

Philosophy Department
California State University Long Beach
1250 Bellflower Blvd.
Long Beach CA 90804

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Petition for the MA Comprehensive Examination

I, Thomas Schmutz, am petitioning to take the MA Comprehensive examination in order to complete the requirements of the MA degree in philosophy. I plan to take the examination in the Spring of 2006.

I propose the following three areas of concentration and committee members:

Exam I: Professor Johnson.

Modern Compatibilist accounts of free will as a continuation of Hume's project.

Exam II: Professor Tang.

Hume and Goodman on Induction.

Exam III: Professor Nolan

Locke and Berkeley on Substance

Sincerely,

Thomas R. Schmutz

Exam I: Modern Compatibilist accounts of free will as a continuation of Hume's project:

The first of the exams will be on the topic of Free Will. Specifically, I wish to look modern compatibilist accounts of free will and how they relate to the classical Humean account. Hume gives us what might well be said to be the best known classical account of the compatibilist position on free will. Having written my undergraduate honors thesis on the topic of free will I am interested both in demonstrating my knowledge of the field and also delving in greater detail into one specific avenue of the debate, namely compatibilism.

Hume makes a distinction between what he calls the "liberty of indifference" and "liberty of spontaneity". This distinction is not unlike the modern debate about what it means to be able to do otherwise. It is commonly held that for a person to be free they have to be able to do otherwise. The compatibilist will interpret this as requiring that a person merely have the power to do differently than they had done if they had wanted to do so. This is an important caveat absent in the incompatibilist account, where the ability to do otherwise must be independent of determined causal forces. Hume defines liberty of indifference to be a sort of liberty that is independent of causal influences. This sort of liberty would be free of any causal necessity. Conversely, liberty of spontaneity is a freedom of a more limited sense. In this sense, a person is free if and only if they are free of constraints, be those constraints internal such as a type of madness or external like chains or some threat of force. Hume contends that the later is the only type of freedom desirable or even possible. A person free of causal necessity Hume argues, would then not be influenced by his beliefs, desires or intentions in any deterministic way. Obviously though, this means that weather or not one is moved by their internal composition would be entirely random. Such a person would be the least free of all. We want to believe that who and the way we are will determine our actions in any circumstance of significance. This is why we feel that we can trust others after we have come to know their habits and dispositions.

The modern way of dealing with the problem of free will, from a compatibilist perspective, has also been to focus on concepts like power or ability but also on the role of intentionality, action and moral psychology. Free will, concerning what a person is free to do, is here interpreted as what one, generally speaking, can do. So that if a person does some act X, they are by implication also capable of not doing X. If then a person has the power to do X they are free to do it. Conversely, if they are in some way constrained from doing it, they are not free. Instead of thinking in terms of, a person could have done otherwise, the compatibilist will instead speak in terms of, a person could have done otherwise if they had wanted to do otherwise. This is referred to as a hypothetical analysis of can. We generally hold that a person is free to do some action if at that time it is within their power to do it. Only if they are coerced, perhaps forced by threat of violence, do we consider them unfree. Of course past behavior might be taken into account in some circumstances. If a person has been unable to prevent themselves from committing some act on a consistent basis, even when it is clearly in their best interest to refrain, we might find them to be an addict and as such not free. Being addicted is often thought to be a form of being coerced. This is referred to as a hypothetical analysis of the AP theory, because whether or not a person is free to do otherwise is claimed to be contingent on whether or not they wanted to do otherwise.

Of course modern philosophers have also gone beyond this distinction. They often focus on the psychology and mental attributes that make men free. If it is possible to be constrained internally to various degrees then freedom admits to degrees as well. Just what sorts of behaviors, choices and mental

constitution contribute to the constraint or exercise of free will consumes a great deal of ink in the modern writings of this issue. Daniel Dennett in his book *Freedom Evolves* discusses how human consciousness might have evolved and how it is possible for a vast amount of intricately related but non-conscious entities like cells to give rise to human consciousness. Stuart Hampshire focuses more on the interrelation between thought and action. He presents us with a philosophy of intentionality that though internal and mental is not separable from the external and physical. Harry Frankfurt, another modern compatibilist contends that freedom resides in the layers of volition exhibited by the agent. He asserts that one of the things that make someone a person is their self-reflective attitude toward their own desires. People have the ability to reflect upon the desirability of their own wants and it is this sort of insightful self-reflective ability that makes a person fully human. He also holds that Free will is essentially being able to do what one wants to do. Of course with these self-reflective abilities and the differing attitudes toward ones own wants that follow from this, the very word “want” is rather ambiguous. It is for this reason that he begins his discussion on free will with an analysis of what it means to want something.

