

Personal Identity and Free Will

1. Thursday, September 3 OVERVIEW

The aim of this class is to introduce you to the kind of writing that you will be asked to consume and produce over the next four years: academic writing. Academic writing has quirks and rules that are probably unfamiliar to you. So it is only sporting of us to explain them. After going over the plan for the term, we will read and discuss a psychology article on the use of laptops (Mueller and Oppenheimer 2014). We will try to make some generalizations about the rules for academic writing in the field of psychology. I also hope to convince you not to use laptops to take notes in class.

2. Thursday, September 10 WE HAVE FREE WILL

We are starting with a seventeenth-century debate between Bishop John Bramhall (1594–1663) and the philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). Our readings come from their initial exchange in 1645 (they kept at it into the 1650s). Bramhall begins by making his case for thinking that we have free will (Bramhall 1655). After this session, you will be asked to write a few paragraphs about what conclusion Bramhall is trying to establish and how he goes about arguing for it. These will be due in the Sakai dropbox by 10pm this evening.

3. Tuesday, September 15 WE DO NOT HAVE FREE WILL

Hobbes believes that everything that happens is causally determined and, consequently, that human action cannot be free from causal determination. He also held that there is a kind of freedom that is compatible with causal determination (Hobbes [1654] 1993). We will want to understand both points. There will be a short writing assignment to do after our discussion similar to the one for Bramhall. Before 10pm this evening you will be asked to write out what Hobbes was trying to establish and what his argumentative strategy was.

4. *Thursday, September 17* WHO IS WINNING?

Our previous two sessions were concerned with describing Bramhall and Hobbes's arguments. Today, we will evaluate them: we will ask what each author's strongest point is and see whether we think that one comes out ahead of the other. This class will be followed by a third writing assignment in which you will be asked to compare Bramhall's arguments with Hobbes's. Note that this is not the same thing as deciding whether or not we have free will. It is about which author has the better arguments for his position. One might be doing better than the other even if he is wrong in the end. This paper will be due by 10pm on Saturday, September 19.

5. *Tuesday, September 22* HUME ON FREE WILL

David Hume (1711-1776) articulates a position very much like Hobbes's. In today's class, we will talk about Part 1 of Hume's chapter (Hume [1748] 1993). As always, we will want to establish how Hume defines and argues for his position. But we will be especially interested in two other things. First, how does Hume identify and answer objections to his position? Second, how do Hume's arguments differ from Hobbes's?

6. *Thursday, September 24* FREE WILL, MORALITY, AND RELIGION

In Part 2, Hume tries to show that the denial of free will does not have dire implications for morality and religion (Hume [1748] 1993). For example, one of Bramhall's better points was that it would be unjust to hold people responsible for things they are caused to do. Hume maintains that, on the contrary, moral responsibility makes no sense if actions are not predictable. This, he believes, means they must be governed by uniform causal laws, much as physical objects are. We will try to understand what his point is and determine whether we accept it. Hume is an extremely well organized writer and there is no better way to appreciate this fact than by reproducing the structure of his writing for yourself. Consequently, after today's class you will be given a writing assignment in which you will be asked to go back over Hume's chapter and describe, in a sentence or two, the function of each paragraph. This will be due by 10pm on Saturday, September 26.

7. *Tuesday, September 29* LEGAL STANDARDS

According to Hume, people who act out of character are excused from responsibility for what they do (Hume, ¶29-30). Similarly, the law treats insanity as an excuse for behavior that would otherwise be illegal. Today's reading covers two different legal standards for insanity: the M'Naghten Rules and the rules proposed by the American Law Institute (House of Lords [1843] 2010; American Law Institute [1956] 2010). We will pay special attention to how these rules differ from one another. In order to focus our discussion, we will have a specific case described in a Radiolab show (there is a link to the audio on Sakai.)

