

Phenomenal Abilities: Incompatibilism and the Experience of Agency

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Abstract:

Incompatibilists often claim that we experience our agency as incompatible with determinism, while compatibilists challenge this claim. We report a series of experiments that focus on whether the experience of having an ability to do otherwise is taken to be at odds with determinism. We found that participants in our studies described their experience as incompatibilist whether the decision was (i) present-focused or retrospective, (ii) imagined or actual, (iii) morally salient or morally neutral. The only case in which participants did not give incompatibilist judgments was when the question was explicitly about whether one's ignorance of the future was compatible with determinism. This lends empirical support to claims made by incompatibilists about the experience of agency, while also showing that compatibilist accounts of ability are inadequate to the reported phenomenology. Our results also inform recent debates about the presuppositions of deliberation.

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