

Bio-Agency and Natural Freedom

Anne Sophie Meincke (PI)

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In everyday life, we take ourselves to be agents who could have decided and, hence, acted differently from how they actually did. However, within contemporary philosophy of action, free will in this robust sense is mostly doubted as it is believed to clash with the fact that humans are part of nature. The substantive and widely shared assumption in the background is that nature is a mechanistic system, governed by deterministic laws. Given the power of this assumption, so-called libertarians struggle hard to defend the existence of free will. Their appeal to indeterminism is contentious and threatens to turn our actions into a matter of chance. It seems that any attempt to naturalise free will and the agency that we take to flow from it will inevitably result in eliminating what we sought to explain.

The project endeavours to offer a way-out of this dilemma by invoking a new bio-processual perspective. The core thesis is that human agency is a (sophisticated) case of bio-agency, and free will a natural means of survival and well-being for bio-agents, both being grounded in the processual constitution of living systems. Drawing on cutting-edge findings in systems biology, neurobiology, behavioural biology and evolutionary biology and engaging with current debates on bio-agency in the philosophy of biology, the project will put forward a metaphysical account that naturalises agency and free will without thereby eliminating them. Humans, like many other organisms, are *naturally free* thanks to the fundamental plasticity of life that lies halfway between determinism and mere randomness.

The project will proceed in three steps. It will

- 1) reveal the dilemma faced by contemporary philosophy of action to be a twofold dilemma of agency and free will and identify its metaphysical roots in a neglect of both the biological and processual nature of the agents at stake;
- 2) develop a novel bio-processual metaphysics of actions and agents, including a bio-processual account of action causation, that acknowledges actions as a particular form of the interactions with the environment any organism, qua dynamical system, has to perform in order to maintain itself;
- 3) demonstrate how this new framework, together with a corresponding notion of biological indeterminism that is not identical with randomness, facilitates a satisfactory version of libertarianism ('bio-processual libertarianism').

The project breaks new ground in defeating free will scepticism on a fresh metaphysical basis that is informed by insights from today's biology. It is strongly committed to interdisciplinary research and exchange, involving interactions with scholars from various fields through meetings, workshops and joint publications. The project leader, Dr Anne Sophie Meincke, will work closely with a group of national and international collaborators consisting of metaphysicians, philosophers of biology and biologists.