

Practice Final

Isaac Wilhelm (iwillhelm@nus.edu.sg)

Here are the three selections. Choose one, and write your final paper about it.

1 Sider on Hard Determinism

“The rejection of free will in the face of determinism is called hard determinism. Think of the hard determinist as a hard-nosed intellectual who tolerates no softies. Free will conflicts with science, so free will has got to go. Here is a typical hard determinist speech:

We must get used to the idea that no one is really responsible for anything. Belief in freedom and moral responsibility was a luxury of a pre-scientific age. Now that we have grown up, we must put aside childish ways and face the facts. Science has disproved the existence of freedom and morality” (pp. 119–120).

2 Sider on Libertarianism

“If the hard determinist is the intellectually hard-nosed devotee of science, the libertarian has the opposite mindset. Libertarians resolve the conflict between free will and determinism by rejecting determinism. Their guiding thought is that people are *special*. The march of science, subjugating observed phenomena to exceptionless law, is limited to the non-human realm. For libertarians, science is good as far as it goes, but it will never succeed in completely predicting human behavior. Humans, and humans alone, transcend the laws of nature: they are free” (pp. 120–121).

3 Ismael on Causation and Counterfactuals

“So the *direction* of influence is introduced by the choice of exogenous and endogenous variables, and the *strength* of the connection depends on the specification of invariants. The upshot is that the idea that changes in one variable *bring about* changes in another is imposed by these choices. It is not an internal relation between the events. The direction in which influence between A and B runs depends on which you treat as exogenous and which you treat as endogenous. This doesn’t mean that there aren’t objective facts about what varies with what *relative to a choice of sub-model*. It just means that we have to make the choice of exogenous variables and invariants explicit when we raise such questions. There *are* facts about what varies *under hypothetical variation in X when Y is held fixed*. There is no fact about what is *really* or *absolutely fixed*, or what is *really* or *absolutely* variable. The variation in question is in every case hypothetical, and what varies with it is always relative to a choice of invariants or range of applicability. This is all that realism about causal structure requires. In many ways, it is an entirely commonsensical picture that is very natural for the people with hands-on experience investigating causal structure” (pp. 225–226).