



Free Will in Elza Kučera (1883–1972)

Ivana Skuhala Karasman & Luka Boršić
Zagreb University

Elza Kučera approaches the problem of free will from the perspective of experimental psychology. In her article “Experimental Contributions to the Characteristic of Motivation in Voluntary Action”, which presents the summary of her almost 20-year long psychological research, Kučera applied contemporary experimental methodology (ergograph) in order to isolate purely volitional activities from other kinds of motivations to act (Kučera 1948: 136). The results of her experiments suggest distinguishing between eight qualitatively different motivations to act, beginning from pure bodily reflex to purely volitional act. Simultaneously, Kučera deals with the detection and description of voluntary activity and voluntary experiences as the subjective foundations of human free activity. Kučera is interested in the basics of voluntary action and willful experience and the way in which a willing experience, through man, appears to be the driving force for action (Kučera 1948: 136). Based on this, the problem of free action and decision-making is merged with experimental methods of measurement of reactions and accompanying description of subjective states of participants in the experiment. In the conclusion of the experiment, Kučera states there is a quadruple relationship between action and motivation: unmotivated and involuntary action, unmotivated voluntary action triggered by emotional states, motivated voluntary action triggered by emotional states and justified involuntary action not triggered by emotions but by cognitive process. The source of voluntary action and accompanying emotional states is man’s alone [private, internal] and remains beyond the reach of experimental psychology (Kučera 1948: 160). By this experiment Kučera puts emphasis on elaborating different emotional experiences of the participants in the experiment. Thereby she corrected those of contemporary psychologists who denied the role of emotional states in voluntary actions (Meumann, Lindworsky). Freedom comes into play when no external motivation can be taken as a cause, but when actions are derived from the self-conscious “I” in an intellectual and emotional experience which can be described as a voluntary motivation.

Primary Sources:

Kučera, Elza 1930. Experimentelle Beiträge zur Charakteristik der Willenshandlung, in *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie* 77, 223–248.

Kučera, Elza 1933. "Experimentelle Beiträge zur Charakteristik von Willensstufen", in Bujas, Ramiro (ed.): *Radovi Psihologijskog instituta Univerziteta u Zagrebu* I.3.

Kučera, Elza 1948. "Eksperimentalni prilozi karakteristici motivacije u voljnom djelovanju.", in *RAD* 1, 129–160.

Secondary Sources:

Boršić, Luka & Karasman, Ivana Skuhala 2017. Elza Kučera između filozofije i psihologije, in Boršić, Luka & Karasman, Ivana Skuhala (eds.): *Filozofkinje u Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: Institut za filozofiju, 145–162.

Keywords:

free will, experimental psychology, voluntary action