

PHIL 255  
**Week 10: Free Will**  
 Paul Thagard

Freedom  
 Determinism  
 Will  
 Please turn off and put away all electronics.



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## Why Free Will Matters

Self-image: I am free.  
 Morality: Responsibility requires free will.  
 Politics: Right to liberty.



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## Alternatives



Will: Direction of action by deliberative conscious control.  
 Libertarian: People have free will.  
 (NOT POLITICAL LIBERTARIANISM!)  
 Determinism: All events have causes.  
 Hard determinism: All events have causes, so there is no free will.  
 Soft determinism (compatibilism): All events have causes but people have free will.  
 Hard *in*determinism: Not all events have causes, but mental acts do, so there is no free will.

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## Alternatives



	Free will exists	No free will
Determinism is true	Soft determinism (compatibilism)	Hard determinism
Determinism is false	1. Libertarian 2. Soft indeterminism (Sober)	Hard indeterminism

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## Support for Free Will

- Sense of free actions: I can do what I want.
- Religion: God gave people free choices.
- Dualism: Mind is not physically caused.
- Morality: Without free will, everything would be permissible, and society would fall apart.



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## Doubts about Free Will

- Future truths: You can't change the future.
- Fate, destiny, "meant to be".
- Fatalism: There's nothing you can do.
- Predeterminism:** God knows what will happen.
- Determinism: Every event has a cause.
- Indeterminism: Not every event has a cause, but human actions are caused or random.



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## Discussion Question

What evidence and arguments most clearly support the existence of free will? Do they work?

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## One-minute Essay

Please write your name clearly in the top left corner: last name, first name.

What is libertarianism?

Optional: What questions do you have about today's class?

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Isaac Newton



## Determinism

Determinism: Every event has a cause.

Evidence: success of scientific explanations, e.g. Newtonian physics.

Consequences: Everything is predictable. All mental events have causes. Hence human decisions are caused, therefore **not** free.

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CS Peirce



## Against Determinism

Peirce, tychism: There is objective chance in the universe, which explains growth, complexity, variety, diversity, mind.

Biology: Universal laws are rare. Causality is probabilistic. Mechanisms are regular, but not deterministic. E.g. neuron firing. Chaos.

Quantum indeterminacy: Quantum events, e.g. photon transmission and radio decay, are partially random.

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Daniel Dennett



## Soft Determinism

Compatibilism: Free will and determinism are compatible.

Your actions are FREE if:

You could have done otherwise if you had chosen.

Your internal mental processes are not disrupted by disease, drugs, etc.

You are not externally coerced.

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## Discussion Question

Which is more plausible, hard or soft determinism?

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Elliott Sober 

## Soft INdeterminism

Compatibilism: Free will and indeterminism are compatible.

Your actions are FREE if:

- Your actions are not randomly produced.
- Your internal mental processes are not disrupted by disease, drugs, etc.
- You are not externally coerced.

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Benjamin Libet 

## Mental Causation

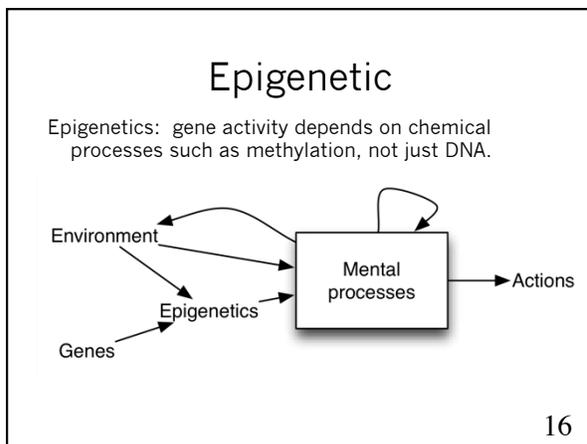
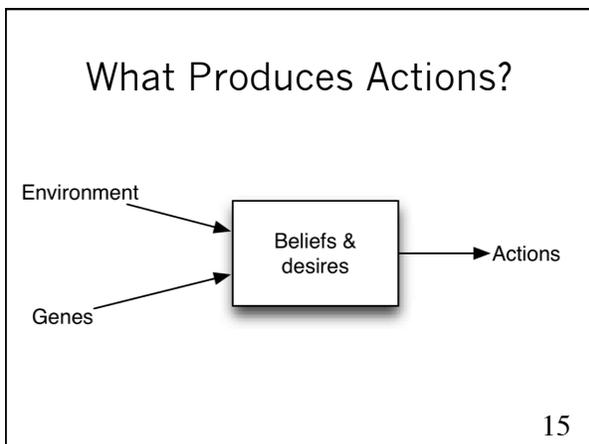
The key issue is *not* determinism vs. indeterminism.

