

PHIL 230: Metaphysics  
Free Will and Determinism  
Eddy Chen & Manuel Vargas  
UCSD Fall 2024

Seminar meetings: Fridays 9-11:50, RWAC 0472

**Office hours**

E: MWF 5:00-5:30 + by appt.

M: W 11am-noon + by appt.

- 9/27      **0: Introduction**  
Topics: history of free will debate; positions and terminology; survey of topics in phil sci (laws, determinism, counterfactuals); preview of some arguments; how to read this material  
*Four Views on Free Will 2e*: Introduction & Appendix  
Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths"  
Recommended: Tolstoy *War & Peace* (including part 2 of the epilogue)
- 10/4      **1: The Consequence Argument**  
Topics: The consequences argument; 'can' and abilities; breaking the laws  
Van Inwagen  
Lewis, D (1981) Are we free to break the laws?  
Graham, P (2017) [Review of van Inwagen's \*Thinking about Free Will\*](#)
- 10/11      **2: Compatibilism**  
Topics: some of the major positions; motivations; challenges  
Frankfurt, H (1969) Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility  
Frankfurt, H. (1971) Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person  
Nelkin and Vargas (2024) Responsibility and Reasons-Responsiveness  
Recommended: Strawson "Freedom & Resentment";  
Wolf, S. (1987) Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility
- 10/18      **3. Revisionism** [E away; likely a recording.]  
Topics: revisionism; compatibilist counterfactual talk; social pressures  
Vargas (2024) Revisionism from *Four Views on Free Will 2e*  
Vargas (2013) Responsible Agency from *Building Better Beings*  
Optional: Replies by Kane, Fischer, Pereboom, and Vargas
- 10/25      **4: Determinism, Chance, and Laws of Nature**

Topics: Humeanism, non-Humeanism about laws; determinism, indeterminism; deterministic chance, and stochastic chance

Hofer, Carl (2023) SEP entry "Causal Determinism" (sections 1, 2, 5-6)

Carroll, John (2020) SEP entry "Laws of Nature" (sections 1-4)

(optional) Chen (2024) *Laws of Physics* (sections 1-4)

11/1

### **5: Counterfactuals and Statistical Mechanics**

Topics: chancy counterfactuals; statistical mechanical account of deterministic chance (review); counterfactual response to the consequence argument; counterfactual influence of the past

Loewer, Barry (2020) The Consequence Argument Meets the Mentaculus

Dorr, Cian (2016) Against Counterfactual Miracles

(optional) Hajek, Alan (ms) Most Counterfactuals are False (selections)

(optional) Hofer, Carl (2002) Freedom from the Inside Out

11/8

### **6: Revisiting Responsible Agency; Local vs. Global Laws of Nature**

[M departs @ 10:30am]

Topics: continuation of the discussion about counterfactuals, applied to BBB's definition of responsible agency, sketch some supplements and potential repairs; Jenann Ismael's account of local laws and global laws, response to consequence argument

Ismael, Jenann (2016) *How Physics Makes Us Free* (chapters 4, 5, 6)

11/15

### **7: Emergentism [E away]**

Topics: does weak emergence provide another way of thinking about free will, counterfactuals, and the consequence argument?

Wilson, Jessica (2021) *Metaphysical Emergence* (Ch. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8)

11/22

### **8: Student presentations! Future directions? [M away]**

*We anticipate that this will involve a video recording of student presentations*

11/29

### **9: NO CLASS MEETING [Thanksgiving]**

12/6

### **10. Strong determinism FINAL CLASS MEETING**

Topics: strong determinism and free will; pre-ordained quantum universe; future directions

Chen (2024) Strong Determinism

Chen (2023) The preordained quantum universe

12/7-12/14

Final exam week

12/14

Fall quarter ends

## Evaluation

1. 40%: Weekly assignments: every week post to discussion board with one paragraph per reading; due Thursday 5pm
2. 40%: Long seminar paper, due Dec 12 @ 5pm (5k-10k words); or two shorter papers (3-5k words), first due @ start of class week 6, and second due Dec 12 @ 5pm
3. 20%: Participation, which includes week 9 presentation of paper idea

## Assorted class policies:

1. For enrolled students, we expect regular attendance
2. Manuel is strongly disposed against incompletes

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