from obvious that all of the necessary conditions on free will can be experientially represented. However, there is reason to think that this assumption can be resisted. An alternative view allows that an

experience of freedom might be legitimately so-called even if a characterization of its content doesn't refer to all of the necessary features of freedom. Consider, for example, our labels for perceptual experiences. We have no hesitation in referring to an experience as an 'experience (as) of an apple,' even though some of the properties that are necessary for being an apple—such as having a particular genetic structure—cannot be experientially represented. Similarly, one might argue that it is possible to have an experience of freedom even though some of the properties that are necessary for freedom cannot be experientially represented. In short, the relationship between the content of experiences of freedom and the nature of free will itself might be somewhat opaque, and one might not be able to recover the latter from an analysis of the former.

With these points in hand, let us turn to two core debates about the content of experiences of freedom. One of these debates concerns libertarianism, the other concerns the self. I begin with libertarianism.

I suggested earlier that the phenomenology of freedom can be understood as the sense that it is 'up to one' which of various possible states of affairs are actualized—that one has the power to settle matters that are currently open. A central question concerns how this notion of openness should be understood. Some theorists claim that it should be understood in libertarian terms. According to this view, the phenomenology of freedom would not be veridical should determinism turn out to be true. This idea can be found in the work of William of Ockham, and in our own era has been defended by Carl Ginet (1990), Keith Lehrer (1960), Timothy O'Connor (1995), Galen Strawson (2004) and John Searle (1984). As Searle has put it, "we sense the possibility of alternative courses of action built into these experiences . . . that we could be doing something else right here and now, that is, all other conditions remaining the same" (1984: 95).

Although popular, the libertarian analysis of the phenomenology of freedom has not gone unchallenged, and many theorists deny that human beings have experiences with libertarian content. Although such theorists can sometimes be read as denying that there is a phenomenology of freedom, it is perhaps more accurate to take them to recognize that there is a phenomenology of freedom while denying that it has libertarian content.

One question raised by the foregoing is whether libertarianism *could* be experientially encoded. The question is not an idle one, for there are constraints on the kinds of properties that can be experientially represented. It is possible to believe that the Taj Mahal was completed in 1653, but it does not appear to be possible for such a fact to be experientially represented. Similarly, one might argue that although libertarianism can be the object of belief, it cannot be the object of experience. An experience as of libertarian freedom would need to represent (if only implicitly) that determinism is false, and it is far from clear how that might be possible. As Richard Holton has put it, "What is it to experience one's action as not causally determined, or oneself as an uncaused cause? I have no idea how that could be the content of an experience" (2009: 416). Intuitively, claims about the falsity (or truth, for that matter) of determinism are no more amenable to experiential representation than claims about the date on which the Taj Mahal was completed.

Philosophers haven't agreed about the veridicality conditions of experiences of freedom, but what do the *folk* think? (There are a couple of reasons for wanting an account of what view the folk take of the phenomenology of freedom. For one thing, one might think that folk views of the matter are likely to be less subject to 'theoretical contamination.' Further, folk accounts of the phenomenology of freedom may ground—and

thus explain—folk conceptions of freedom.) Although studies of folk views of free will have tended to focus on what the folk *believe* about free will (e.g., Monroe and Malle 2010), there has been some work on the folk phenomenology of freedom—or, perhaps more accurately, on what the folk believe about the phenomenology of freedom. This line of research was initiated by Eddy Nahmias and colleagues (2004), who asked participants to imagine (or recall) an experience of making a difficult choice, and then asked whether that experience was best described in compatibilist terms (“I could have chosen to do otherwise even if everything at the moment of choice had been exactly the same”), incompatibilist terms (“I could have chosen to do otherwise only if something had been different—for instance, different considerations had come to mind as I deliberated or I had experienced different desires at the time”), or whether it resisted both compatibilist and incompatibilist descriptions. Nahmias and colleagues found that 62 percent of their subjects preferred the compatibilist description as compared to 35 percent who preferred the libertarian description.

