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Neurophilosophy of free will: from libertarian illusions to a concept of natural autonomy

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Abstrak

Beyond a doubt, neuroscience has become as important to contemporary philosophy as physics and evolutionary theory were to past modern philosophy. This development questions the general liaison of science and philosophy. It requires that we first outline our concept of philosophy before we carefully explore neurophilosophy?s research ventures. Anyone defining philosophy as a discipline dealing with issues irrelevant to empirical science is likely to reject or oppose the endeavors of neurophilosophy. My experience and opinion is that philosophical questions inevitably arise at a certain stage within scientific work in progress, unintentionally and in spite of the fact that the scientists involved might themselves prefer to ignore them. This is decidedly true for any science investigating the ?soul?s organ.? Neuroscience already investigates such classical philosophical topics as consciousness, thought, meaning, language, aesthetics, and death?just to mention a few. Philosophers in tune with the state of the art should, in turn, reach out and embrace the wealth of research findings and ideas provided by neuroscience. Why? Philosophy?s primary concern, writes Thomas Nagel, is ?to question and understand very common ideas that all of us use every day without thinking about them? (Nagel 1987, p. 5). Science also questions and reconsiders these general pet notions in light of new empirical findings. Philosophical fantasy frequently sails past the real data, but it also tends to assimilate recent empirical findings to our commonplace experience. Good philosophy needs a dab of speculation, which, however, should be firmly anchored in historical and empirical knowledge.