Frankfurt points out that we often have conflicting desires. We may find ourselves wanting two separate things that are mutually exclusive. When one has a desire that in some way pertains to another desire, this is termed by Frankfurt a second order desire. So, if a person wants to take some drug, this is a first order desire and if they also do not want to have a desire to want to take that drug this is a second order desire. Though this distinction is interesting, it is second order volitions that Frankfurt claims are resultant in a person possessing free will. He observes that people are often not indifferent to what sorts of desires they possess. A person can both have a desire and wish that desire to move them, or wish for some competing desire to move them. This is the most obvious in the case of the unwilling drug addict. This is a case where a person has the desire to take a drug and the competing desire not to take it. Yet in addition to this, he also has the desire to be moved by only one of these desires. In the case of the unwilling drug addict he wishes to be moved by the desire to not take the drug, despite it's falling to actually move him. What qualifies an action as a free action is then in this case rather narrow. For instance, a person who has second order desires, but no opinion about which should be his motivating force is not free. A person is also unfree if they have second order volitions, but like the drug addict are over powered by some other desire to act against this volition. Of course, as is usually accepted, any person that is constrained, coerced or outright forced into acting contrary to their will is not free. The only type of person that is considered to be free is someone that has desires, second order desires, second order volitions and is actually moved to act by and unimpeded from acting in accordance with their second order volitions.

The bibliography for this exam is fairly broad, but it follows the common thread of the compatibilist account of free will and can be expected to show where it has kept to the Humean outline of free will and where it has deviated and evolved beyond it.

Exam II: Hume and Goodman on Induction:

This exam should give me the opportunity to explicate on a comparative analysis of Hume and Goodman on the Topic of induction. I have taken more than a couple of classes that have dealt with the Empiricist movement and have found the philosophical problems that arise to be quite fascinating. Specifically I found that Professor Tang's class on Nelson Goodman to inspire me to look more closely at the whole issue of induction. I intend to research what both Goodman and Hume have had to say on this subject and to be able to explicate at length both their positions and how they relate to one another.

The epistemological claims of empiricism and the worry about induction that naturally follows, is exactly what these two eminent philosophers tried to address. Hume observed that *a priori* reasoning about matters of fact was impossible. Though *a priori* reasoning could reveal interesting things about the relations that hold between our ideas, as with mathematics, it could shed no light on propositions about the empirical world. Knowledge about matters of fact can only be derived from experience about those issues. This, as can quickly be seen, creates a problem for all predictive claims about the future. Whenever we use our experiences to justify some belief about future events, i.e. use the process of induction, we are making an assumption that on the surface cannot be justified in experience. Hume contends that our assumptions about cause and effect, the principle behind our inductive claims, are the result of nothing more than a constant conjunction of ideas. When we see event A always followed by event B we conclude that A is the cause of B. Prima facie this seems an acceptable way of reasoning, but it is based on a hidden premise that brings the entire epistemological justification for the belief into question. If one takes all of this as is, it is hard to avoid a radical skepticism. Most of our daily activities are based on beliefs whose justifications are grounded on some level or another on inductive inferences. Hume tries to save induction by an appeal to human psychology. For him there is a sort of determination of the mind that results in inability to conceive that results might actually differ from how they have proceeded in the past. When we observe the constant conjunction of some event with an immediately preceding event the mind cannot but help to conjoin the two in a causal relationship. So the causal relationship between two events is not defined just in terms of their constant conjunction, but instead their constant conjunction plus their effect upon the mind, resulting in a conjoining of the two events.