Oisín Deery and colleagues (2013) have criticized this study on the grounds that asking subjects about difficult decisions may have primed them to ignore the intended incompatibilist meaning of “could have done otherwise” and parse the phrase in commitment-expressive terms. In an attempt to avoid this problem, Deery and colleagues told subjects that they (that is, the experimenters) would donate 50 cents to one of two charities, a foundation that protects the tree *Castanae Dentata* or a foundation that protects the tree *Ulmus Dentata*, depending on how the subjects chose. Subjects were instructed to decide between the two charities, and were then asked to indicate their level of agreement (on a 7-point scale) with the following statement:

When deciding which option to choose, it feels like I can either choose to donate to the endangered tree *Castanae Dentata* or choose to donate to the endangered tree *Ulmus Dentata*.

Subjects were then trained on the notion of determinism (described by the experimenters as ‘causal completeness’), and asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement:

Even though it felt like I could either choose to donate to *Castanae Dentata* or choose to donate to *Ulmus Dentata*, if causal completeness is true, then I couldn’t really have chosen differently than I did.

Deery et al. (2013) found that 31 of their 37 students gave a response of 5 or above on the 7-point scale, a response that the author took to be indicative of libertarian phenomenology.

What should we make of this study? Although it suggests that people can be led to describe their experiences of freedom in incompatibilist terms, it is far from clear that we should conclude that the folk really have incompatibilist phenomenology; indeed, it is not even clear whether we should conclude that the folk *believe* themselves to have incompatibilist phenomenology. One of the lessons of recent work in experimental philosophy is that folk responses to questionnaires are highly sensitive to the way in which questions are framed (Nichols and Knobe 2007). One possibility is that by first training subjects on the notion of causal completeness and then asking whether their phenomenology of freedom in any way conflicted with that notion Deery and

colleagues may have inadvertently primed their subjects to report incompatibilist phenomenology.

Perhaps future research will elucidate folk conceptions of the phenomenology of freedom, but at this stage matters are anything but clear. One possibility is that some of the folk (believe themselves to) have libertarian phenomenology whereas other folk (believe themselves to) have compatibilist phenomenology. This proposal gains some support from the finding that there are significant individual differences in folk conceptions of free will (Feltz and Cokely 2009). Another possibility—floated by Nahmias et al. (2004)—is that certain kinds of actions may be associated with libertarian experiences whereas other kinds of actions may be associated with compatibilist experiences. Perhaps the only thing that can be said with any certainty at this point is that questions about the content of folk experiences of freedom are open ones.

If the veridicality conditions of experiences of freedom are not libertarian in nature, then what are they? Describing the phenomenology of freedom as ‘compatibilist’ doesn’t really provide a positive characterization of its content. Close inspection of the literature reveals that the compatibilist approach can be developed in a variety of ways. According to *some*, the feeling of freedom “simply discloses that we were able to act in accord with our strongest desire at the time, and that we could indeed have acted otherwise if a different motive had prevailed at the time” (Grünbaum 1952). Other compatibilists argue for a rather bolder—and, in my view, significantly more plausible—conception of the phenomenology of freedom. For example, Richard Holton claims that in choosing we experience ourselves as settling issues that are psychologically open for us—“our experience tells us that our choice is not determined by our beliefs and desires, or by any other psychological states . . . to which we have access” (2006: 15)—but he is at pains to emphasize that this sense of psychological openness is in no way at odds with determinism, for an action could be determined by physical causes without being determined by psychological causes.

Let me turn now to questions about the way in which the self might figure in the phenomenology of freedom. The idea that the phenomenology of freedom is self-involving in important ways is a common theme in the literature, although different authors focus on different facets of this theme. Terry Horgan has emphasized the experience of the self-as-initiator. How, he asks, should one characterize the “actional phenomenal dimension” of the act of raising one’s hand and clenching one’s fingers?

You experience your arm, hand, and fingers as being moved *by you yourself*—rather than experiencing their motion either as fortuitously moving just as you want them to move, or passively experiencing them as being caused by your own mental states.

