

Freedom and free will: impact of phrasing on intuitions

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Recent studies have investigated layperson intuitions about free will and related concepts. Some have found actions born of free will to be associated with deliberation and reaching goals (e.g. Stillman, Baumeister, and Mele, 2011). However, others have found spontaneous actions with little to no consequence are rated as more free (e.g. Deutschlander, Pauen, and Haynes, 2017). Perhaps asking about free will versus free action probes two distinct concepts. We asked laypeople (n=626; MTurk) to rate scenarios according to concepts related to free will (freedom, free will, will, ability to do otherwise, individual expression, and being in control of a decision; between subjects). Scenarios varied by consequences (lunch vs. new job; within subjects) and by decision type (picking decision vs. easy choosing decision vs. difficult choosing decision (see Ullman-Margalit and Morgenbesser, 1977); within subjects). Results indicated that the consequences of a decision did not impact free-will-ratings overall ($p = 0.873$), nor

did arbitrary vs deliberate overall ($p = 0.176$; however, there was a significant interaction with type of question asked, $p < 0.001$). There was a significant main effect of the type of question asked ($p < 0.001$). Bayesian analysis further suggests little to no effect of consequence ($BF_{inc}=0.338$), while question type, decision type, and interaction between the two are significant ($BF_{inc}=inf.$ for all). In-depth results, discussion of implications, and potential follow-ups are included.