

“A Degenerate Case of Action”

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Sted: rom 210, Sydneplassen 12/13

Abstract

A recent short paper that achieved a large amount of media attention, “Neuroscience vs. Philosophy: Taking Aim at Free Will?” (Nature 477, 23-25 (2011)), discussed experiments using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) of the brain that purport to cast into doubt the reality of free will. In this talk, I will first give a quick overview of these experiments and the claims made on their behalf. Second, I will suggest that the entire conception of free will supposedly at stake in these experiments is a bogus one. Third, I will argue that whatever philosophical relevance these fMRI studies have is due to their exploiting what I will call a “degenerate case” of action, a case that only seems plausible against the background of very tendentious Cartesian assumptions about humans and human action.