

General Philosophy Paper (PPE Prelims etc.)

Topic 8: Free Will

What does it mean for us to have free will? Is it necessary, in order to have done action A freely, that it should have been possible for me, in exactly the same situation, not to do A? Can we be free if everything we do is causally explicable or “determined”? What implications does this debate have for moral responsibility?

READING

The asterisked items in the list below are those on the Faculty’s official reading list, and therefore likely to “set the agenda” for the examination. I have added several others, but you should not feel obliged to read everything!

* David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), Section VIII – any reasonable edition will do, but my Oxford World’s Classics edition (2007) contains an Introduction and Notes which are designed to put the arguments in context and make the text more accessible.

George Botterill, “Hume on Liberty and Necessity”, in Millican (ed.), *Reading Hume on Human Understanding* (OUP, 2002), chapter 10.

Read Botterill if you want to get really clear on what Hume is up to – very frequently misinterpreted by commentators!

Jack Copeland, *Artificial Intelligence: A Philosophical Introduction* (Blackwell, 1993), chapter 7.

In the context of discussing whether a robot could be free, Copeland gives a very clear defence of Humean compatibilism, helpfully introducing the contributions of contemporary philosophers.

* A. J. Ayer, “Freedom and Necessity”, in Ayer, *Philosophical Essays* (Macmillan, 1954), Chapter 12, pp.271-284, originally published in *Polemic* 5 (1946). Reprinted, Gary Watson (ed.) *Free Will* (1st edition) (OUP 1982), Chapter 1, pp.15-23.

* H. Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 66, No. 23. (Dec. 4, 1969), pp.829-839. Reprinted in Gary Watson (ed.) *Free Will* (2nd edition) (OUP 2002), Chapter 8, pp.167-176, and also available online through the University website.

* G. Watson, introduction to *Free Will* (2nd edition) (OUP 2002), pp.1-25.

Timothy O’Connor, “Free Will”, at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/freewill/> in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

O’Connor is useful for an overview of many of the different accounts that philosophers (including compatibilists such as Hume and Frankfurt) have tried to give of the notion of “free will”.

Robert Kane, “Reflections on Free Will, Determinism and Indeterminism”, available online from <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctytho/dfwVariousKane.html>, within Ted Honderich’s *Determinism and Freedom Philosophy Website*.

Kane is one of the best modern exponents of an incompatibilist position, on the other side of the debate from Hume. If you are really keen or want to read up on the topic over the vacation, an excellent small book on the topic is:

Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (OUP, 2005).