

Direct and Derivative Moral Responsibility

An overlooked distinction in Experimental Philosophy

Pascale Willemsen

Moral Responsibility

1. **Epistemic Condition**
The agent needs to be aware of the moral significance of their action
2. **Control Condition**
The agent needs some relevant form of control over the action

Some version of the Principle of Alternative Possibilities

The Principle of Alternative Possibilities

An agent can only be held morally responsible if she could have done otherwise

- Principle of Alternative Actions
An agent must be able to *act* other than she actually did
- Principle of Possible Prevention
The agent must be able to not cause or to prevent a certain *outcome*



Morally responsible or not?

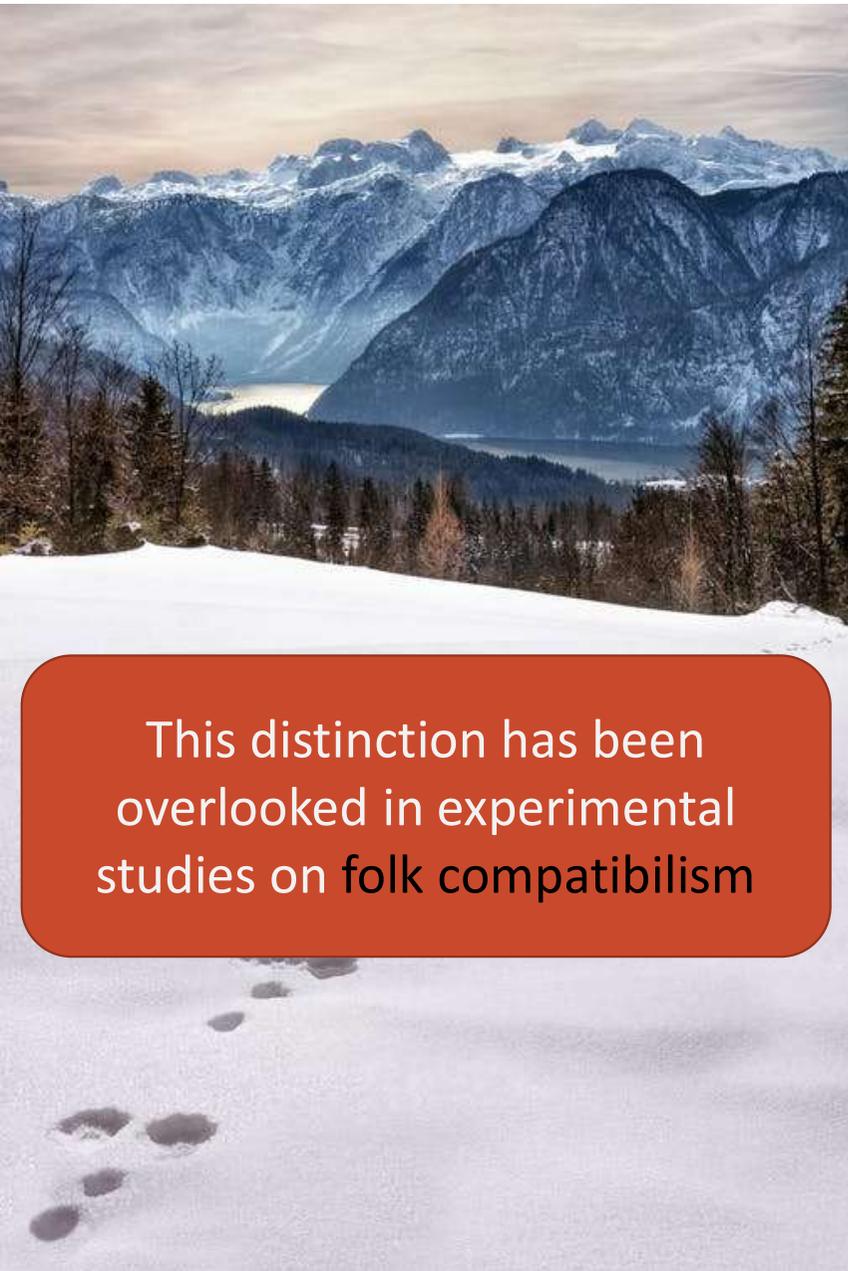
- John goes to a bar and has a few drinks
- He might drive home in his car, even though he is drunk
- John drinks anyway
- On the way home, he hits a pedestrian
- Because of the alcohol in his blood, John's reaction time is significantly reduced and he couldn't have brought the car to an earlier stop

Is John morally responsible for the accident?

We consider him morally responsible despite the fact that he didn't have control over the accident.

Does that mean that the Control Condition is not necessary for moral responsibility?

No, it does not!



