

Inference and conclusion questions may be worded in a variety of ways. Here are some of the most common:

From this passage, you could infer (conclude, predict) that

or

_____ was probably the result of (caused by)

or

The author implies (suggests) that

or

The writer of the passage probably is (feels, will, has, has never)

OPTIONS

The inference and conclusion question or statement will then be followed by four options.

1. The **correct option** will be a logical inference or conclusion that can be made from the passage.
2. Three **incorrect options** will be either false assumptions, conclusions, or inferences; and/or a detail overtly stated in the passage.

PITFALLS

1. A statement that might be considered justifiable outside the context of the passage may be a wrong answer option within the context of the passage. Therefore, be sure to pay particular attention to the question being asked.
2. Watch out for absolute language. Very few statements are ALWAYS true.
3. Don't get too involved in the issue of whether something is an inference or a conclusion; the terms are so close as to be almost interchangeable.
4. Note that an inference/conclusion question specifically asks you to "read between the lines" of a passage. Sometimes a wrong answer option might be a concrete fact taken from the text. If a fact is clearly stated, however, it *does not* need to be inferred.
5. Finally, while you always want to interact with the material, don't "over-read" a passage or be misled by your own strongly held opinions. Stand back and critically decide whether an inference or conclusion is justified on the basis of the passage itself, regardless of your own opinion.
6. Again, pay particular attention to the way the questions are being asked.



FULL LENGTH PASSAGE

DIRECTIONS: Read the following passage. Then choose the best answer. Check your answer with the Answer Key that follows.

The argument between free will and determinism is central to moral philosophy. According to free will, an individual, when faced with alternatives, can legitimately choose among them. If such is the case, then whatever was chosen might *not* have been chosen, and what was not chosen *could* have been chosen. Any act might therefore *not* have taken place because the individual could have chosen differently. Determinism, on the other hand, is based on the principle of causation, according to which a particular event is related to the event that preceded it by a lawful connection so that every time the same conditions obtain, the same relationship between the two events will obtain. Every event or action has a cause, which in turn is an event or action resulting from another cause--and so on. Applied to human behavior, then, determinism would hold that all behavior is caused because character itself is caused by heredity and environment. Given this lawlike relationship, all choice is reduced to the effect of a cause. Therefore, no authentic choice can exist to begin with, only the illusion of choice.

Whether or not human behavior is free or determined is of great importance to moral philosophers. With freedom comes responsibility. If an individual faced with authentic choice chooses to steal an object, then he or she is responsible because he or she could have chosen *not* to steal the object. If actions are determined, however, then the act of theft was brought about unavoidably by a series of events extending back in time, and the theft was the effect of a cause. The individual is therefore not responsible.

Clearly, the ability to choose between alternatives is fundamental to any concept of moral responsibility. Indeed, one of the standard conditions of excusability is coercion, where choice is forcibly removed; another is insanity, where a person is not rational enough to perceive choice; still another is mental impairment, where the individual can not discern options or deliberate among them. At any rate, a person who had no choice in regard to his or her action is not held responsible, while an individual who could have chosen otherwise is held responsible.

Interestingly, William James, in his essay "The Dilemma of Determinism" argues that it is only *after* the fact that a choice and the reasons behind it are said to have a lawlike relationship. Prior to that time, it is not possible to predict choice. James also argues, and rightly so, that regret is pointless if events could not have been otherwise. Thus to regret a murder would be absurd; it *had* to take place. Likewise, the person sacrificing his or her life to rescue others would be merely manifesting the effect of a cause: consequently, praise, like punishment, would be rendered absurd if people are not actually responsible for choosing their actions. It is easy to see which school of thought lends itself to the concept of moral improvement and which to the likelihood of moral despair.