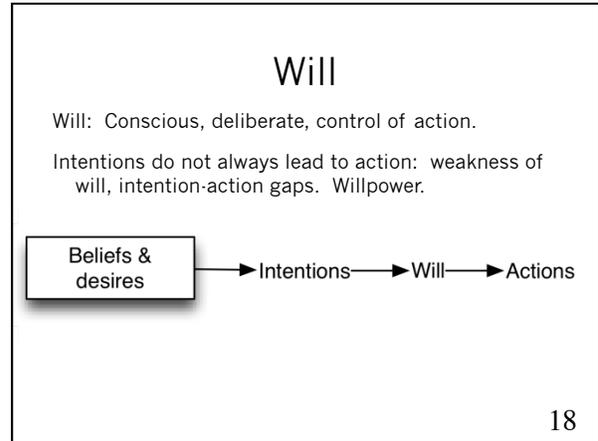
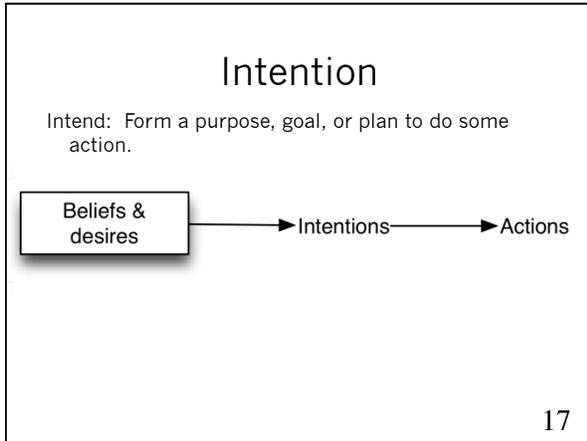
What matters is *how* decisions are produced.

Dualism: Soul makes the decision, freely.

Mind-brain identity: How does the brain produce decisions? What are the mechanisms, i.e. the interacting parts that lead to decisions and actions?

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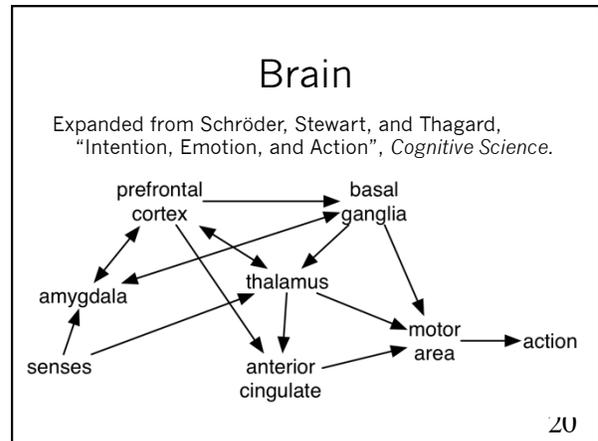




### Discussion Question

When and why do your intentions not lead to desired actions?

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Daniel Wegner



## Implications

Causation of action may be deterministic or not, depending on whether neurons are deterministic (noise, quantum).

Causation of action is far more complicated than merely resulting from conscious deliberation (will).

Conscious experience may be effects, not causes, of decision (Libet, Haynes).

Whether an action is consciously affected is not under conscious control (fatigue, stress, glucose, cognitive load).

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## Conclusions

Will (conscious, deliberative control of action) is rare or nonexistent.

Causation of action is largely independent of will.

So, free will is rare or nonexistent.

Hard indeterminism: brain processes may be partly uncaused, but the known causes show that will and hence free will are ineffective.

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## Do Not Despair!

Even without free will, life is still meaningful.

Meaning comes from love, work, and play, based on human needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy.

Morality survives: An act is right if its consequences satisfy human needs.

Responsibility survives: Hold people responsible when doing so has good consequences.

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