

## ***Free Will, Neuroscience and Mechanistic Explanation: Reassessing the Threat from Unconscious Initiation of Action***

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A closer look at the literature on so-called ‘neuroscientific threats to free will’ reveals that, in the most pressing cases, the success of these empirical challenges - whether or not they compel us to endorse a form of free will skepticism - hinges upon the correct formulation of their *empirical premise* viz. the claim that the relevant neuroscientific results can be plausibly said to establish. In this paper I argue for the novel view that the empirical premise in neuroscientific arguments against free will cannot, as has previously been assumed, be ascertained within the purview of philosophy of mind and free will alone, but instead requires close attention to the broader *explanatory project* of cognitive neuroscience, discussion of which is prevalent in contemporary philosophy of science (Craver 2007). Taking the most substantial and pressing threat to free will from neuroscience as my focus- the threat from *unconscious initiation of action* - I argue that, on a mechanistic reading, such a threat is rendered illusory. This is based on two considerations (i) that initiation incontrovertibly implies the presence of a *causal* relation between the initiating event and the event which is initiated and (ii) that, according to standard readings, constitutive mechanistic phenomena bear a *constitutive*, non-causal relation to their component parts in a manner which precludes *interlevel causation* between a component acting-entity (indicated by unconscious brain activity) and a constitutive phenomenon (volitional free action) required for the notion of initiation to get off the ground. I conclude with a discussion of how the explanatory account of neuroscience detailed by the new mechanists might prove to be of further, positive, use to the free will debate, providing the foundations of an empirically validated account of how free will looks when its’ working.

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