1. From this passage, you could infer that the author
 - A. is a moral person concerned about right and wrong.
 - B. frequently reads about issues related to moral philosophy.
 - C. is a deep thinker about philosophical topics.
 - D. grasps certain basic issues in moral philosophy.
2. The author implies that
 - A. William James wrote an essay on moral philosophy.
 - B. it is preferable to believe in free will rather than determinism.
 - C. cause and effect is a fundamental principle underlying human behavior.
 - D. praise, blame, and responsibility are consequences of determinism.
3. The writer of this passage probably feels that
 - A. it is better to live righteously than to commit evil acts.
 - B. not enough people pay attention to moral issues.
 - C. we should take responsibility for our actions.
 - D. the ability to choose is just an illusion.
4. From this passage, you could conclude that
 - A. in order to regret an action you have to have chosen it.
 - B. all actions are caused by something in a person's life.
 - C. theft is an example of moral wrongdoing.
 - D. cause and effect is a universal law.
5. From this passage, you could conclude that
 - A. any event can be seen to have a cause after it happens.
 - B. responsibility places an unpleasant moral burden on individuals.
 - C. we all experience the conditions for excusability in our lives.
 - D. sacrificing your life to rescue someone is worthy of praise.



ANSWER KEY: FULL LENGTH PASSAGE

1. D In the first sentence of the passage, the author comes right out and states that "the argument" between free will and determinism is "central to moral philosophy," and then goes on to discuss--clearly and concisely--why the initial assertion was made. Therefore, you are justified in inferring that the author does understand, or grasp, those issues. Option A goes too far; perhaps the author *is* concerned about right and wrong, but there is no evidence in this theoretical discussion that the actions of the author make him or her *moral*. Option B is also incorrect; while it would seem that the author is interested in this subject, it does not follow that he or she *frequently* reads about it. You have no way of determining what actions the author performs or what books the author reads. Option C also reads too much into the passage; only one philosophical topic is discussed, and the explanation provided indicates that the issue itself can be approached without too much difficulty or "depth."
2. B The author points out that choice is an essential condition of moral responsibility, and in the last paragraph of the passage lists some of the problems associated with the absence of moral responsibility. Suggested, therefore, is that moral responsibility is good--and choice is its precondition. Consequently, free will is preferable to determinism because free will allows for choice, the necessary precondition for moral responsibility. The last sentence of the passage tips you off to the author's position. Option A is incorrect because the author *directly* refers to James' essay; nothing is implied. Option C is incorrect because the author argues the opposite position by pointing out the faults of determinism; he or she therefore could not believe in cause and effect as the underlying principle of human behavior. Option D is incorrect because, like Option C, it is a misreading of the passage: praise, blame, and responsibility are consequences of free will, not determinism.
3. C If you answered the last question correctly, you probably answered this one correctly as well. The author favors the concept of free will because it allows for responsibility; you are warranted, therefore, in inferring that if the author argues for the concept of moral responsibility, then the author believes in that concept. Option A is too strongly stated to be a real possibility. Words like *righteously* and *evil* go overboard in their description of what might be good or bad--but notice, judging behavior isn't even at issue here: establishing how moral responsibility can be possible is the point. Option B is incorrect because the discussion is theoretical; it does not pass judgments on people or behavior. Option D is incorrect because it represents a misreading of the passage. The author argues that choice would be an illusion *if* action were determined.

4. A The last paragraph of the passage provides the grounds for this conclusion which you, as a reader, would be justified in drawing based on the author's argument. Praise, blame, and regret make sense only if choice is possible. Option B is incorrect because it represents a generalized misreading of the passage. Option C requires too great an inferential leap: the example of theft is used to illustrate the concept of choice and responsibility, not moral wrongdoing. Option D is another misreading--whether or not cause and effect applies to human behavior has not been established as a "universal law."
5. A The author's reference to William James' argument supports this point. James maintains that cause can easily be discovered *after* the effect has taken place, but not so easily beforehand. Option B is incorrect because of the word *unpleasant*; while responsibility may constitute a moral burden for some, the burden is one of accountability which is not necessarily distasteful for all. Option C is factually incorrect because although we may *wish* to be excused, the conditions of excusability are very particular. Not everyone will experience these conditions. Option D is incorrect as a conclusion you might draw based on the passage: praise is possible only if free will and choice are possible.

