

Ezio Di Nucci

Automatic Actions: Challenging Causalism

Abstract:

I argue that so-called *automatic actions*—routine performances that we successfully and effortlessly complete without thinking such as turning a door handle, downshifting to 4th gear, or lighting up a cigarette—pose a challenge to causalism, because they do not appear to be preceded by the psychological states which, according to the causal theory of action, are necessary for intentional action. I argue that causalism cannot prove that agents are simply unaware of the relevant psychological states when they act automatically, because these content-specific psychological states aren't always necessary to make coherent rational sense of the agent's behaviour. I then dispute other possible grounds for the attribution of these psychological states, such as agents' own self-attributions. In the final section I introduce an alternative to causalism, building on Frankfurt's concept of *guidance*.