

# Introduction

While sitting on a train with my friend and colleague Hroar Klempe, we began discussing the role of agency and agentic behavior in an individual. Our discussion included items such as: what is the nature of the Agency, the neuroscience behind it, and how does psychological thought inform and be informed by agentic processes. As the train picked up speed along the tracks, we came to the conclusion that true agency comes from constraints that are put on agency. In the absence of constraints, individuals can become overwhelmed, with truly unlimited options from which they can choose. As the train shifted tracks and shunted along the rails, our conversation continued and ranged on to assess why this was so.

This seeming incongruous conclusion led to a discussion of the differing ways in which that might be felt or experienced by people. As we continued along the rails, we began to explore these situations and circumstances. As an historian of psychology, Hroar began asking the questions and exploring through a myriad of thought experiments that how agency was and might have been explored and discussed in psychology's evolution. While he and I have some quite definitive thoughts on the matter, we believe that Roger Smith has addressed them from a truly unique perspective and are quite happy about the ensuing dialogue.

Subsequently, we also discussed the role of neuroscience in agentic behavior. Our discussion led further to conversations which I had with Matthew Clark. He and I have spent countless hours discussing, arguing, and then agreeing to explore further the nature of the neuroscience of agency. In our discussions, Matt took the lead in addressing this area of inquiry. While reviewing our discussions (which were both passionate and good natured), I came to see that the viewpoints and topics we discussed are quite well presented in the section led by William Klemm. I believe that this section allows us to look into the neuroscience of agency in a way in which we have not looked, as a discipline, before. It is exciting for me, as a psychologist and one of the editors of the *Annals* project, to see this discussion taking place among academics of varying views.

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The editorial help by Lauren Takakjian and Dakota Snyder for all of this volume is acknowledged with great gratitude.

Lastly, as the train continued toward the end of the line, Hroar and I took our discussion to the role of agency in the psychology of religious thought. It was a fascinating conversation in which we discussed the role of psychology in religion, regardless of one's religiosity. The concept of agency in religion is one which has been intriguing me for quite some time. Free will, agency, psychology, are all terms which have varying levels of acceptance and applicability to individuals depending on their faith background, or a lack of faith background at all. To lead the discussion, Phil Helsel brings an opening point to the discourse which I believe is both thought provoking and discerning. The commentaries that follow, I believe, help to take the conversation of agency in religion to a place from which further research, writing, and discourse may easily flow.

As our train reached its terminus, Hroar and I ended our discussion of the moment, promising to continue it via dialogue and writing. We enlisted the help of Matt Clark and Jaan Valsiner to make it happen, and the four of us present it to you here.

I believe it is a testament to surround ourselves by those who will inform our conversation, provoke our thoughts, and stretch our cognitive skills that we have assembled as the authors and contributors you see in this 12th edition of the *Annals of Theoretical Psychology*. As we wrote in Volume 11, we strongly believe that the place for discussion and theory in psychology is here, and the time for these discussions is now, as we strive to build and recognize theoretical psychology as a discipline which does not negate the theories which have brought psychology to where it is today, but rather to rely upon the theories and theoreticians who have gone ahead of us to develop the next generation of psychologists. This next generation will only be able to move forward by standing on the shoulders of the psychologists and theoreticians who have come before us to lay the groundwork for new thoughts, as they did for the generation of psychologists before them.

Please, join the conversation.

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Constraints of Agency

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