Instructor: Kadri Vihvelin

Contact: vihvelin@usc.edu

Class time: Mondays 2-4:20, on Zoom

Office hours: Fridays, 10 – 11:45, on Zoom, or by appointment

**Philosophy 560**

**Seminar in Metaphysics**

**SYLLABUS**

The Consequence argument, defended most prominently by Peter van Inwagen, is an argument from plausible premises – the fact that the laws and the past are not in our power – to an implausible conclusion: that if determinism is true, we are equally powerless with respect to our own choices and actions and therefore with respect to the future. An adequate defense of compatibilism – about free will and moral responsibility – must explain why the argument fails. This can’t be done without some understanding of counterfactuals and the links between counterfactuals, causation, and the laws of nature. Most of the philosophers who work on questions of free will and moral responsibility have not been interested in these topics, so the Consequence argument still stands, mostly unchallenged, with David Lewis nearly the only exception. Our goal, in this class, will be to learn enough about counterfactuals, causation, laws, and time’s arrow (the difference between past and future) to figure out why the argument fails. We will also read some of the best of the classic and contemporary philosophical literature on free will, freedom of action, and the free will/determinism problem.

**Free Will and Freedom of Action**

Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”

Albritton, “Freedom of Will and Freedom of Action”

Watson, “Freedom and Strength of Will in Hoffman and Albritton”

Possible: Frankfurt, “Concerning the Freedom and Limits of the Will”

Background: Vihvelin, An Introduction to the Problem of Free Will and Determinism (handout)

Sider, “Free Will and Determinism” (from *Riddles of Existence: A Guided Tour of Metaphysics*)

**Historical Background**

Aune, “Hypotheticals and ‘Can’: Another Look”

Lehrer, “Cans without Ifs”

Possible: Pickard, “Psychopathology and Ability to do Otherwise”

Background: Vihvelin, “Historical Interlude: Objections to the Simple Conditional Analysis Reconsidered”, from Chap. 6 of *Causes, Laws, and Free Will: Why Determinism Doesn’t Matter*

**The Consequence Argument**

van Inwagen, “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism”

van Inwagen, excerpt from *An Essay on Free Will*, against the conditional analysis of “could have done otherwise”

Lewis, “Are We Free to Break the Laws?”

Perry, “Compatibilist Options”

Background: Vihvelin, excerpt from “Compatibilism, Incompatibilism, Impossibilism” (in *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*)

Vihvelin, An Introduction to Counterfactuals (handout)

**Does it matter whether the laws are “weak” or “strong”?**

van Inwagen, excerpt from *An Essay on Free Will*

Beebee and Mele, “Humean Compatibilism”

Beebee, “The Non-Governing Conception of Laws”

Vihvelin, “How the Laws Constrain” (excerpt)

Background: Loewer, “Determinism”

**Ability, Possibility, and “Can”**

Lewis, excerpt from “The Paradoxes of Time Travel”

Jaster, “What Tim Can and Cannot Do: A Paradox of Time Travel Revisited”

Van Cleve, “Lewis and Taylor as Partners in Sin”

Mele, “Agent Abilities”

Vihvelin, “Free Will Demystified: A Dispositional Account”

Vihvelin, “Dispositional Compatibilism”

Possible:Clarke, “Abilities to Act”

Vihvelin, excerpt from “Ability and Possibility”, draft

Vihvelin, “The Abilities and Dispositions of our Freedom”, Chap. 6 of *Causes, Laws, and Free Will: Why Determinism Doesn’t Matter*

Background: Kratzer, “What ‘Must’ and ‘Can’ Must and Can Mean”

Taylor, “Fate”

Vihvelin, “Book of Osmo, Conditionals of Futility, and the Fatalist’s Argument against Time Travel” (excerpt from Chap. 2 of *Causes, Laws and Free Will*: Why Determinism Doesn’t Matter

Vihvelin, “Killing Time Again”

**Semi-Compatibilism: Responsibility without Alternatives? Causation without Alternatives?**

Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”

Sartorio, Introduction, *Causation and Free Will*,

Sartorio, Chap. 1 of *Causation and Free Will*, “The Grounds of Freedom**”**

Background: Vihvelin, “How to Think about the Free Will/Determinism Problem”

**Incompatibilism, again**

van Inwagen, “When is the Will Free?”

van Inwagen, “A Promising Argument”

van Inwagen, “Ability”

Possible**:** Vihvelin, “The Abilities and Dispositions of our Freedom”, Chap. 6 of *Causes, Laws, and Free Will: Why Determinism Doesn’t Matter*

van Inwagen, “Preface to the French Translation”

van Inwagen, “The Problem of Fr\*\* W\*ll”

**Mental Causation**

List & Menzies**,** “My Brain Made Me Do It: The Exclusion Argument against Free Will and What’s wrong with It”

Loewer, “Mental Causation or Something Near Enough”

Background: Kim, excerpt from *Mind in a Physical World*

Vihvelin, The Exclusion argument (handout)

