

## **Living without free will**

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Did you come to SAND of your own free will? I think not, despite how powerful the illusion of free will can feel. The idea of free will is deeply dualist – supposing a ‘me’ who can act and choose independently of prior conditions – and non-dual spiritual traditions reject this powerful self. Some, like Zen, lead towards a life of non-doing or non-action.

There is plenty of evidence from neuroscience to back this up, suggesting that brains need no magical interference from a mythical ‘me’. Experiments on the timing of voluntary actions throw free will into doubt; the neuroscience of volition reveals how the brain makes choices and decision with no need for a self, and experiments show that the feeling of being responsible for actions comes down to attributions we make after the fact on the basis of sequence, similarity and timing.

So if our intuitions are not to be trusted, how should we live our lives? Despite the mounting evidence, many philosophers and psychologists still believe in free will. Others claim that even if there is no free will we still have to live ‘as if’ there is. Otherwise, they claim, terrible disasters will befall us – a loss of morality, the breakdown of law and order and even of society itself. I think they are wrong and we would be better off not to delude ourselves. In any case, I am not prepared to live a lie. I will discuss the challenges of living without the illusion of conscious will.