(2015: 2; see also Horgan and Timmons 2011; Horgan et al. 2003)

Martine Nida-Rümelin has noted that the self seems to be present not only in bodily action but also in the control of attention and mental action.

A person may direct her attention upon the specific color of the sky. In doing so she will in some cases experience herself as causing the upholding of that attention during the whole period in which the attention is directed upon that specific colour.

(Nida-Rümelin 2007: 264)

And Galen Strawson suggests that there is a “radical, absolute, buck-stopping *up-to-me-ness* in choice and action,” a sense that is “indissociable from the ordinary, sane, and sober adult human sense of self” (2004: 380, 394; see also Strawson 1986/2010: 83).

These claims run counter to what we might regard as a deflationary—and perhaps traditional—view, according to which the self features in the phenomenology of agency only insofar as it functions as the ‘location’ of those mental events (or states) that are experienced as the primary causes of one’s actions. On this view, I experience myself as raising my arm only insofar as I am aware of the beliefs and desires that are responsible for this action as my beliefs and desires. Horgan, Nida-Rümelin and Strawson appear to reject this ‘place-holder’ conception of the phenomenology of the self in favor of an account according to which it is oneself *rather than* one’s mental states or events which is experienced as the cause of one’s actions.

But if the self is indeed experienced as a genuine cause of one’s actions does it follow that we have returned to some form of libertarianism, albeit a libertarianism of an agent-causal rather than event-causal variety? Although some of the quotations given above certainly invite such a view—consider Strawson’s reference to a “radical, absolute, buck-stopping *up-to-me-ness* in choice and action”—I am inclined to side with those who claim that the self is represented in agentic experience in a manner that has no bearing on the debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists (Horgan 2015; Pereboom 2015). One can experience oneself as the initiator of an action without experiencing oneself as lying outside the realm of ordinary event causation.

Although questions concerning the content of the phenomenology of freedom have dominated the debate, they are not the only questions that an analysis of the phenomenology of freedom must address. Another set of questions concerns the *distribution* of such experiences: when we do enjoy the phenomenology of freedom? (Although distribution questions apply to both background and focal forms of the phenomenology of freedom, discussion has centered on the latter.) Do experiences of freedom occur only when one attends to one’s own agency, or do such experiences characterize deliberation and decision-making even when one’s own agency isn’t the focus of one’s attention? Are experiences of freedom restricted to occasions in which one is confronted by a momentous moral decision and where the considerations on each side are equally counter-balanced (as some accounts of free will might suggest), or are they a ubiquitous feature of everyday waking life, albeit one that we may be inclined to overlook (perhaps because of their ubiquity)? These questions are contested in much the way that parallel questions about the distribution of free will itself are contested; indeed, it is possible that questions about the distribution of free will are contested precisely *because* questions about the distribution of experiences of free will are contested.

Genetic Questions

Let me turn from questions concerning the analysis of the phenomenology of freedom to questions about its genesis. What are the psychological and neural mechanisms responsible for the phenomenology of freedom? Is the phenomenology of freedom an aspect of experience enjoyed by all neurotypical human beings, or is it heavily dependent on particular forms of cultural scaffolding? Do experiences of freedom emerge early in development—perhaps with the acquisition of the capacity for intentional agency?—or do they arise only later, perhaps only as and when the child internalizes the norms associated with the reactive attitudes?

Although there is a large and rapidly growing literature on the psychology and neuroscience of agentic experience in general, little of it has any direct relevance to these questions, and detailed accounts of the genesis of the phenomenology of freedom have yet to be developed. Perhaps the most influential body of experimental work that bears on the phenomenology of freedom is that conducted by Benjamin Libet (Libet et al. 1983; Libet 1985). In these experiments, subjects are told to perform some simple motor action (such as flex their wrist) at a moment of their choosing within a specified period of time (say, 20 seconds), and that this action should be performed ‘spontaneously.’ At the same time, they are instructed to monitor their agentic experiences, and to identify the time at which they were first aware of the ‘decision,’ ‘urge’ or ‘intention’—Libet used these terms interchangeably—to act. Subjects do this by watching a clock face with a dial that rotates rapidly (once every 2560 ms). Libet referred to the judgment of the time of their ‘decision’ (‘urge,’ ‘intention’) to act as the ‘W judgment.’ While subjects were both acting and monitoring their urges (intentions, decisions) to act, Libet used an electroencephalogram (EEG) to measure their neural activity. These measurements revealed preparatory brain activity—what Libet called a type II readiness potential (RP)—prior to the action. The critical question in which Libet was interested concerned the temporal relationship between the RP on the one hand and the subjects’ W judgments on the other hand.

