

Free Will: A Very Short Introduction
By Thomas Pink

Do we really make our own decisions? Or are we compelled to act by factors beyond our control? And if our choices are not free, why should we be held morally responsible for them. Thomas Pink's Very Short Introduction to free will is an accessible and stimulating investigation of one of the most important and enduring problems of Western philosophy. It looks at a range of issues surrounding this fundamental philosophical question, exploring it from the ideas of the Greek and medieval philosophers through to the thoughts of present-day thinkers.

Questions for thought and discussion

- Can animals be free agents, or can it only be humans who possess freedom?
- Is rationality or the capacity for reason a condition of freedom?
- Is freedom a kind of power? If so, how is the power of freedom exercised and over what? How does it differ from other kinds of power?
- Does freedom always involve a power over alternatives - a power either to do things or to refrain? Or can we be free while lacking the freedom to act differently than we do?
- Is freedom a form of causal power, so that to exercise freedom is to produce effects? Can there be powers that are not causal?
- Is freedom of action consistent with the causal determination of our actions by past events outside our control?
- If we are free, how do we learn of our freedom - through experience or in some other way?
- If freedom is an illusion, what is the source of the illusion? - Why should we mistakenly suppose ourselves to be free?
- Does freedom of action depend on a freedom of will - of choice or decision? Do we possess freedom of choice or decision?
- Could freedom amount to no more than the capacity to act as we want or will?
- Can we be morally responsible and to blame for how we act without being free to act otherwise?
- Can there be any justification for punishing people for what they do if they lack the freedom to act otherwise?
- Could natural science ever show that we lack freedom? - If so how?
- 'If actions are causally predetermined, then they cannot be free; but if actions are not causally predetermined, then they are merely chance, so again they cannot be free. So freedom is impossible.' Is this a good argument?
- If freedom were shown to be an illusion, what difference would this make to human life? Could people in general ever come to abandon belief in their own freedom?

Other Books by Thomas Pink

Thomas Pink, *The Psychology of Freedom* (Cambridge University Press, 1996)
 Thomas Pink, *The Will and Human Action: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Routledge, 2004)
 Thomas Pink, *The Ethics of Action* (OUP, forthcoming)

Thomas Pink, *Francisco Suarez: Moral and Political Works* (Liberty Classics, forthcoming)

Thomas Pink, *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance*, in the Clarendon edition of the works of Thomas Hobbes (OUP, forthcoming)

Further Reading

G. Watson (ed.), *Free Will* (OUP 2003)

A. Mele (ed.), *The Philosophy of Action*, (OUP)

The Oxford Handbook of Free Will, ed R. Kane (OUP 2002)

D.D. Raphael (ed.), 'Of liberty and necessity' T. Hobbes, in *British Moralists 1650 - 1800* vol 1

H.J. Paton (ed.), *The Moral Law: Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (Routledge 2005)