8. *Thursday, October 1* NEUROSCIENCE AND FREE WILL

Greene and Cohen maintain that developments in neuroscience will force us to abandon the understanding of responsibility necessary for treating punishment as deserved retribution for bad behavior. They are similar to Bramhall in holding that free will is necessary for responsibility. However, Bramhall insisted that we have free will while Greene and Cohen deny it. In today's class, we will talk about the first four sections of their article (Greene and Cohen 2004, 1775-78). In these sections, Greene and Cohen introduce a lot of technical terminology. They also make the case for the position that they intend to refute: that neuroscience has no implications for the legal understanding of responsibility.

9. *Tuesday, October 6* NEUROSCIENCE AND RETRIBUTION

Today's class takes up the second half of Greene and Cohen's article (Greene and Cohen 2004, 1778-84). In this part, Greene and Cohen argue that the apparent compatibility of legal responsibility with the neurological determination of our behavior is superficial. As neuroscience develops, they believe, we will give up on the idea that people deserve punishment for unsocial behavior. Instead of seeking to give people the punishment they deserve, we will instead try to manage their behavior to produce the best outcomes. They believe that this will be a desirable change. The case of Mr. Puppet is especially important for their position, so we will devote a lot of attention to that. After our discussion, you will be asked to write a short summary of how they use the Mr. Puppet case, due by 10pm this evening.

10. *Thursday, October 8* LIBRARY RESEARCH

Sections of ID-1 are required to have a research assignment. For ours, I am going to ask you to look up and report on articles on the Libet experiment from different academic disciplines. As preparation for that, we will have a presentation from Mr. Adam Rosenkranz, a librarian in the Honnold Library. Bring your laptops. There will be an exercise to do before this session and a research paper that will be due by 10pm on Saturday, October 24.

11. *Tuesday, October 13* THE LIBET STUDY

Benjamin Libet is a neuroscientist whose experiments seem to show that our brains begin to cause our bodies to move before we are consciously aware of having made a decision to move (Libet 1999). He believes this shows that we lack free will since what we think of as our choices follow what our brains have already started to do. There is one exception: he thinks that we might be able to consciously veto actions that our brains have set in motion. We will talk about what to make of his experiments and whether this so-called “free won’t” makes any sense to us.

12. *Thursday, October 15* DENNETT ON LIBET

Daniel Dennett does not believe that Libet’s experiments have the implications for free will that Libet believes they do (Dennett 2003). Dennett is an exceptionally engaging writer. He is so engaging that it is not always easy to tell where the fun stops and the work begins. So the first thing that I will ask is: “where is Dennett’s argument against Libet?” Once we have found it, we will talk about what the argument is and whether we find it persuasive. I would also like to talk about the last third of the article. It is highly suggestive but also hard to grasp. What do you think he is trying to do there?

13. *Thursday, October 22* FRANKFURT ON PERSONS

This article serves as a bridge between our two topics. Frankfurt’s project is to say what is distinctive about persons. Unlike those who maintain that persons are distinguished from other creatures by virtue of their ability to reason, Frankfurt maintains that the distinctive feature of persons is found in their ability to govern their behavior. We will read the first half of Frankfurt’s essay for this session (Frankfurt 1971, 5-14). One thing that is very difficult about

the article is the second section (labelled I, of course). What is he saying there and how it is relevant to what he is trying to accomplish in his essay? We will also want to nail down what he means by terms like “first order desire,” “second order desire,” “wanton,” and “person.”

14. *Tuesday, October 27* FRANKFURT ON FREE WILL

The third section of Frankfurt’s essay applies the conceptual apparatus he developed in the earlier sections to the topics we have been discussing (Frankfurt 1971, 14-20). We will talk about how he understands free will and responsibility and whether his ideas about second-order desires satisfactorily address our questions about those topics. There will be a paper assigned following this class due by 10pm on Saturday, November 7.