This distinction has been overlooked in experimental studies on folk compatibilism

Direct vs. Derivative Moral Responsibility

Direct moral responsibility

An agent is non-derivatively responsible for X at t if they are responsible for X at t, given the Epistemic and the Control Condition

Derivative moral responsibility

An agent is *derivatively* morally responsible for X if they are morally responsible for X at t *in virtue of* being directly morally responsible for Y at t^{-1} .

Compatibilism can be natural

Delivery

A man promised to deliver a package by 4pm. He just got on the freeway. Given current traffic conditions, it is physically [impossible/guaranteed] that he can deliver the package by 4pm. As a matter of physics, it is literally [impossible/guaranteed] that he can make it by 4pm. He will arrive late.

Evaluation

A woman is evaluating her employee's performance. The employee performed excellently. Given the current condition of the woman's brain, it is physically [impossible/guaranteed] that she can give the employee a positive evaluation. As a matter of brain chemistry, it is literally [impossible/guaranteed] that she can give the employee a positive evaluation. She will give the employee a negative evaluation.



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Compatibilism can be natural

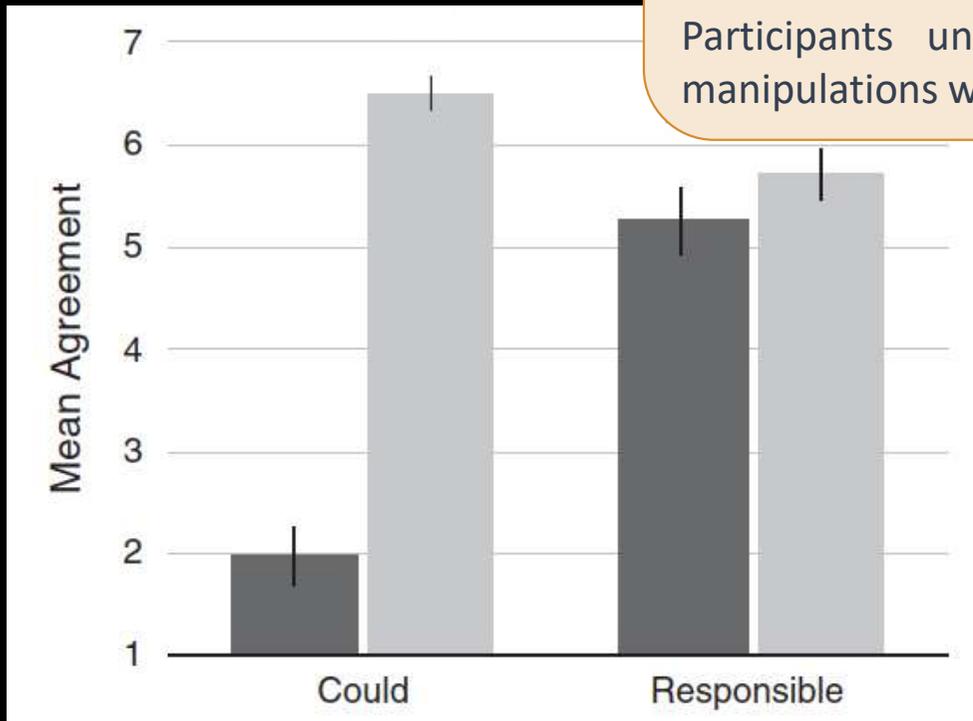
John Turri

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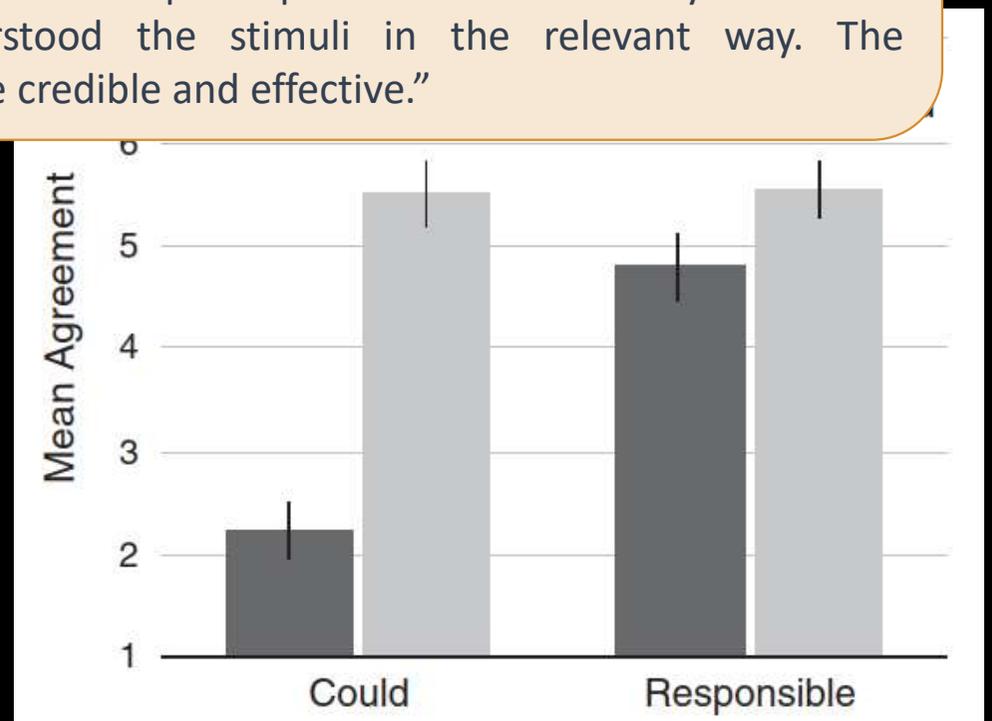


