

U3APP 2019 Term1
Philosophy and the challenges of the 21st century

Class 3_26 February 2019: Free will, prediction and control

1. General questions arising from last class.

We will look briefly at any questions raised by last week's discussion (Super AI and computers that can outsmart humans; robots, feelings, and relationships with humans).

2. Predictive policing

We are familiar with 'police profiling' which involves justifying police surveillance or intervention on the basis of *what a person is likely to do* before any crime has been committed. Factors relied upon include character, past criminal activity, peers and associates, but also race and political affiliation.

See Attached Extract: *Predictive Policing*

The movie, *Minority Report* presents a more extreme *sci fi* version of this. In the movie, psychics are brought in to 'mind read' suspects and identify those who are intending to commit a crime. The suspect could then be restrained and treated therapeutically, before any crime was actually committed, the result being a crime free society. (See: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0181689/plotsummary>)

Modern brain-imaging techniques present us with the in-principle possibility of even more accurate predictions in the form of identifying those neural patterns that are activated when a person *intends* to perform a certain action such as murder or rape. Whilst the law has always maintained the principle of 'innocent until guilty' and that mere thoughts and mental intentions are not the same as the physical act, the increased accuracy of brain-based predictions might prompt us to re-think.

What do you think? Should we re-think the issue of predictive policing on the basis of these new technologies? Are there ethical reasons for objecting to it?

3. Free will, predictability, and the plastic brain.

Neuroscience has thrown up some contradictions: Experiments like those of Benjamin Libet seem to suggest that the gap between intention and execution of an action is illusory – hence free will is also an illusion.

See Free will: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjCt-L0Ph5o>

Also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehmGgVg5Yzl>)

And yet recent findings on brain plasticity seem to contradict this. It is claimed that the brain can change itself – that no matter how entrenched certain habits may seem, there is generally (and within certain constraints) the possibility of changing and creating a new future.

Find out what you can about "brain plasticity." This phenomenon was popularised by Norman Doidge in his book, *The Brain that Changes Itself*.

See attached article *Mind over movement*.

To what extent are individuals free to shape their own future?

As a species, do we play a role in shaping evolution? (Topic to continue next class when we look at genetic engineering, genetic and neural enhancement (transhumanism), and the Anthropocene.)

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