The EEG revealed that the RP preceded the subjects’ actions by about 550 ms. However, on average subjects reported that they felt that they had decided to move only 200 ms prior to the action (dating that point to the onset of muscle activity initiating the movement). In other words, there appeared to be a gap of about 350 ms between the RP and the point at which subjects claimed to be aware of their decision (urge, intention) to act. Libet argued that the gap of 150 ms between the agent’s conscious decision and the onset of the action allowed for a kind of free will in the form of conscious veto, but many theorists have seen in Libet’s results the death-knell of free will. For example, William Banks and Susan Pocket (2007) describe Libet’s experiments as providing “the first direct neurophysiological evidence in support of [the idea that perceived freedom of action is an illusion]” (2007: 658).

This conclusion might be challenged on many grounds (see, for example, Bayne 2011; Mele 2009), but here I am interested in the Libet paradigm only insofar as it raises questions about the phenomenology of freedom. One question concerns whether the kinds of actions elicited in these experiments—‘Libet actions’—are genuine examples of free will. Although Libet took himself to have studied an “incontrovertible and ideal example” of a free act (Libet et al. 1983: 640), not everyone shares his view. Adina Roskies, for example, claims that Libet actions are at best “degenerate” examples of free will, and suggests that we ought to focus on actions that are grounded in our reasons and motivations if we are interested in “how awareness and action are related insofar as they bear on freedom and responsibility” (Roskies 2011: 19). In addressing this issue, one might consider whether Libet actions involve the phenomenology of freedom, for if they do then there is at least a *prima facie* case for regarding them as genuine examples of free will despite their lack of integration with the agent’s reasons and motivations.

A second question concerns the content of the phenomenology of freedom as it occurs in Libet actions. On one reconstruction of his argument, Libet is assuming that the experience of agency represents itself as initiating the relevant bodily action. It is this assumption, which is supposedly at odds with the neuroscientific findings, for the

claim is that the bodily action is initiated by the readiness potential, which occurs some 350 milliseconds prior to the experience of agency. Leaving to one side the question of whether the readiness potentially really does function as the point of origin of the relevant action, we might ask whether experiences of agency represent themselves as initiating actions. It is far from clear that they do. One experiences oneself as initiating the action, but it is highly doubtful whether one experiences one's own experiences of agency as initiating one's actions (Bayne 2006; Horgan 2010).

In addition to questions about the genesis of the phenomenology of freedom, one might also ask about the role that the phenomenology of freedom plays in grounding folk beliefs about free will. Just as many of our folk beliefs about the physical world can be explained by appeal to perceptual experience, so too one might suggest that many of our folk beliefs about free will can be explained by appealing to agentic experience. Perhaps, as Galen Strawson claims, "The true centre of our commitment to belief in freedom lies . . . in our experience of our own agency" (1986/2010: 80). Call this the *empiricist* account of (belief in the existence of) free will.

The most straightforward version of the empiricist approach takes the folk conception of free will to be simply read off from agentic experience. Should it turn out that (significant numbers of) the folk have a libertarian conception of free will, then one might explain why this is the case by appealing to the fact that (significant numbers of) the folk have libertarian experiences of freedom. However, there are also less straightforward versions of the empiricist approach. For example, one might appeal to the Spinozan idea that we are simply unaware of the causes of our behavior, and infer on that basis that our actions are uncaused. As Nichols (2012) has pointed out, this proposal stands in need of supplementation, for we don't typically regard an event as uncaused simply because we fail to experience its cause. How might it be patched up? Nichols makes the plausible suggestion that the folk assume that any causes of their actions would need to be introspectively available. Given that many of our actions don't appear to have introspectively discernible sufficient psychological causes, the folk conclude that such actions don't have fully sufficient causes.

