Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

JENNIFER SOMMERS

BA (University of Victoria, 2011)

“Overeating, Obesity, and Weakness of the Will”

Department of Philosophy

Wednesday, August 19, 2015
2:00 P.M.
Clearihue Building
Room B315

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Scott Woodcock, Department of Philosophy, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Cindy Holder, Department of Philosophy, UVic (Co-Supervisor)

External Examiner:
Dr. Frederick Grouzet, Department of Psychology, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Rebecca Grant, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

The philosophical literature on akrasia and/or weakness of the will tends to focus on individual actions, removed from their wider socio-political context. This is problematic because actions, when removed from their wider context, can seem absurd or irrational when they may, in fact, be completely rational or, at least, coherent. Much of akrasia's apparent mystery or absurdity is eliminated when people's behaviours are considered within their cultural and political context. I apply theories from the social and behavioural sciences to a particular behaviour in order to show where the philosophical literature on akrasia and/or weakness of the will is insightful and where it is lacking. The problem used as the basis for my analysis is obesity caused by overeating. On the whole, I conclude that our intuitions about agency are unreliable, that we may have good reasons to overeat and/or neglect our health, and that willpower is, to some degree, a matter of luck.