

## Free Will and the Brain

Neuroscientific evidence has educated us in the ways in which the brain mediates our thought and behavior and, therefore, forced us to critically examine how we conceive of free will. This volume, featuring contributions from an international and interdisciplinary group of distinguished researchers and scholars, explores how our increasing knowledge of the brain can elucidate the concept of the will and whether or to what extent it is free. It also examines how brain science can inform our normative judgments of moral and criminal responsibility for our actions. Some chapters point out the different respects in which mental disorders can compromise the will and others show how different forms of neuromodulation can reveal the neural underpinning of the mental capacities associated with the will and can restore or enhance them when they are impaired.

Walter Glannon is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Calgary. His research interests are primarily in the areas of bioethics and neuroethics and he has published on free will and moral and criminal responsibility, with a focus on how cognitive and clinical neuroscience has influenced how we conceive of and assess these concepts and associated practices. His publications include *Brain, Body and Mind: Neuroethics with a Human Face* (2011), *Bioethics and the Brain* (2007) and *Biomedical Ethics* (2005). In 2010 he was the recipient of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation for the project 'Diminishing and Enhancing Free Will'. *Free Will and the Brain* is the product of this project.

# Free Will and the Brain

*Neuroscientific, Philosophical, and Legal  
Perspectives*

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*Edited by*  
Walter Glannon



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-03603-1 – Free Will and the Brain  
Edited by Walter Glannon  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107036031](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107036031)

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First published 2015

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Free will and the brain : neuroscientific, philosophical, and legal perspectives / edited by Walter Glannon

pages cm

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-107-03603-1 (Hardback)

1. Free will and determinism. 2. Brain-Research. I. Glannon, Walter, editor.

BF621.F74 2015

123'.5-dc23 2014038618

ISBN 978-1-107-03603-1 Hardback

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## Preface

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The chapters from an international group of researchers and scholars in this book explore how our increasing knowledge of the brain can elucidate the concept of the will and whether or to what extent it is free. They also examine how brain science can clarify our normative judgments of moral and criminal responsibility without explaining them away. The book is distinctive in its interdisciplinary approach to free will, showing that we can gain a better understanding of it when philosophy, clinical neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and criminal law inform and are informed by each other in the study of human thought and behavior. The volume is also distinctive in that a number of the authors are both neuroscientists and philosophers, which gives them expertise in and a unique perspective from which to examine the normative aspects of free will and responsibility as well as the neurobiological underpinning of the mental capacities associated with them. Some of their insights into free will come from treating actual patients with mental disorders that impair the will. Many of the chapters are written by authors from overlapping or complementary disciplines, resulting in a book that is more richly textured than other works addressing these questions solely from the view of philosophy. Another prominent feature of the book is that many of the authors are at the forefront of research in psychology, clinical and forensic psychiatry, functional neurosurgery, and legal theory. All of this makes the volume a valuable source of information, analysis, and discussion of how brain function enables and how brain dysfunction disables the capacity for reasoning, decision-making, and action.

I thank my editors at Cambridge University Press, Hetty Marx and Rebecca Taylor, for supporting this project as well as for their guidance and excellent advice. I am also grateful to the three reviewers commissioned by Cambridge University Press for their constructive comments on the book proposal – Jonathan Lowe, Peter Clarke, and Steven Quartz. I regret that Professor Lowe, who died in January 2014, did not live to see this book. The following comments he made on the book concisely capture its aim: “Recent developments in neuroscience, drawing on

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findings from brain-imaging experiments and the like, have prompted exaggerated and philosophically naïve claims about the ‘illusory’ character of free will, and have been met with equally ill-conceived criticisms from some scientifically uninformed philosophers. The present volume promises to be a valuable corrective to such fruitless debates and a genuine meeting of minds.” Most of all, I am grateful to the authors for their contributions to the book. This project was made possible in part through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the editor and authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the John Templeton Foundation.

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