15. *Thursday, October 29* LOCKE ON IDENTITY

This is our first reading on personal identity. Questions about identity usually concern how one thing could continue to persist as the same thing despite changing in various ways. We will read the first eleven sections of John Locke’s (1632 - 1704) chapter, “Of Identity and Diversity” (Locke [1689] 1995). In these sections, Locke develops a series of distinctions between masses of matter, living things, and people. We will want to know how he uses these distinctions to address questions about identity. The distinction between person and man is especially important for our purposes. What does Locke think a person is, what does he think a man is, and how does he think they are different from one another?

16. *Tuesday, November 3* LOCKE ON PERSONS AND SUBSTANCES

The second half of Locke’s chapter (§§12-29) is largely taken up with a series of examples. These are meant to show that the identity of a person does not depend on the identity of any kind of substance, whether material or immaterial, and that it does not depend on the identity of a man. How does he use these examples? How is the point about the independence of personal identity related to the ideas he presented in the first half of the chapter? After this class, you will be asked to write a short summary of the distinction between man and person.

17. *Thursday, November 5* REID ON LOCKE

Thomas Reid (1710 – 1796) developed several influential criticisms of Locke’s theory. We will be especially interested in Reid’s brave officer problem (pp. 333–34) and his argument that memory is only evidence of personal identity (Reid 1785, 335–36).

18. *Tuesday, November 10* QUINTON ON THE SOUL

Anthony Quinton has an improved version of Locke’s theory of personal identity (Quinton 1962). We will talk about how he modifies Locke’s view to avoid objections such as those made by Reid. We will also be concerned with his reasons for thinking that Locke was fundamentally correct. In essence, Quinton is answering the “what is Locke’s best argument for his conclusion” question.

19. *Thursday, November 12* WILLIAMS ON BODY SWITCHING

The idea that a person could switch physical bodies is a persistent one. As Wu observes, its most recent incarnation comes in the prediction that computers will become powerful enough for us to copy our selves onto them (Wu 2015). The assumption is that we can move from our animal bodies into some other physical medium much as computer files are copied and moved from one physical location to another. Bernard Williams takes a very careful look at exactly why these body switching stories seem so persuasive. For today’s class, we will read the first part of his article (Williams 1970, 161–69). Williams describes the same “experiment” multiple times. Why does he do that? What point is he trying to make? I will distribute paper topics covering the material in the next two weeks; the paper will be due by 10pm on Saturday, December 5.

20. *Tuesday, November 17* ARE PEOPLE SPECIAL?

The last part of Williams’s essay attempts to take stock of the lessons from the first part (Williams 1970, 169–80). We will do the same. One of the most interesting things he notes is that it is apparently impossible to think that questions about personal identity might have indeterminate answers. Here is what that means. Suppose you take a ship, swap a bunch of parts, and ask “is it the same ship as the one I started with?” The answer might well be something like “it’s the same in some ways and different in others, and there is nothing more to

say about whether it's the same ship or not." Williams argues that there is nothing like that sort of answer available to us when we ask "would that person tomorrow be the same person as me?" If so, persons are unlike almost everything else in the world.

21. *Thursday, November 19* PARFIT'S BRANCH LINE CASE

Could I survive being duplicated? On the one hand, no: two cannot be one and there is only one of me. On the other hand, yes: two is more than zero. More to the point, the process of being duplicated seems to be the same as having an ordinary, ongoing life, only doubled. That is the paradoxical, yet oddly compelling, conclusion that Derek Parfit argues for (Parfit 1987, 199-217).

22. *Tuesday, November 24* THE COMBINED SPECTRUM

I am made up of either a bundle of mental states, bits of physical matter, or some combination of the two. Given that, how could it be the case that questions about my identity over time must have determinate answers? This is not true for the identity of physical objects: they can change in ways that leave their identity indeterminate. According to Parfit, something similar is true of minds: change the qualities of my mind enough, but not too much, and you will not be able to say whether it is the same mind or not (Parfit 1987, 229-43). That conflicts with the interesting point Williams made at the end of his article. Who is right?

23. *Tuesday, December 1* IS DEATH BAD?

