Free Will and Moral Responsibility – A Questionnaire

The concept of free will is notoriously tricky. Probably most of us have some "intuitive" idea of what we would consider a free action, and of the circumstances in which we would consider someone to be morally responsible (or not). But it turns out that such "intuitions" can conflict with each other, and that trying to put together a consistent account of free will is extremely difficult. This questionnaire is designed to give you a mental work-out on the topic. First, just go through dealing with all of the questions as quickly as you can, giving your off-the-cuff answers. Then, after watching the lecture material on free will, go through again and work out whether your views have changed.

(A) Free Will and Moral Responsibility

For each of the statements below, please give a mark of "SA" (strongly agree), "A" (agree), "N" (neither agree nor disagree), "D" (disagree) or "SD" (strongly disagree").

1. It is (generally) appropriate to hold people morally responsible for actions that they do freely.
2. It is (generally) inappropriate to hold people morally responsible for actions that they do not do freely.
3. Acting under threat reduces freedom, and hence reduces moral responsibility.
4. The bigger the threat under which I act, the more my freedom (and hence responsibility) is reduced.
5. The more my actions are under my conscious control, the more free they are.
6. If everything that I do is causally determined, then my actions are not free.
7. If my actions are to some extent random, then (at least to that extent) they are not free.

(B) Moral Responsibility

For each of the statements below, please give a mark of "SA" (strongly agree), "A" (agree), "N" (neither agree nor disagree), "D" (disagree) or "SD" (strongly disagree").

8. It is (often or always) appropriate to hold adults morally responsible for what they do.
9. It is appropriate to hold drug addicts responsible for continuing to take drugs.
10. If a person does something wrong when drunk, he is less culpable than if he had been sober.
11. It is appropriate to hold young children morally responsible for what they do.
12. It is appropriate to hold dogs morally responsible for what they do.
13. It could be appropriate to hold a robot responsible for what it does.
14. A premeditated murder is more culpable than a spur-of-the-moment "crime of passion".
15. A planned theft or fraud is more culpable than one done opportunistically.
16. A crime is more culpable if done by an habitual criminal than by someone of generally "good character".
17. A crime is less culpable if done under threat, e.g. "I'll kill you if you don't open the safe".

(C) Free Choice

In a restaurant, I am offered a choice of dessert between ice-cream and fruit. For each of the variations below, please rate the freedom of that choice on a scale from 0 to 4 (where 4 means "totally free", 3 means "slightly impaired freedom", 2 means "significantly impaired freedom", 1 means "minimal freedom", and 0 means "not free at all")

18. Ice cream is my absolutely favourite dessert, so I choose ice-cream.
19. I've been given strict medical advice to avoid sugar, so I choose fruit.
20. There's only one portion of ice-cream left, and my friend loves it, so I choose fruit to allow her to have it.
21. My boss whispers, with a serious look, "if you take the ice-cream, you're fired!", so I choose fruit.

(D) Free Bargaining

Someone in the street asks me to give them my mobile phone, and I do so. For each variation below, please rate the freedom of my giving them the phone on a scale from 0 to 4 (where again 4 means "totally free", 3 means "slightly impaired freedom", 2 means "significantly impaired freedom", 1 means "minimal freedom", and 0 means "not free at all")

22. They offer me £150, and I reckon it's a good bargain, so I accept the money and give them the phone.
23. They offer me £50, persuading me that it's a good bargain by showing me an advertisement that later turns out to be fraudulent (it was offering £130 for such phones, but had been amended to say £30).
24. They pull out a gun and threaten to shoot me if I don't give them the phone.
25. They threaten to punch me if I don't give them the phone.
26. They threaten to abuse and embarrass me if I don't give them the phone.
27. They hypnotise me and then tell me to give them the phone.
28. I'm a drug addict, desperate for money to buy a fix quickly, so I accept £50 for the phone.

(E) Free Bargaining and Responsibility

The situation is similar to (D) above, except that here the phone has been borrowed from my friend. For each of these variations, please give a mark between 0 and 4 to rate the moral responsibility of my decision to part with my friend's phone between 4 for "totally responsible" down to 0 for "not responsible at all".

29. They offer me £150, and I reckon it's a good bargain, so I accept the money and give them the phone.
30. They pull out a gun and threaten to shoot me if I don't give them the phone.
31. They threaten to punch me if I don't give them the phone.
32. They threaten to abuse and embarrass me if I don't give them the phone.
33. They hypnotise me and then tell me to give them the phone.
34. I'm a drug addict, desperate for money to buy a fix quickly, so I accept £50 for the phone.

(F) Free Actions

For each of the types of action below, please give a mark to rate the (typical) freedom of that action between 4 for "totally free" down to 0 for "totally unfree".

35. I want a glass of water, so I take a glass from my cupboard, go to the tap and fill the glass etc.
36. Driving along the road to work, I slow down to avoid going through a red light ahead.
37. I want a hot drink, with both tea and coffee available in my kitchen – after some thinking, I make tea.
38. I want a hot drink, and toss a coin to decide which kind – "tails" comes up, so I make tea.
39. I want a hot drink, and always prefer tea to coffee when both are available. So I make tea.
40. I want a hot drink, and always prefer tea, but in any case there's no coffee. So I make tea.
41. Playing chess, I see immediately that taking the knight wins. So I take the knight.
42. After a long calculation, I work out that taking the knight definitely wins. So I take the knight.
43. After a long attempt at calculation, I reckon that taking the knight probably wins. So I take it.
44. Without thinking it through, I like the look of the position after taking the knight, so I take it.
45. I've no idea about the position, but I have to move quickly. So I take the knight.