Turri's Results

“The present experiments provide the best evidence to date for natural compatibilism, completely avoiding weaknesses of prior work on the topic [...] I used brief, plain, tightly matched, and anodyne stimuli, tested multiple narrative contexts, and included multiple measures to assess how participants understood key variables. Participants understood the stimuli in the relevant way. The manipulations were credible and effective.”



“The man is **to blame** for the time he delivers the package.”



“The man is **morally responsible** for the time he delivers the package.”

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He delivery man should...

- have left earlier
- have paid more attention to the traffic news
- have planned his route more carefully
- know about alternative routes

The woman should...

- not have been drinking/taken drugs the night before
- have gone to bed earlier
- *decide not to write the evaluation right now*
- *decide to write the evaluation later (after some coffee or a break)*

Determined?! Probably not...

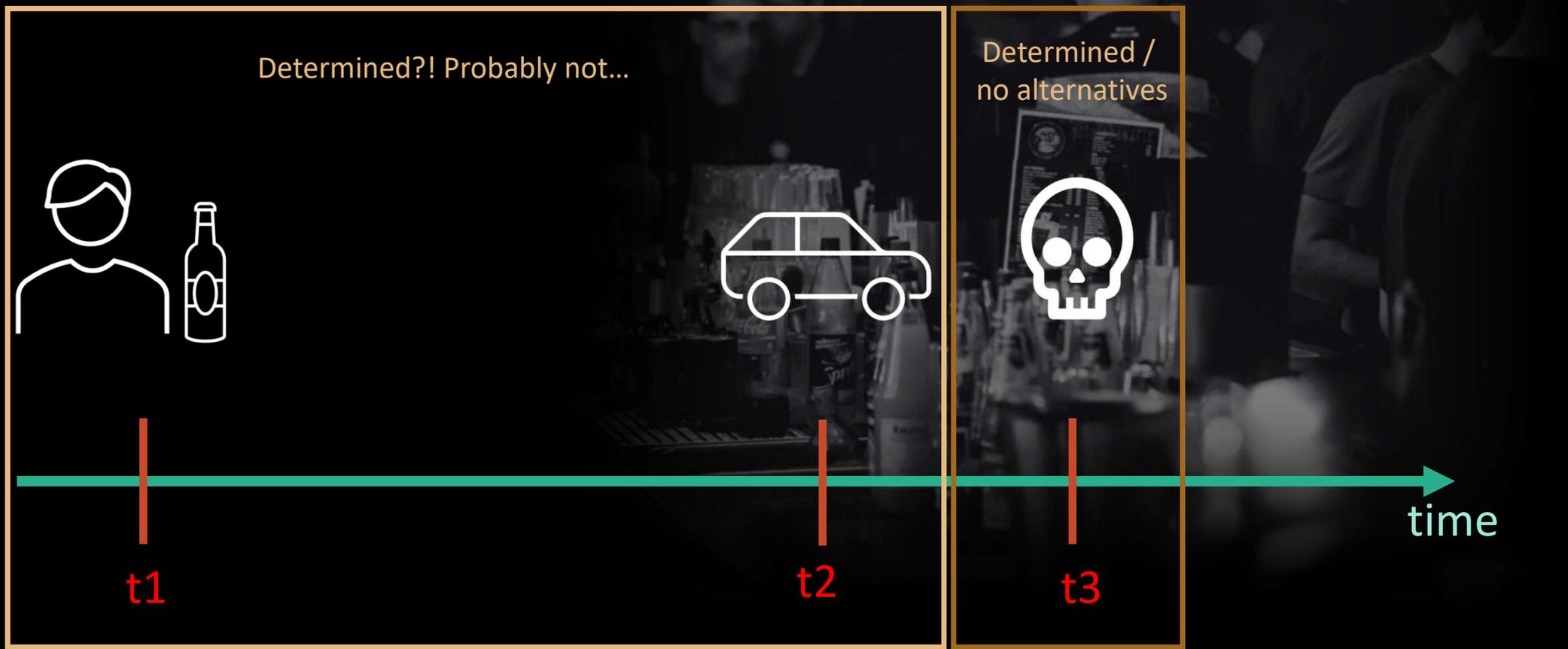


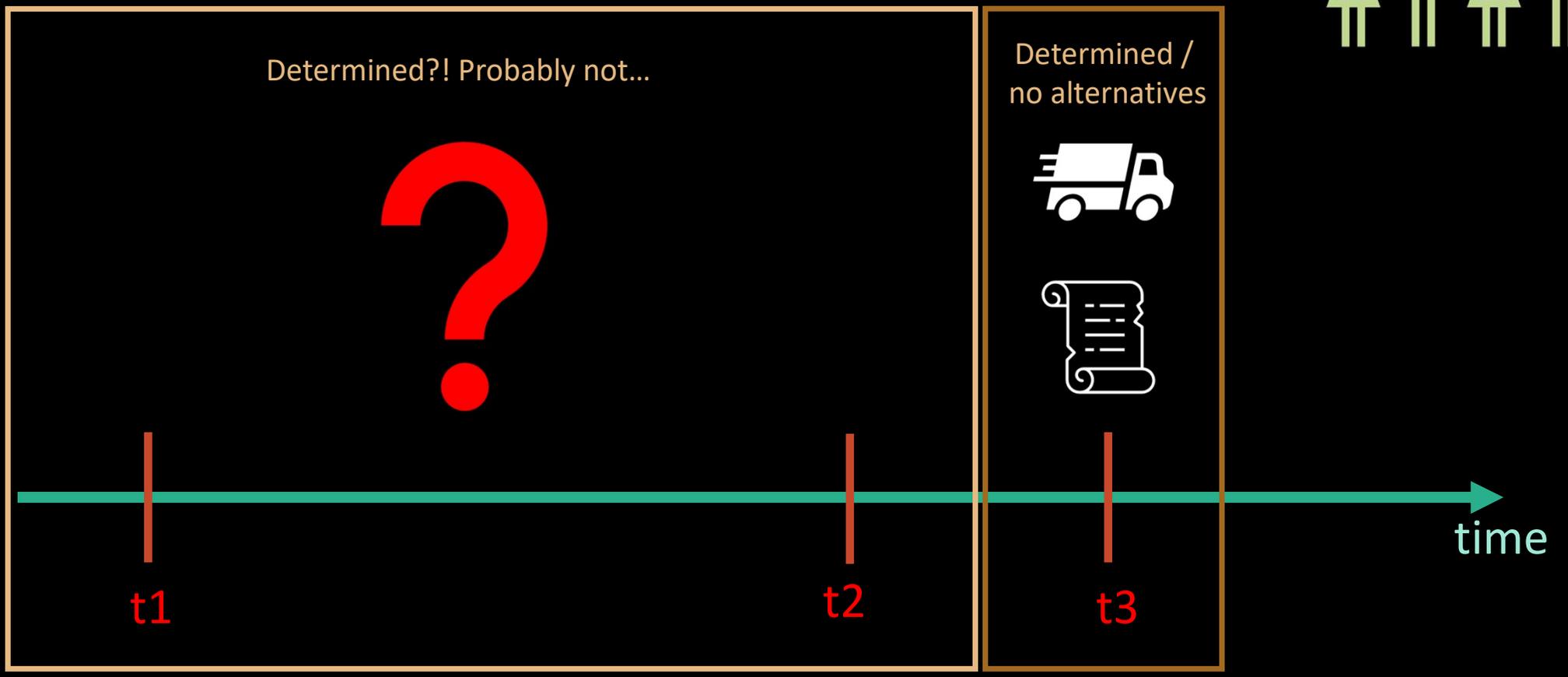
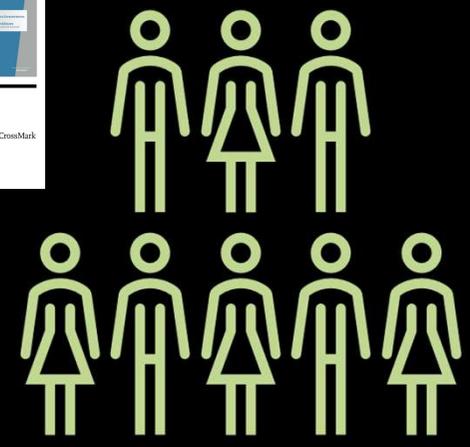
t1

t2

t3

time







Experimental Evidence

Methods and Design

	Delivery	Evaluation
Original	<p>A man promised to deliver a package by 4pm. He just got on the freeway. Given current traffic conditions, it is physically impossible that he can deliver the package by 4pm. As a matter of physics, it is literally impossible that he can make it by 4pm. He will arrive late.</p>	<p>A woman is evaluating her employee's performance. The employee performed excellently. Given the current condition of the woman's brain, it is physically impossible that she can give the employee a positive evaluation. As a matter of brain chemistry, it is literally impossible that she can give the employee a positive evaluation. She will give the employee a negative evaluation.</p>
No Self-Induced Inability	<p>A man promised to deliver a package by 4 pm. <u>He planned his route carefully and left very early, so that he would have plenty of time to get to his destination.</u></p> <p>He just got on the freeway, <u>when two trucks collide before him. The freeway is blocked, and the police inform everyone that it will take at least until late in the night to clear the freeway. Unfortunately, this freeway is the only street that leads to the destination of the package.</u></p> <p>Given current traffic conditions, it is physically impossible that the man can deliver the package by 4 pm. As a matter of physics, it is literally impossible that he can make it by 4 pm. He will arrive late.</p>	<p>A woman is evaluating her employee's performance. The employee performed excellently <u>and the woman is resolved to and about to give her employee a very good evaluation.</u></p> <p><u>Unfortunately and unbeknownst to her, the woman suffered a minor stroke before she began the crucial part of the evaluation. This stroke changed the current condition of the woman's brain.</u></p> <p>Given the current condition of the woman's brain, it is physically impossible that she can give the employee a positive evaluation. As a matter of brain chemistry, it is literally impossible that she can give the employee a positive evaluation. She will give the employee a negative evaluation.</p>

Methods and Design

- 2x2 between-subjects design
- 773 participants recruited via Prolific, 57 were excluded for failing the attention check or not finishing the survey
- Results are reported for 716 participants
- Age: M=34 years
- Gender: 56% female, 44% male
0% non-binary
- All English native speakers

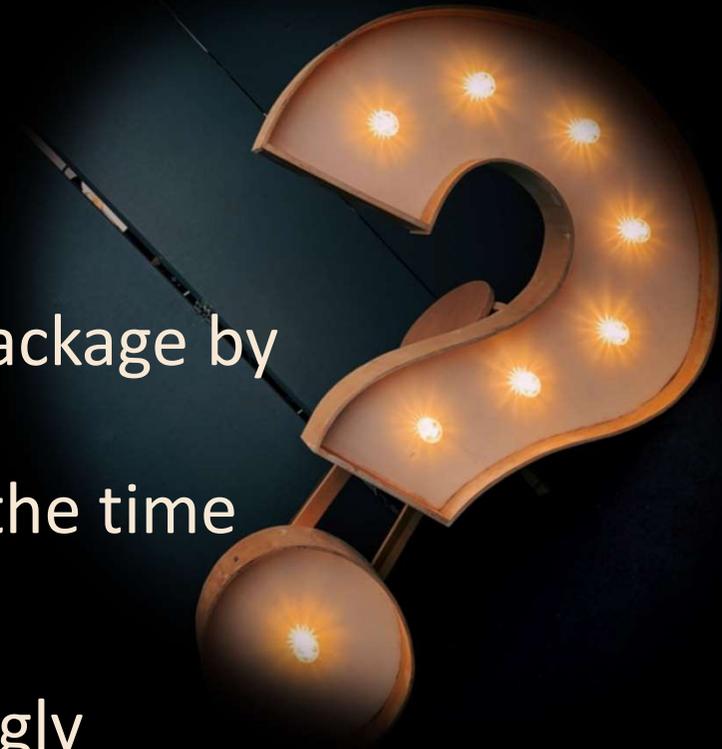
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No Self-Induced Unability	<p>A man promised to deliver a package by 4 pm. <u>He planned his route carefully and left very early, so that he would have plenty of time to get to his destination.</u></p> <p>He just got on the freeway, <u>when two trucks collide before him. The freeway is blocked, and the police inform everyone that it will take at least until late in the night to clear the freeway. Unfortunately, this freeway is the only street that leads to the destination of the package.</u></p> <p>Given current traffic conditions, it is physically impossible that the man can deliver the package by 4 pm. As a matter of physics, it is literally impossible that he can make it by 4 pm. He will arrive late.</p>	<p>A woman is evaluating her employee's performance. The employee performed excellently <u>and the woman is resolved to and about to give her employee a very good evaluation.</u></p> <p><u>Unfortunately and unbeknownst to her, the woman suffered a minor stroke before she began the crucial part of the evaluation. This stroke changed the current condition of the woman's brain.</u></p> <p>Given the current condition of the woman's brain, it is physically impossible that she can give the employee a positive evaluation. As a matter of brain chemistry, it is literally impossible that she can give the employee a positive evaluation. She will give the employee a negative evaluation.</p>

Methods and Design

1. **Ability:** The man could still deliver the package by 4pm.
2. **Responsibility:** The man is to blame for the time he delivers the package.

(rated on 7-point Likert item from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”)

3. **Likelihood:** On a scale of 0% to 100%, how likely is it that the man will deliver the package by 4pm?



Results of Exp. 1



Delivery

Condition	Rating	Descriptive Statistics			t-tests against mean			
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	95% CI	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Original	Ability	1.14	0.63	[1.05, 1.24]	179	-61.16	< .001	.98
	Blame	3.84	1.77	[3.58, 4.1]	179	-1.18	0.24	<i>n.s.</i>
No Self-Induced Inability	Ability	1.35	1.08	[1.17, 1.52]	152	-30.28	< .001	.93
	Blame	1.31	0.87	[1.17, 1.45]	152	-38.37	< .001	.95

Evaluation

Condition	Rating	Descriptive Statistics			t-tests against mean			
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	95% CI	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Original	Ability	2.19	1.95	[1.94, 2.45]	231	-14.1	< .001	.68
	Blame	4.08	2.28	[3.78, 4.37]	231	0.52	0.6	<i>n.s.</i>
No Self-Induced Inability	Ability	2.42	1.95	[2.1, 2.73]	150	-9.98	< .001	.63
	Blame	3.03	2.15	[2.69, 3.38]	150	-5.53	< .001	.41

Ability ratings

Factor	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Origin of Inability	712	3.29	0.07	<i>n.s.</i>
Vignette	712	81.79	< .001	.1
Origin of Inability : Vignette	712	0.01	0.9	<i>n.s.</i>

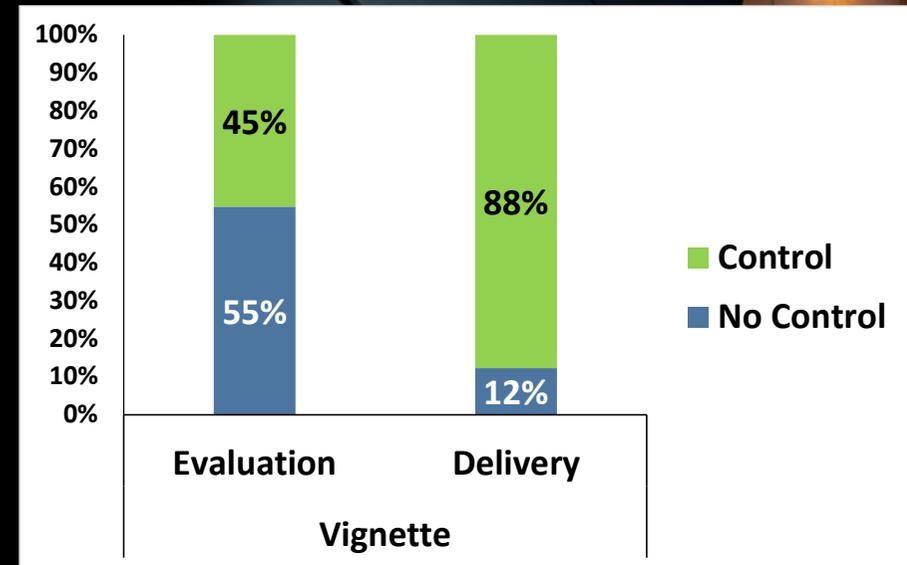
Blame ratings

Factor	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Origin of Inability	712	154.75	< .001	.18
Vignette	712	46.29	< .001	.06
Origin of Inability : Vignette	712	26.88	< .001	.04

4. **Explanation:** Your judgment indicates that you believe the man is to blame for the time he delivers the package. Please explain your judgment by choosing the option that best expresses your intuition:

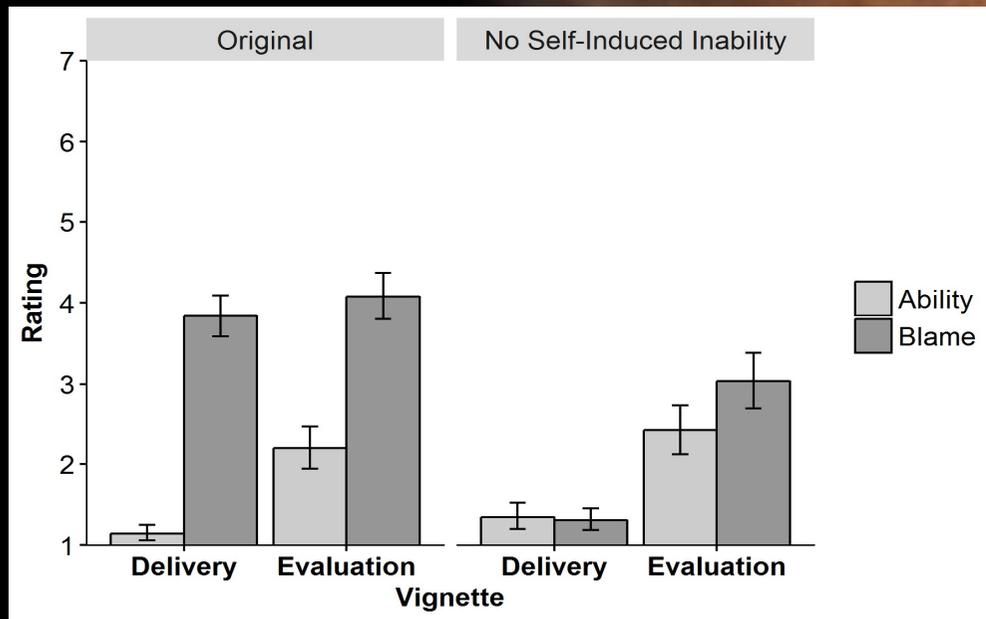
The man is to blame for the time he delivers the package...

- ❖ ... **although** there was nothing he could have done to ensure that he would deliver the package in time.
- ❖ ... **because** there was something he could have done to ensure that he would deliver the package in time.



Asked to participants who gave seemingly compatibilist judgments in Original, N = 210 (out of 304)

Results of Exp. 2



Blame Ratings



Moral Responsibility Ratings



Summary

- For both stories, adding information that the agent is not to blame for his own inability to act otherwise significantly reduced blame judgments
- These results support the hypothesis that participants ascribe derivative instead of direct moral responsibility
- In the Original Conditions, a large number of seemingly compatibilist responses can be accounted for by this hypothesis as well

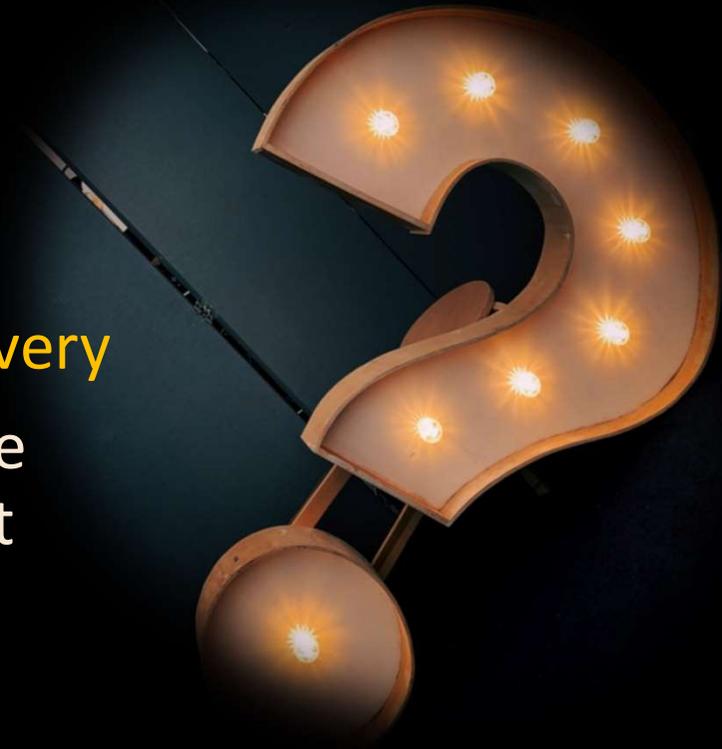
Potential Worries

- The manipulated vignettes are longer
- Processing the information is harder in the manipulated ones
- This might have affected people's responses
- The new stories also included additional agents (police) or additional events (gas leak)



Methods and Design

- 3 between-subjects conditions based on Delivery
- 343 participants recruited via Prolific, 46 were excluded for failing the attention check or not finishing the survey
- Results are reported for 297 participants
- Age: M=36 years
- Gender: 66% female, 34% male, 0% non-binary
- All English native speakers



Methods and Design

Original

Original

A man promised to deliver a package by 4pm. He just got on the freeway. Given current traffic conditions, it is physically impossible that he can deliver the package by 4pm. As a matter of physics, it is literally impossible that he can make it by 4pm. He will arrive late.

Original Long

A man promised to deliver a package by 4 pm. Before he leaves, he checks the results of yesterday night's football games and how his favourite player performed.

He just got on the freeway, when he hears on the radio that the police announce an open day at the local police station next week Sunday. Young people interested in becoming a police officer can visit and ask questions about the job and the entry conditions. There will also be music and a bouncy castle for children.

Given current traffic conditions, it is physically impossible that the man can deliver the package by 4 pm. As a matter of physics, it is literally impossible that he can make it by 4 pm. He will arrive late.

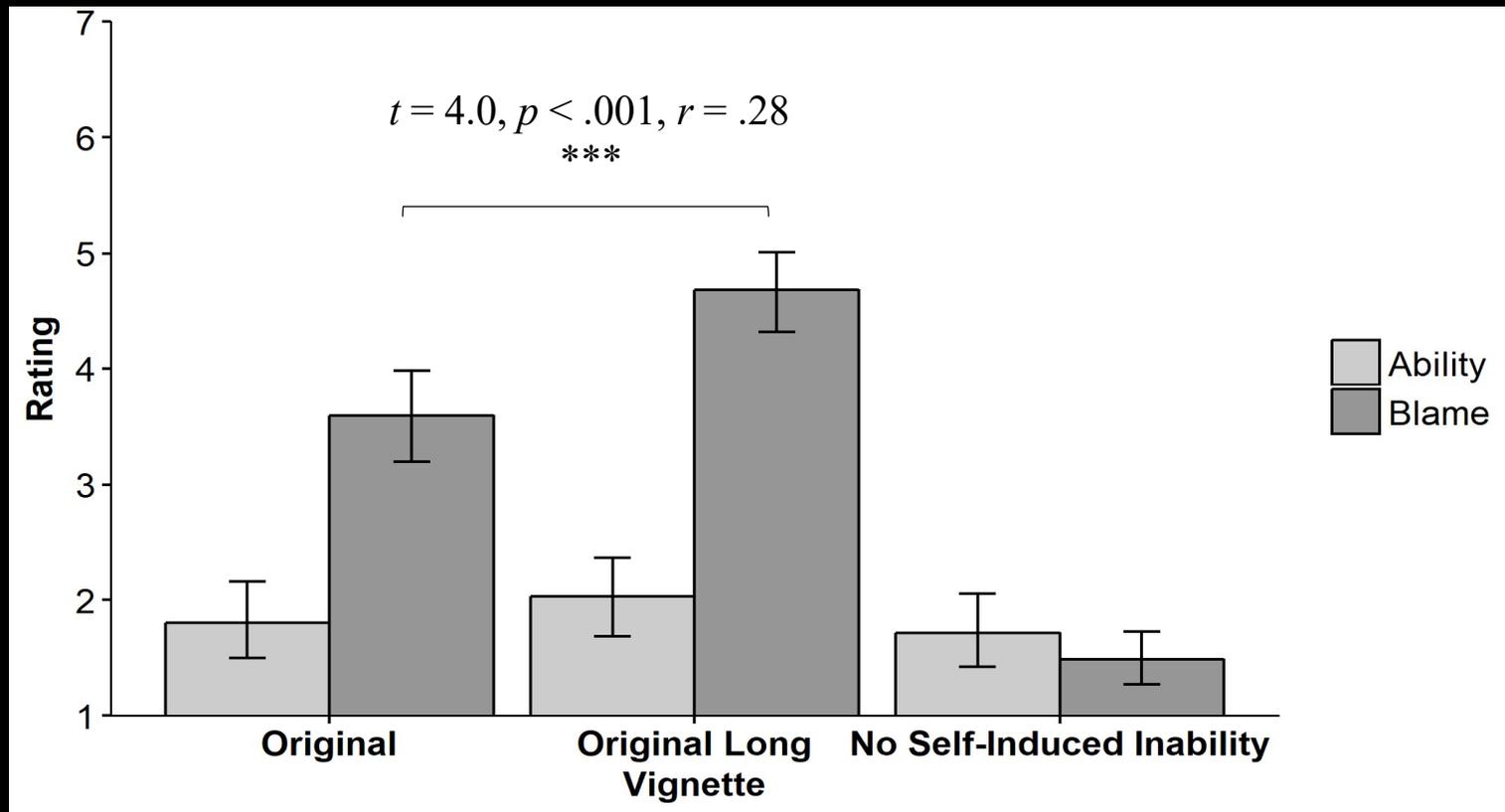
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Given current traffic conditions, it is physically impossible that the man can deliver the package by 4 pm. As a matter of physics, it is literally impossible that he can make it by 4 pm. He will arrive late

Results Exp. 3





Implications for XPhi

- It is likely that when investigating compatibilism, we actually test derivative moral responsibility
- This gives us no insights concerning the question we started with
- The same worry applies to a broad variety of literature in XPhi
 - Free Will
 - Moral Responsibility
 - Punishment
 - Ought-Implies-Can



That's all Folks!



Three Messages

1. XPhi can make a great contribution to classical debates in philosophy
2. XPhi has done a poor job on the folk compatibilism
→ 3 experiments
3. XPhi on folk compatibilism might be a dead end