

The influence of free will beliefs on intentional motor control and social perception

Philosophers have discussed the question whether it matters if people believe in free will or not for centuries. Some have argued that it does not matter while others thought it would be catastrophic for our society if people start to question the existence of free will. Only a decade ago, this theoretical question has been started to be addressed empirically. Social psychological research suggests that disbelief in free will might have negative social consequences. Based on this research, we became interested in the question whether disbelief in free will also affects intentional motor control and basic social perception. Our findings suggest that free will beliefs are related to sense of agency, intentional motor control and error processing. More recently, we could also demonstrate that free will beliefs are related to the way we perceive our social environment: people high on free will beliefs perceive the behavior of others as more intentional. I will discuss potential mechanisms that might explain the influence of high-level free will beliefs on low-level cognition and social perception.