Death is non-existence. But you have already not existed before (so to speak): think of all the time before you were born. So why are you afraid of death? Lucretius (c. 99 BC - c. 55 BC), thinks this sort of point is enough to show that death is not a bad thing (Lucretius 2001). We will spell out Lucretius's arguments in our familiar way. Did they work for you? If not, why not?

24. *Thursday, December 3* **WOULD IMMORTALITY BE BETTER?**
Williams criticizes Lucretius's reasons for thinking that death is not bad but he also argues that immortality would be undesirable (Williams 1973). How does he try to establish both positions at the same time?
25. *Tuesday, December 8* **THE END**
This day is reserved for finishing our discussion of Williams and Lucretius, wrapping up the course as a whole, taking a class photo, and completing course evaluations. Class photo? That's right: dress as you want to be remembered.

Goals

The goal of ID-1 is to prepare students for college writing. I believe that the best way to become a good writer is first to become a good reader. The authors we will read come from a variety of fields. They are philosophers, scientists, and lawyers. Despite their different backgrounds, they all focus on arguments in their writing. This analytical kind of writing is not the only kind you might do in college, but it is by far the most predominant one. We will spend our class sessions talking about how the authors try to make their points and how one might construct contrary arguments. Students will write several analytical essays of their own, do one library research project, and engage in extensive classroom discussions of exceptional analytical writing.

The specific topics we will discuss are personal identity and free will. The problem of personal identity concerns what is required in order to survive through time. The origins of the problem are religious. If material bodies do not go to the afterlife, what does? Is it souls, minds, or something else? But it is not just a religious question. In the movies, people are beamed to other planets. What do we think happens to them? And when memories can be stored on computers will we be able to outlive our bodies? The problem of free will concerns what is required in order to be responsible for what one does. This has become a more pressing issue as neuroscience has gotten better at locating the physical sources of decisions in the brain. Indeed, some scientists claim they have shown that the brain makes decisions before the person is aware of having done so! If they are right, we may

have to abandon our legal standards of responsibility and significantly revise our understanding of ourselves. Students who take this class will gain extensive experience analyzing and writing about arguments. They will also see themselves and our legal institutions in a new light.

Materials

All of the readings for the class will be available in the resources section of the Sakai website for this course: <https://sakai.claremont.edu>. My note on our discussions and announcements will also be posted on Sakai.

Instructor

My name is Michael Green. My office is 207 Pearsons. My office hours are posted on the Sakai site. My office phone number is 607-0906.

Assignments

Grades will be based on five papers, including the outline of Hume. There are a number of shorter writing assignments throughout the term. Their purpose is to serve as building blocks for the larger papers and so I am reluctant to assign them grades on their own. Nonetheless, I will penalize inadequate efforts on these shorter assignments in the final grade.

Grading policies

I am committed to seeing that my students are able to do very high quality work and that high quality work will be recognized. I do not employ a curve and there is nothing competitive about grading in my courses.

Grades apply to papers, not to people. They have no bearing on whether I like or respect you. Nor do they measure improvement or hard work: one may put a lot of effort into trying to make a bad idea work or produce a very good paper with ease.

Grades communicate where written work stands on as objective a scale as we can devise. That is all that they involve, so don't make too much of them.

What the grades mean

- A Work that is accurate, elegantly written, and innovative. It adds something original, creative, or imaginative to the problem under discussion. The grade of A is given to work that is exceptional.
- B Work that is accurate, well written, and has no significant problems. The grade of B is given to very good work. There is less of a difference between A and B work than you might think. Generally speaking, B papers are less innovative than A papers. This may be because the paper does not attempt to add much or because the attempt made is not fully successful.
- C Work that has problems with accuracy, reasoning, or quality of writing. The grade of C means that the paper has significant problems but is otherwise acceptable.
- D Work that has severe problems with accuracy, reasoning, relevance, or the quality of writing. Papers with these problems are not acceptable college-level work. A paper that is fine on its own may nonetheless be irrelevant. A paper is not relevant to my evaluation of work for this particular course if it does not address the question asked or if it does not display knowledge of our discussions. This sometimes trips up those taking a course pass/no credit.
- F Work that has not been completed, cannot be understood, or is irrelevant.

