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Your Brain as the Source of Free Will Worth Wanting: Understanding Free Will in the Age of Neuroscience

Eddy Nahmias

In Gregg Caruso & Owen Flanagan (eds.), *Neuroexistentialism: Meaning, Morals, and Purpose in the Age of Neuroscience*. Oxford University Press (forthcoming)

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Abstract

Philosophical debates about free will have focused on determinism—a potential ‘threat from behind’ because determinism entails that there are conditions in the distant past that, in accord with the laws of nature, are sufficient for all of our decisions. Neuroscience is consistent with indeterminism, so it is better understood as posing a ‘threat from below’: If our decision-making processes are carried out by neural processes, then it might seem that our decisions are not based on our prior conscious deliberations or reasoning. The response to this threat will require a neurophilosophical theory of mind that makes sense of the causal role of our conscious reasons and reasoning. Without such a theory, our conscious self seems bypassed by the neural processes in our brains, and this view seems to explain why many scientists assume that neuroscience challenges free will. However, I argue that most people are amenable to the possibility of a future theory of mind that is physicalist (if not reductionist), yet preserves much of our ordinary experience and understanding of conscious decision-making and self-control. I outline such a theory using the resources of causal interventionism. I argue that this view is best

understood as a minimal revision to our understanding of free will, rather than an elimination of it. And I argue that this view has more reasonable and effective implications for our moral and legal practices than an eliminativist or skeptical theory of free will.

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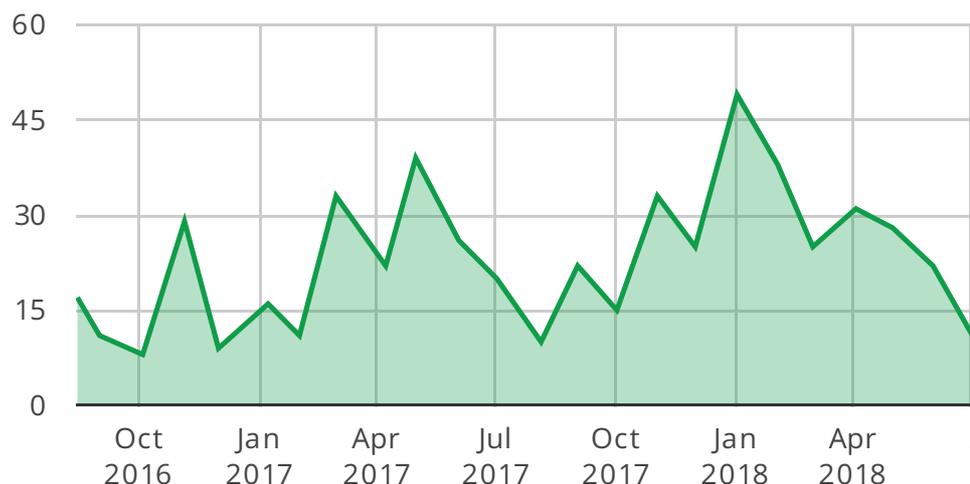
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