

EINLADUNG ZUM KOLLOQUIUM

Prof. Dr. Hans Radder
(Amsterdam)

Does the Brain 'Initiate' Freely Willed Processes? A Philosophy of Science Critique of Libet-Type Experiments and Their Interpretation

In the extensive, recent debates on free will, the pioneering experiments by Benjamin Libet continue to play a significant role. It is often claimed that these experiments demonstrate the illusoriness of freely willed actions. In this paper, we provide a detailed analysis and evaluation of Libet's experiments from a philosophy of science perspective. Our analysis focuses on Libet's central notion of the 'initiation' of freely willed processes by the brain. We examine four interpretations of the notion of initiation: in terms of a cause, a necessary condition, a correlation, and a regular succession. We argue that none of these interpretations can be supported by the design and results of Libet's experiments. Significantly enough, on the basis of these experiments we cannot even conclude that each free decision, or each (freely willed) motor action, is always preceded by a readiness potential. In addition, we analyze two recent Libet-type experiments. Our general conclusion is that neither Libet's original experiments nor later Libet-type experiments can justify the claim that allegedly freely willed processes are in fact initiated by the brain.

Hans Radder is Professor of Philosophy of Science and Technology at VU University Amsterdam. He holds degrees in physics (BA and MSc.) and in philosophy (BA, MA and PhD). Principal themes in his work are: scientific observation and experimentation, the historical, epistemological and ontological significance of concepts, scientific realism, the normative and political significance of science and technology, and the commercialization of science. He published numerous articles and several books, including *In and about the World* (1996), *The World Observed/The World Conceived* (2006), and *The Material Realization of Science* (2012, revised edition). He edited *The Philosophy of Scientific Experimentation* (2003) and *The Commodification of Academic Research* (2010), and co-edited (with Alfred Nordmann and Gregor Schiemann) *Science Transformed?* (2011).

Montag, 15.10.2012
18 c.t. Uhr
Raum O.11.09

Gemeinsame Veranstaltung des Philosophischen Colloquiums und des
Kolloquiums für Wissenschaftsgeschichte und -philosophie des IZWT

Volker Remmert
Gregor Schiemann

www.izwt.uni-wuppertal.de

