

24.221: Final paper topics

Please look over the following three prompts and choose to write your essay on one of them. Citations to work that is not your own must be clearly marked in text (use whatever style, Chicago, or MLA, etc you want) – and you must include a bibliography if you cite anything. Your essay should be between five and eight pages (double-spaced, 12 point font with 1” margins), stapled, and handed in at the last session. The draft of the paper is due on session 21 and is optional.

1. Here are two problems we’ve discussed, side by side. The first is basically Unger’s problem of the many. At any particular time, it’s unclear which of many equally plausible people-candidates (slightly overlapping fusions of particles, each of which instantiates all of my mental properties now) I am; Unger says each is me and there are many *mes*, or maybe none is me and I don’t exist. The second is Parfit’s puzzle about fission. In fission cases, it’s unclear which of two equally plausible people-continuers I will be; Parfit thinks every answer to the question of which I will be is wrong. Discuss both of these problems together (how are they similar and different? Do they have a unique solution? Why or why not?) and argue for your own resolution of them. You may focus on any aspect of these problems you want, but do so rigorously and go beyond the readings.
2. Suppose determinism is true. Then if I had done something other than I in fact did, either the entire past of the world would have been different than it in fact is, or some proposition that states a law would have been false. This much is uncontroversial between incompatibilists and compatibilists. Explain why van Inwagen thinks this consequence of determinism leads to incompatibilism. Then articulate what you think to be the strongest objection to his argument. You may draw on Lewis and Beebe here, but make sure you cite them when you do so, and also make sure your discussion goes beyond them.
3. Is eternalism compatible with individuals having free will? Give an argument why or why not. Consider the strongest objection to your argument and respond to it. (If you think it isn’t, what theory of time do you think is, if any?)

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