

Philosophy in Review



Kevin Timpe, Meghan Griffith, & Neil Levy, (eds.), "The Routledge Companion to Free Will."

Filip Grgić

Volume 40, Number 1, February 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1068160ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1068160ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

University of Victoria

ISSN

1206-5269 (print)

1920-8936 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Grgić, F. (2020). Review of [Kevin Timpe, Meghan Griffith, & Neil Levy, (eds.), "The Routledge Companion to Free Will."]. *Philosophy in Review*, 40(1), 41–42.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1068160ar>

Copyright Filip Grgić, 2020



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Kevin Timpe, Meghan Griffith, & Neil Levy, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Free Will*. Routledge 2016. 730 pp. \$260.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781138795815).

The Routledge Companion to Free Will is a collection of sixty entries that together provide an excellent overview of the main positions, arguments, and topics in the free will debate. It is structured in six main sections: I Major Positions in the Free Will Debate, II Major Arguments, III Historical Figures, IV Empirical and Scientific Work, V Free Will and Theology, and VI Special Topics. Each entry includes a bibliography, references for further reading, and the list of related topics discussed in the *Companion*. The editors have assembled a mixture of big names and new entrants in diverse fields pertaining to the problem of free will. As has become common in volumes of this kind, they characterize it both as ‘an advanced introduction and as a guide for specialists who want to continue to contribute to the free will debates’ (xxi). This is indeed an apt description of this collection. Most contributions are written with a view to give an introduction to a specific position, argument, or topic, while some provide a more advanced treatment.

The *Companion* opens with the entry on semicompatibilism, written by its originator and the most important proponent, John Fischer, who provides an illuminating account of its main arguments and responds to some recent objections. As Saul Smilansky rightly notes in his entry on ‘nonstandard views,’ ‘Fischer is the contemporary compatibilist standard, the “establishment”’ (136), so that it is not surprising that the editors decided to open the volume with the account of a recent variety of compatibilism. Some of their most important proponents (e.g., dispositional compatibilism by Kadri Vihvelin, event-causal libertarianism by Laura Ekstrom, or free will skepticism by Derk Pereboom) also present other major positions in the contemporary free will debate.

Much traditional and contemporary work in the free will problem is devoted to major arguments in favor of the main positions. Section II provides an overview of central arguments for incompatibilism (the Consequence and the Manipulation arguments) and for compatibilism (Frankfurt-style arguments and the Luck and *Mind* arguments), as well as the discussion of one of the oldest arguments against free will, which turns on the idea of logical fatalism. The chapters in this section show that a clear-cut classification of major arguments is not possible. As Kristin Mickelson shows in her entry on the Manipulation Argument, this argument can be understood as directed to any position that affirms the possibility of free action. Likewise, Christopher Franklin argues that the Luck Argument raises problems not only for libertarians, but for most compatibilists as well. Our approach to these arguments depends largely on how we understand the conditions for free will. Timpe’s useful entry (which perhaps should have been placed at the beginning of the section) introduces the reader to the two main conceptions of free will: the so-called leeway conception, according to which free will requires the existence of alternative possibilities, and the sourcehood conception, according to which free will is a matter of our being the appropriate source of our choices.

The third section comprises seventeen chapters on historical figures from Aristotle to Nietzsche, including two chapters on Chinese and Indian perspectives on free will. As is to be expected, this is the most diverse section of the book. It is not always clear whether, and to what extent, our conceptions of freedom, responsibility, action, will, etc., correspond to anything that has been discussed in the past. For instance, it has often claimed that Aristotle has no concept of a will, and hence no concept of a free will. Karen Nielsen challenges such a view and argues that ‘if, instead of assuming that there is such a thing as the—one and only—concept of the will, we recognize that there could be many, then the question of will in Aristotle seems rather less straightforward, and we may find room for Aristotle’s theory of *prohairesis* in the history of the notion of will’ (232).

The next section discusses some central empirical and scientific issues surrounding the free will problem, especially the threats to the idea that we have free will that comes from psychology and neuroscience. This section contains also the entry on the contribution of experimental philosophy (Adam Feltz on 'Folk Intuitions'), as well as the illuminating paper by Hanna Pickard on addiction, which discusses whether the addict as the character depicted in some recent compatibilist literature fits in what empirical research reveals about the real-life addicts. Especially worth mentioning is also the chapter on children's intuitions about choice (written by Adam Bear and Paul Bloom), in which the authors argue that our understanding of choice is more a product of a folk theory of mental life than of a phenomenological experience.

Next comes the group of entries concerned with theological issues. As none of them approaches the problem from the perspective of a non-Christian religion, Timpe, rightly observes that this section reflects 'the Christian-centric nature of current philosophy of religion' (486). Three papers discuss the nature and value of free will in relation to theological determinism and fatalism, and the problem of evil. Stewart Goetz gives an overview of the relationship between libertarianism and substance dualism, and shows why these two positions go hand in hand. Timothy Pawl writes about a difficulty concerning the relation of free will and grace, and Ken Perszyk discusses the problem of divine free will.

As Levy, puts it, '[t]here is always more to learn about free will, other angles to bring to bear to it, other ways in which disciplines may productively engage on its terrain' (563). The chapters in the last section, 'Special Topics,' show why this is so. They 'illustrate how exciting this kind of territory can be, as well as how productive it is to traverse this terrain' (ibid.). Thus, among the topics discussed in this section are *akrasia*, free will and criminal law, blame, feminist approach to moral responsibility, phenomenology of agency, marginal agents and responsibility pluralism, etc. Here we also find an entry on determinism written by Charlotte Werndl. Although most of the traditional free will debate is concerned with the (in)compatibility of free will and determinism, the participants in the debate, especially if they are philosophers, rarely address the more advanced and subtle questions concerning the very notion of determinism. This entry, as well as the others in this section, will therefore be useful primarily for the specialists.

Apart from being an outstanding review of state of the art in this field of research, the *Companion* demonstrates the extent to which the free will debates have moved from their traditional preoccupations with the compatibility question to the much broader domain. Even though much of the discussion remains within the traditional boundaries, the insights from neuroscience, various branches of psychology, physics, biology, law, etc. are indispensable if we want to make any significant progress toward the deeper understanding of free will and related notions. The editors should be congratulated for providing us with convincing proof that such progress is possible.

Filip Grgić, Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb