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*The cognitive foundations of personal autonomy*

My overarching concern in this presentation is with the need to develop a clearer understanding of the relations between personal autonomy, a capacity that has been thought to be central to human agency, and the cognitive abilities that support personal autonomy. This will require fostering closer ties between philosophical work on personal autonomy and related cognitive research, including executive control and skills & expertise research. I begin by outlining the concept of personal autonomy as it is usually understood by philosophers, which emphasizes reflective reasoning. I then describe a challenge to the philosophical view of human agency based on the dual process theory of cognitive architecture. According to dual process theory there are two kinds of cognitive process: non-conscious, automatic, fast processes, and processes that are conscious, controlled, and slow (Evans 2008). Haidt (2001) has argued on the basis of dual process theory that moral judgment is largely emotional and intuitive, and usually not the product of moral reasoning, which he argues is to a large extent post hoc rationalization of intuitive judgments. If this is right it has important philosophical and practical implications for our understanding of moral agency, and I next describe critical responses to Haidt's position by Jeanette Kennett (forthcoming) and Catriona Mackenzie (forthcoming), who argue that the evidence Haidt draws on is too narrow to support his thesis, and that it remains plausible that reflective reasoning plays an important role in human moral agency. I agree with this view and extend it by considering problems with the dual process theory. Longstanding research on expert memory shows that experts are capable of rapid controlled processing of complex information, contrary to the dual process view that controlled cognitive processing is slow. This suggests that higher order reasoning may be present even in rapid action contexts. Since the acquisition of moral expertise is a central part of a normal upbringing, moral responses may have a much stronger rational basis than Haidt believes. Thus, there are important strands of cognitive research that support the philosophical view of personal autonomy and human agency, and I conclude by discussing ways that philosophical and cognitive research might become more mutually informative. For example, one important implication flowing from cognitive research may be that we need to expand our understanding of rational cognitive processes and high order cognitive control, which in turn may influence the philosophical conception of personal autonomy.