

**Free will: implications of state-of-the-art research in natural sciences  
for humanities and social sciences**

*Description of open post-doctoral positions within the project*

**Context of the project**

The broad goal of this multidisciplinary project is to critically investigate the concept of free will in natural science (neuroscience and physics), and to study the implications of an upgraded theory of free will for the most relevant disciplines of the social sciences and humanities. The project aims at intensive collaborations between philosophers, neuroscientists, historians and scholars from other disciplines; the project is led by two professors at the SAS-Tyumen (Dr. Louis Vervoort, senior project manager, Dr. Tomasz Blusiewicz, junior project manager). Within the project three post-doctoral fellows will be recruited. In some more detail, in a first phase the project aims at investigating the most relevant empirical findings in natural science, notably in neuroscience (and to a lesser degree in physics), relative to free will, with the aim to contribute to an enhanced definition and theory of free will. This work will involve both experiment (in neuroscience) and theory (in neuroscience and analytic philosophy). In the next phase the project will theorize the most relevant implications of the obtained results for society at large, i.e. for disciplines in social sciences and humanities, such as history, theory of law, moral theory, etc. Important questions are: how to reconcile our obvious feeling of being free agents, with recent findings in natural science ? How to conceive of moral and legal responsibility / autonomy in view of a refined concept of free will ? What are some of the most important consequences and lessons humanities and social sciences can draw from an informed debate on free will ?

**Vacant post-doc positions (3 in total) at the SAS**

**Post-doc 1 (a neuroscientist, neurobiologist or related)**

The goal of this sub-project is to contribute to the state-of-the-art neuroscientific research (both experimental and theoretical) related to free will, and to feed the findings towards the analytic philosophical work in this area.

**The ideal candidate:**

- has strong experience in setting-up and performing Libet-like experiments in neuroscience, to investigate topics related to free will, consciousness, mind-body interaction etc.
- has through his/her connections with his/her institute of origin the possibility to perform such experiments and can help the SAS team to gain access to such experiments and to actively participate to them
- has a clear interest in devising and interpreting new experiments; has strong experimental and theoretical skills
- is interested in foundational ('philosophical') questions related to free will, and to collaborate with a multidisciplinary team on foundational questions
- has a clear interest and capacity to actively collaborate with a multidisciplinary team
- has excellent command of English, notably in writing

We will also consider excellent candidates whose profile somewhat deviates from the above ideal one.

**Post-doc 2 (an analytic philosopher, e.g. philosopher of science, of mind, or related)**

The goal of this post-doctoral project is to:

- critically investigate the most prominent theories of free will existing in (analytic) philosophy and neuroscience; derive, after analytic efforts, a synthetic view leading to one or a handful of powerful 'working' definitions of free will.
- use the latest empirical findings from neuroscience (in part generated by another sub-project within the larger project) to critically revisit these prominent theories and come up with upgraded versions (definition and theory of free will), when necessary.

**The ideal candidate:**

- has experience in, and strong interest for, the question of free will as analyzed in the most prominent modern theories on free will, in philosophy and neuroscience
- has strong experience in conceptual analysis of notions related to free will, consciousness, mind-body interaction; is interested in coming to clear definitions; is well aware of the prominent theories on these notions within modern (analytic) philosophy and neuroscience
- Has experience in, or strong interest for, investigating the implications of the 'working' definition of free will in legal philosophy, history, and possibly other disciplines in humanities and social sciences
- is creative and likes to interact with scholars from various disciplines, notably neuroscience, history, law

- has excellent command of English, notably in writing

We will also consider excellent candidates whose profile somewhat deviates from the above ideal one.

### **Post-doc 3 (legal theorist)**

The goal of this post-doctoral project is to:

- Critically investigate whether and how the current legal systems (at least one in the Western world, but we are open to a comparative global expertise) are (are not?) theoretically grounded in the various historical theological/philosophical/ethical doctrines on human moral autonomy (conventionally understood as free will)
- Develop a new genealogy of the constructive moments of the dialogue between the abstract conversation on the concept of free will and legal theorists/practitioners
- Highlight the potentially obsolete spots where contemporary legal doctrines could use a more updated understanding of how philosophers and scientists define human moral autonomy, especially in the light of recent scientific discoveries in neurosciences (and possibly evolutionary biology/genetics)
- Develop a comparative case study including at least two distinct legal systems that assume a different position on the triangular continuum between the autonomous/socially/biologically conditioned origin of human decision making. The goal of this study is to understand whether/how the different philosophical points of departure (consciously stipulated in the legal doctrine or merely implicitly assumed) affect 1) legislative outcomes 2) social outcomes
- Suggest new solutions facilitating a more engaged and fruitful dialogue between 1) philosophy 2) natural sciences 3) legal theory 4) practical legislative solutions 5) penal regimes 6) resocialization methods

**The ideal candidate:** a scholar with broad-ranging expertise in legal history and theory, and with at least an active interest in the main conversations in contemporary legislative agenda. The project's main implications are predicted to concern criminal law, but if the scholar can demonstrate their applicability to international, civil, administrative or any other type of law – her insight will be welcome. The candidate must demonstrate his or her appreciation for the long historical trajectory of various legal regimes and their foundational rootedness in the philosophical debates dating back to Antiquity. Concrete expertise in history of philosophy or science is not a prerequisite – but the willingness to become familiar with the major debates and concepts will be

necessary to facilitate participation in the multidisciplinary research project. The basic intuition that major domains of legal theory and practice need a serious effort at creating a new conceptual language to remain in touch with the cutting-edge developments in philosophy and natural sciences must be shared with other team members. A candidate whose expertise, background and linguistic ability would enable him to develop an empirical comparative project (Western-Western or Western-nonWestern legal regimes) is preferable. Interest in the resocialization vs penalization/isolation debate welcome. Teamwork skills and the ability to communicate across various disciplines will be a major plus.

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Louis Vervoort, Tomasz Blusiewicz