Hume then, though often taken for a radical skeptic, did try to elucidate just how it is we distinguish between law-like claims from non-law-like claims in practice. Goodman, in his "*Fact, Fiction and Forecast*" can be seen as continuing this enterprise. Goodman is concerned with how we can distinguish between valid and invalid deductive inferences. For Goodman, since induction is clearly something that we cannot do without, it behooves us to discover exactly what it is that we are doing when we make inductive inferences and how we distinguish between valid and invalid inferences in our daily use. In this vein, Goodman examines the role that counterfactuals play in inductive reasoning. He notes that counterfactuals can be seen as trying to spread manifest predicates over possible situations. The counterfactual:

If match *m* had been struck at time *t*, then *m* would have lit

is one he uses fairly frequently. It is in dealing with the difficulty of trying to explain such a counterfactual that Goodman is led to talk about dispositions. He asserts that more is being said by the above counterfactual than at first appears. Clearly for a match to light when struck certain conditions must apply. After all, the striking of a match does not in anyway guarantee its coming to be lit, the

conditions must be propitious. Furthermore, the proposed counterfactual claims that conditions at time t were in fact just so. For a counterfactual to be valid then, the antecedent must be conjoined with the proper conditions that are appropriate to the consequent. What makes for appropriate conditions though? Some sort of general principle must be appealed to. This thought brings us back to the problem of induction. Goodman intends to find what it is that makes a proposition law like. It is difficult to differentiate between actual law like generalizations and accidental ones. This is exactly the problem faced here. Goodman hopes to find a solution to this problem as I have briefly sketched it by analyzing dispositions. Goodman rightly notes that dispositions are often translatable to counterfactuals. Statements about a thing's flammability are often taken to mean that, if object "a" had been heated enough, it would have burned. Goodman wants to discuss dispositions such as flammable and flexible in terms of manifest properties. However, he is careful to avoid any talk about the properties of things deserving their own ontological status. In this way he avoids treating dispositions as occult powers. Dispositional terms, must refer to actual things and these actual things in the world are what the dispositional term has as its extension. Goodman of course wants to explain the dispositional properties of a thing in terms of something actual that is in fact present at the time of attribution of a dispositional quality to it. Goodman believes that if we can use some manifest predicate that coincides with our use of a specific dispositional term, then we can explain the dispositional predicate, in terms of the manifest one. Coming back then to induction; an inductive inference is then just the projecting of a manifest predicate into the future. Goodman's new riddle of induction is then simply a matter of defining what dispositional terms are projectible and which are not. This quest for finding out what is projectible and what is not, based on various types of confirmation, leads Goodman to his now famous Grue paradox. To escape this paradox Goodman formulates the notion of entrenchment as a condition for projectibility. The rules of entrenchment in conjunction with ordinary rules of confirmation are designed to create a schema to explain inductive reasoning, just like the rules of predicate logic explain deductive reasoning.

This particular exam should then ultimately evaluate my ability to couch the problem of induction as it is put forth by both Hume and Goodman and the differences between these two presentations of the nature of the problem. Also, I should be able to explicate the differences and similarities between their respective solutions and the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

Exam III: Locke and Berkeley on substance:

The last exam will be based on Locke and Berkeley, specifically on their respective takes on the notion of substance. I have taken the British Empiricism class with Professor Nolan where I first gained an interest in the empiricist movement and even gave an oral defense of Locke's account of abstract ideas against Berkeley's criticisms, an argument that to some extent runs parallel with their disagreement about substance. I have also read extensively and been interested in latter Empiricists like A.J. Ayer and Quine. I believe that my education would benefit from further research into the early developments of the empiricist movement. This exam then shall require me to do just that.