Some version of the empiricist account of belief in libertarian free will is very appealing, but it is not the only approach on the market. For example, one might argue that the appeal of libertarianism is due to a certain picture of what real moral responsibility requires (Nichols 2004). The idea, roughly, is that the folk assume both that we enjoy deep moral responsibility for many of our actions and that deep moral responsibility requires libertarian free will, and on that basis of these assumptions draw the inference that we possess libertarian free will.

Of course, the foregoing presupposes that the folk have a libertarian conception of free will, and that assumption is contested (Nahmias et al. 2005, 2006; Turner and Nahmias 2006). Although there is some cross-cultural research on folk conceptions of free will (Sarkissian et al. 2010), the vast majority of quantitative data we have concerns the views of Western undergraduates, and such views might not be representative of folk views in general. My own view is that it is highly plausible that at least some of the folk within contemporary Western society have at least some degree of commitment to libertarianism. But it is worth noting that the empiricist approach might still be of interest even with respect to folk views of free will that are compatibilist in character, for here too we can ask whether the commitment to a certain version of compatibilist free will might be grounded in the phenomenology of freedom.

Epistemic Questions

What role might experiences of freedom play in debates about the existence of free will? Although some libertarians have explicitly rejected the suggestion that introspection provides evidence for their view (van Inwagen 1983; see Guillon 2014 for discussion), a number of libertarians have appealed to agentic experience in order to justify their position. Libertarianism, they claim, is *pro tanto* justified in virtue of the fact that we experience ourselves as exercising libertarian free will (Campbell 1951; Lehrer 1960; O'Connor 1995).

Engaging with this argument in detail goes beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is possible to identify some of the general issues that it raises. First, unlike a number of other arguments that have been offered for libertarianism, the argument from experience does justice to the fact that libertarianism is at best a contingent truth and not something that one would expect to follow from purely *a priori* considerations. Second, the argument is on firm ground insofar as experiential content is typically regarded as a legitimate source of evidence. Having an experience with the content that P is usually regarded as a source of warrant for believing that P is the case. Just as it is reasonable to regard visual experiences (as) of one's hand as moving as providing one with *pro tanto* justification for the claim that one's hand is moving, so too it would seem reasonable to regard the experience (as) of oneself as acting freely as providing oneself—and indeed others, perhaps—with evidence that one is acting freely.

But although *prima facie* plausible, the argument from agentic experience faces serious objections. Some objections attempt to *undercut* the evidential force of agentic experience. One kind of undercutting objection appeals to the existence of introspective disputes about the phenomenology of freedom. Even if a subject *does* experience herself as having libertarian freedom, the mere fact that libertarian construals of the phenomenology of freedom are contested arguably undermines the justification that would otherwise be provided by her experience. Another undercutting objection appeals to the possibility that the phenomenology of freedom is cognitively penetrated, and that experiences as of libertarian free will (for example) are grounded in a prior commitment to the existence of libertarian free will. If the phenomenology of freedom were subject to top-down expectations in this way then there would be an important respect in which the argument from experience would be undercut: although individuals who were unaware that their experiences of freedom were dependent on their expectations might be justified in taking themselves to have libertarian free will, those privy to the relevant facts would not be so justified. I know of no evidence that the phenomenology of freedom is dependent on expectation in this way, but there is some evidence that certain aspects of agentic experience can be modulated by expectation (Desantis et al. 2011).