Loewer, “The emergence of time’s arrows and special science laws from physics”

**Causation**

Lewis, “Causation”

Schaffer, “Trumping Preemption”

Strevens, “Mackie Remixed”

Armstrong, “Going through the Open Door Again”

Possible: Lewis, “Causation as Influence”

Paul, “Aspect Causation”

Beebee, “Causing and Nothingness”

Menzies, “The Role of Counterfactual Dependence in Causal Judgments”

Maudlin, “Causation, Counterfactuals, and the Third Factor”, Chap. 5 of *The Metaphysics within Physics*

Background: Vihvelin, Some Notes on Causation (handout)

Hausman, “Metaphysical Pictures and Wishes”, Chap. 1 of *Causal Asymmetries*

Vihvelin, excerpt from “Causation: A Theorist’s Guide” , draft

Hausman, “Causation, Regularities, and Time: Hume’s Theory, Chap. 3 of *Causal Asymmetries*

**Counterfactuals**

Stalnaker, “A Theory of Conditionals”

Lewis, “Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow”

Bennett, “Counterfactuals and Temporal Direction”

Possible: Wilson, “The Asymmetry of Counterfactual Dependence and Hume’s Dictum”

Vihvelin, “How the Laws Constrain”

Edgington, “Counterfactuals and the Benefits of Hindsight”

Background: Goodman, “The Problem of Counterfactual Conditionals”

Lewis, *Chap. 1 of Counterfactuals*

**Time’s Arrow**

Price, “The View from Nowhen”, Chap. 1 of *Time’s Arrow and Archimedes’ Point*

Hoefer, “Freedom from the Inside Out”

Maudlin, “On the Passing of Time”, Chap. 4 of *The Metaphysics within Physics*

Maudlin, “The Whole Ball of Wax”, Chap. 6 of *The Metaphysics within Physics*

Loewer, “Two Accounts of Laws and Time”

Dummett, “Bringing about the Past”

Horwich, “Knowledge”, Chap. 5 of *Asymmetries in Time*

Possible:

Loewer, “The Consequence Argument Meets the Mentaculus”

Loew, “The Asymmetry of Counterfactual Dependence”

Albert*, “*The Sharpness of the Distinction between Past and Future”

Fernandes, “Freedom, Self-Prediction, and the Possibility of Time Travel”

Mellor, “The Direction of Time”, Chap. 11 of *Real Time II*

Mellor, “The Linearity of Time”, Chap. 12 of *Real Time II*

Background:

Horwich, “Asymmetries”, Chap. 1 of *Asymmetries in Time*

Maudlin, “Epilogue: A Remark on the Method of Metaphysics”, *The Metaphysics within Physics*

**One Possible Schedule of readings:**

Aug. 17: Introduction

Aug. 24: Freedom of Will and Freedom of Action; Historical Background.

Aug. 31: Consequence Argument

Sept. 7: No class: Labor Day

Sept. 14: Does it Matter whether the Laws are Weak or Strong?

Sept. 22: Ability, Possibility, and ‘Can’

Sept. 29: Ability, Possibility, and ‘Can’

Oct. 5: Semi-Compatibilism; Mental Causation OR Incompatibilism, again

Oct. 12: Causation

Oct. 19: Causation

Oct. 26: Counterfactuals

Nov. 2: Time’s Arrow

Nov. 9: Time’s Arrow

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Nov. 9: Time’s Arrow

**Expectations and Evaluation:** Attendance and participation in every class. Use of Blackboard for follow-up discussion and questions. Use of zoom for office hours, times to be worked out to accommodate students. I won’t require response papers during the semester, but by the end of the semester students should write either one long paper (the usual length) or two, three, or four shorter papers, totaling approximately the same length. All work is due by December 2nd. Students writing the long paper should consult with me about paper topic no later than Nov. 2nd.

**Disability Accommodations:**

If you require academic accommodations based on a disability please inform me (as well as Disability Services and Programs) as early in the semester as possible, so that I can make whatever arrangements are necessary.

**STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC CONDUCT AND USC SUPPORT SYSTEMS:**

**Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

**Academic Conduct:**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable.  See additional information in *SCampus*and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

**Support Systems:**

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. [engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org_&d=DwMFAg&c=clK7kQUTWtAVEOVIgvi0NU5BOUHhpN0H8p7CSfnc_gI&r=CkL4kY0no88QZj2uCDFOI7xhjLQ9O4YZiOIPGjQSQJ8&m=FN8fbuOqtif1bWvrKTHrycKDSgd_snFubXhYrp7Dz58&s=yigxVd9JJfatu9uXYx0qpj6LhjknPiz6tnBwI27pj4U&e=)

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/)

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu/)

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu/)

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/)

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu/)

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/)

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [diversity.usc.edu](https://diversity.usc.edu/)

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

*USC Department of Public Safety  – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.*

Provides overall safety to USC community. [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu/)