Locke talks about substance in two disparate ways. There are for him individual substances which are complex ideas formed by the minds association of and with primary and secondary qualities. However he also is still attached to the idea of substance as a substratum to which the basic ideas our mind encounters subsist in. He is careful not to make and grandiose claims about substance in this sense and refers to it as "I know not what". Locke acknowledges that we can have no knowledge of substance

and only create it as a logical construct because we naturally believe that qualities must subsist in something. This cautious explanation of substance has the consequence of being vague and unclear. For this reason, amongst others, Berkeley criticizes what he takes to be Locke's account of substance. However, Locke's discourse on substance is primarily negative in its nature. Locke does say that the secondary qualities inhere in the primary ones. However, if one asks what do the primary qualities inhere in, then Locke thinks we are in no position to give an answer. The standard answer though has been that it is some sort of a substratum or substance in the Aristotelian sense. Since Locke mentions this notion of substance, and does not give some sort of other answer as to what it could be, many critics have mistaken his account of substance as a substratum to be a positive rather than a negative one. What is not clear is whether or not Locke does in fact think that there is something there that extension and figure subsist in. He is either claiming ontologically that there is no such substratum and that the whole idea is bankrupt, or he is making an epistemological claim that we can have no knowledge of what such a substratum might be.

Berkeley first refutes the notion that there can be anything to our objects of perception other than that which is perceived. He contends that the primary and secondary quality distinction is an empty one. He demonstrates this by showing that primary qualities are just as mind dependent as secondary qualities. Primary qualities like hot and cold are integrally related to pleasure and pain which are clearly mind dependent, Berkeley claims. Furthermore, even things like solidity, size and shape are dependent on touch and point of view. This seems to conflate the two categories into one. If both primary and secondary qualities are mind dependent then there is no need to postulate some material substance for them to inhere to. It also follows, that if there are no material substances then there is no need to postulate a substance that is a substratum for the qualities of a material substance to reside in. Once we see that all sensory experiences are purely mind dependent, then all talk of those qualities existing independently is incoherent. If qualities are not anything outside the mind then some sort of material substance for them to subsist in, outside of the mind, is an empty notion.

Despite Berkeley's criticism, it might be that he himself exhibits a greater reliance on the notion of a substratum than Locke himself. Locke clearly is dubious about the notion of an underlying substance that supports the qualities we observe. He says that we have a confused idea of substance. When Locke talks of this confused idea we almost have to wonder if he is using idea in a different sense. Through much of his work he talks of idea in relation to sense experience, like the simple ideas we have of the external world. In fact all of our ideas are supposed to come from a combining of impressions or sense experience, and reflection. How then can we have an idea of substance which is devoid of any qualities of which we could have impressions of? For Locke though the idea of substance is an abstraction. It is a relative idea, dealing with the relation of the qualities of a thing to the thing itself. This seems to work very well for individual substances, but perhaps less well for the idea of substance as a substratum. Mostly he seems to find the idea of such a substance as vacuous, even if he does not entirely rid himself of it. He does explain how we come to such a concept as substance, and explains why we have a propensity to adhere to it, despite the philosophical difficulties associated with it. Berkeley seems to interpret this as Locke's assent to the idea, though Locke's commitment to it is less than obvious. Berkeley's thesis however does leave ideas needing something to be supported and maintained by. Berkeley's "ideas" are the things of everyday experience, like smells, sights, and sounds. Trees and mountains are just ideas, though complex ones. They are a conjunction of many ideas that we have direct access too. If these things are mere ideas though, and we receive them passively, then there must be something maintaining their regularity and predictability. These ideas are dependent upon a mind, a

pervasive and active spirit is needed to maintain the stability of the ideas that we encounter. We have an acquaintance with spiritual substance, namely our own. It is very different from the ideas we receive passively like mountains and chairs. It is not an idea for Berkeley, but we are aware of our willing and desiring and acting upon our ideas with our mind. In this way we develop a notion of spiritual substance that differs from our other ideas. Furthermore, since we know that we receive sensory experiences passively and that they are purely mental, there must be some other entity that is furnishing us with them, in a regular and predictable manner. These ideas that we regularly encounter must be actively maintained by some thing which is the cause of them in us. This Berkeley contends is the supreme spiritual substance, or God.

This exam should delve into the differences and similarities between Locke and Berkeley account of substance. Where Berkeley gets Locke right, where his criticisms are telling, and where they are not should be well explored.

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