But perhaps the strongest objections to the argument from experience are *rebutting* objections. Rather than attempting to undermine the evidential force of appeals to agentic experience as undercutting objections do, rebutting objections claim that the *pro tanto* evidence provided by agentic experience is outweighed by competing considerations. There is an extensive body of research in cognitive science detailing a myriad of ways in which our actions and decisions are influenced by factors of which we are not conscious, and the Spinozan idea that our actions have causes of which we are not aware is more compelling now than it has ever been. If the processes responsible for the phenomenology of freedom are oblivious to some of these factors, then the experiences

generated by those processes might erroneously represent one's decisions as 'open' when in fact they are 'settled.' In summary, even if the phenomenology of agency has libertarian content, attempts to justify libertarianism by appealing to such content are unlikely to succeed.

Constitutive Questions

Let me conclude this chapter by considering a question that is one of the most interesting but least explored questions in this neighborhood: is there a constitutive relationship between free will and the phenomenology of freedom? It is, I assume, possible to experience oneself as a free agent without actually being a free agent, but is it possible to be a free agent without experiencing oneself as free?

A number of authors have advanced accounts of free will according to which the answer to this question is 'no.' For example, Carl Ginet claimed that a free action must possess what he called the "actish" phenomenal quality (Ginet 1990, 1997). Although it is not entirely clear what Ginet meant by "the actish phenomenal quality," he seems to have taken agentive experience of some kind to be a constitutive feature of free will. A more thorough examination of this issue can be found in Galen Strawson's book *Freedom and Belief*. In that work, Strawson defends the claim that the experience of freedom is a constitutive condition on its possession. His central argument for this view involves an appeal to creatures which are stipulated to have all of the cognitive capacities necessary for free will, but lack any experience of themselves as ultimately responsible for what they do. Strawson claims that such creatures couldn't possess genuine free, and hence that the experience of oneself as free is a constitutive feature of free will.

I have a certain amount of sympathy for Strawson's claim, but many will remain unmoved by it. In his review of Strawson's book, Thomas Nagel expressed skepticism on precisely this point, asking why it wouldn't be possible for a person to act freely while laboring under the illusion that they had no freedom? At this point what is needed is an account of *why* the experience of freedom might be a constitutive feature of free will itself. Unfortunately, Strawson provides no such account, and confesses that he is himself puzzled as to why freedom might require the experience thereof (Strawson 1986/2010: Appendix A).

There are two sorts of answers one might give as to why the experience of freedom is required for free will. One account centers on the *epistemic* properties of the phenomenology of freedom. Roughly speaking, the idea is that in order to be truly free, an agent must possess non-inferential knowledge of its own freedom, and that in turn requires that it experience itself as free. Another account centers on the role that the phenomenology of freedom might play in allowing an individual to *control* his or her actions. In order to have the kind of control over one's agency that true freedom requires—the thought runs—the existence of this control must itself be experientially manifest to the agent. Neither of these two proposals has received much attention in the literature, and it would be premature to speculate on what sustained examination of them might reveal. My own hunch is that neither proposal is able to provide any support for the claim that the phenomenology of freedom is metaphysically necessary for free will, but that one or other of these proposals might provide some support for the claim that the actions of creatures like us can be free only insofar as they are experienced as free.

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Further Reading

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- Horgan, T., Tienson, J., and Graham, G. (2003) "The Phenomenology of First-Person Agency," in S. Walter and H.D. Heckmann (eds), *Physicalism and Mental Causation: The Metaphysics of Mind and Action*. Exeter: Imprint Academic, pp. 323–40. (The paper that has arguably done the most to spark the recent interest in the phenomenology of agency.)
- Mylopoulos, M. and Lau, H. (2014) "Naturalizing Free Will: Paths and Pitfalls," in A. Mele (ed.), *Surrounding Free Will: Philosophy, Psychology, Neuroscience*. Oxford University Press, pp. 123–44. (Argues that there is no reason to assign any significant weight to phenomenology in evaluating theories of free will.)
- Nahmias, E., Morris, S., Nadelhoffer, T., and Turner, J. (2004) "The Phenomenology of Free Will," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 11: 162–79. (An important paper that sets out some of the central debates surrounding the phenomenology of free will.)

Related Topics

Neuroscientific Threats to Free Will
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