Final grades will be calculated using the College's 12 point scale.¹ The numerical average must be greater than half the distance between two grades in order to earn the higher grade.

¹ Search for "Letter Grades" here: <http://catalog.pomona.edu/>

Letter	Number	Range
A	12	$11.5 < A \leq 12$
A-	11	$10.5 < A- \leq 11.5$
B+	10	$9.5 < B+ \leq 10.5$
B	9	$8.5 < B \leq 9.5$
B-	8	$7.5 < B- \leq 8.5$
C+	7	$6.5 < C+ \leq 7.5$
C	6	$5.5 < C \leq 6.5$
C-	5	$4.5 < C- \leq 5.5$
D+	4	$3.5 < D+ \leq 4.5$
D	3	$2.5 < D \leq 3.5$
D-	2	$1.0 < D- \leq 2.5$
F	0	$0.0 < F \leq 1.0$

Letter and number grades

Late papers and academic accommodations

Late papers will be accepted *without question*. They will be penalized at the rate of one-quarter of a point per day, including weekends and holidays. Exceptions will be made in extremely unusual circumstances. Please be mindful of the fact that maturity involves taking steps to ensure that the extremely unusual is genuinely extremely unusual.

To request academic accommodations of a disability, please speak with me and Dean Collin-Eaglin at 621-8017. This is never a problem, but it is best taken care of in advance.

Sources

- American Law Institute. (1956) 2010. "The Insanity Defense." In *Philosophy of Law*, edited by Joel Feinberg, Jules Coleman, and Christopher Kutz, 836-39. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Bramhall, John. 1655. *A Defence of True Liberty from Antecedent and Extrinsic Necessity Being an Answer to a Late Book of Mr. Thomas Hobbs of Malmsbury, Intituled, a Treatise of Liberty and Necessity*. London.
- Dennett, Daniel C. 2003. "The Self as a Responding — and Responsible — Artifact." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1001 (October): 39-50. doi:10.1196/annals.1279.003.
- Frankfurt, Harry. 1971. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1): 5-20.
- Greene, Joshua, and Jonathan Cohen. 2004. "For the Law, Neuroscience Changes Nothing and Everything." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 359 (1451): 1775-85. doi:10.1098/rstb.2004.1546.
- Hobbes, Thomas. (1654) 1993. *Of Liberty and Necessity*. Edited by Mark C. Rooks. *British Philosophy: 1600-1900*. Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation.
- House of Lords. (1843) 2010. "The M'Naghten Rules." In *Philosophy of Law*, edited by Joel Feinberg, Jules Coleman, and Christopher Kutz, 9th ed., 835-36. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Hume, David. (1748) 1993. "Of Liberty and Necessity." In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, by David Hume, edited by Mark C. Rooks. *The Complete Works and Correspondence of David Hume*. Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation.
- Libet, Benjamin. 1999. "Do We Have Free Will?" *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6 (8-9): 47-57.
- Locke, John. (1689) 1995. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Mark C. Rooks. *The Philosophical Works and Selected Correspondence of John Locke*. Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation.
- Lucretius. 2001. *On the Nature of Things*. Translated by Martin Ferguson Smith. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.

- Mueller, Pam A., and Daniel M. Oppenheimer. 2014. "The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand over Laptop Note Taking." *Psychological Science* 25 (6): 1159-68. doi:10.1177/0956797614524581.
- Parfit, Derek. 1987. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Quinton, Anthony. 1962. "The Soul." *Journal of Philosophy* 59 (15): 393-409.
- Reid, Thomas. 1785. *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. Edinburgh.
- Williams, Bernard Arthur Owen. 1970. "The Self and the Future." *Philosophical Review* 79: 161-80.
- . 1973. "The Makropulos Case." In *Problems of the Self*, 82-100. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wu, Tim. 2015. "How to Live Forever." <http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/live-forever>.

October 15

October 15