

Seminar in Metaphysics: Free Will and Moral Responsibility

PHIL 8300 Fall 2006

Friday 1:00-3:30pm

Conference Room 1123

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Office Hours: Tuesday 9:30-11:30, Friday 9:30-11:30, & by appointment

Course Description and Objectives:

One of the most exciting philosophical debates of the last forty years is the free will debate, which focuses on the relationships between free will, moral responsibility, and determinism, as well as scientific research on human nature. In this course, we will study some of the most important recent literature on this debate, including arguments for the incompatibility of free will (or moral responsibility) and determinism and for skepticism about the existence of free will, compatibilist responses to these arguments, various libertarian theories of free will, and various compatibilist theories of free will. We will also examine some experimental work on people's intuitions about free will and moral responsibility as well as some work in psychology that poses potential threats to free will. We will be reading and responding to some of the most significant contributors to the free will debates in recent decades (as well as slightly less famous contributions to the debate by your teacher!). To supplement and stimulate our discussion, we will also read the novel *A Clockwork Orange*.

Students should leave the course with a greater understanding of several philosophical debates about free will and moral responsibility and the way these debates intersect with other important philosophical issues as well as some "real world" issues. Students will develop their abilities to read and comprehend philosophical arguments, to respond to them critically, and to develop their ideas in oral and written form. By writing a journal-length paper and a referee report, students will develop skills essential for academic philosophy.

Assignments and Grades:

- **Attendance, Preparation, and Participation:** In general you will read 2-4 articles per week. You should carefully read and think about the assigned articles for each class. As often as possible, you should also re-read articles *after* we discuss them (you'll be amazed how much more you will understand the ideas and take issue with them). You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss these articles in a rigorous way (i.e., with questions and comments, at least in your head if not in your notes). The course will be run as a seminar, so your attendance and active participation in class discussions are required both for the course to succeed and for you to succeed in the course. As a rule, you should neither go more than two classes without offering your perspective during discussion nor should you dominate any class discussions. Active and informed participation will boost a borderline grade (e.g., bring a B+ to an A-). Missing more than one class unexcused will have the opposite effect.

- **Short Papers:** 30% of your final grade will be based on three short papers turned in on or before the classes listed on the syllabus (don't wait—write on articles that interest you). These papers must be no longer than 1200 words (2.5 to 3.5 pages double-spaced) and deal with one of the articles we are reading for the day on which you turn in your paper. They are designed to improve your ability to explicate a philosophical argument, focusing on the premise or principle you *would* then attack (in a longer paper). Essentially you are writing the beginning of a paper: (1) a very short introduction and thesis statement (<½ page), (2) an explication of the argument presented in the target article, focusing on the support for the premise to which you will object (about 2 pages), and (3) a transition to an objection that you then develop only in a few sentences to point in the direction you would develop in a long paper (<½ page).
- **Paper and Referee Report:** You will write one 14-18 page paper, hopefully of a quality sufficient to submit at least to a conference. A 2-3 page paper proposal with a description of the position you are critiquing and an outline of your critique, as well as reference to at least one secondary source (e.g., an article other than those we read in class), is due on **November 3** (you may treat this proposal like one of the short papers). A complete draft of the paper will be due (emailed) by **November 22** (note the early deadline—I hope this helps in terms of balancing major assignments with your other classes). You will then read a fellow classmate's paper and write a 3-4 page referee report on it, as if you were reviewing it for a conference or journal. This report is due on **December 1** and counts 10% of your grade (combined with a one-page discussion of the book *Clockwork Orange* in which you discuss a connection between a specific passage in the book and some specific issue we've discussed in the class). You will then *revise* your paper based on your peer's referee report and on the detailed comments I will provide you and turn in the final draft in class on Friday, **December 8** (you will also present the ideas in your paper to the class for 5 minutes). The final paper counts for 60% of your grade.

Course Policies:

- **Late or Missed Assignments:** Late work, if unexcused, will be penalized 10% per day. If you know you are going to miss a class or a deadline, talk to me ahead of time and we can try to work something out (talk to me about final paper deadline if other class assignments conflict).
- **Academic Honor Code:** Students are expected to *strictly* uphold the GSU Policy on Academic Honesty as specified in *On Campus: The Undergraduate Co-Curricular Affairs Handbook* (see attached). Lack of knowledge of this policy is not an acceptable defense to any charge of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is presenting another person's work as one's own. Plagiarism includes any paraphrasing or summarizing of the works of another person without acknowledgment, including the submitting of another student's work or a paper from an online source as one's own. Any ideas drawn from published material or from discussion with other people, whether quoted or paraphrased, *must* be properly cited.
- **Office Hours:** Please feel comfortable talking with me after class about problems or questions and coming to my office hours (or making an appointment) for assistance on assignments or papers, to discuss grades, or simply to chat about the ideas we're discussing.
- **Flexibility:** This course syllabus provides a general plan for the course; deviations may be necessary (e.g., we will almost always have to finish discussion of the previous week's readings at the beginning of class).

Texts: *Free Will*, edited by Gary Watson [FW]
A Clockwork Orange, by Anthony Burgess
Other articles will be available as handouts [H] or online
* Highly suggested reading

- *A Clockwork Orange* is, in my opinion, an excellent novel that deals in a creative way with issues relevant to debates about free will and moral responsibility. I encourage you to read this book on the side all semester and to refer to it during class discussions when relevant.
- For recent books and anthologies on free will and moral responsibility, see me. Also, try Ted Honderich's website: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~uctytho/dfwIntroIndex.htm>
- Check out the free will blog *The Garden of Forking Paths*: <http://gfp.typepad.com/>

Schedule of Readings and Assignments (subject to change):

Week 1: *What is Free Will? Why Do We Want It? What Threatens It?*
8/25: Introduction to the issues, the course, each other, syllabus

Week 2: *Incompatibilist Arguments*
9/1: Watson, Introduction to *Free Will*, pp.1-4 (* pp. 5-22); Modal Logic (Wikipedia)
Campbell, "Is Freewill a Pseudo-Problem" [H]
van Inwagen, "The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism" [H]
"An Argument for Incompatibilism" [FW 2], p. 45 and 48-54 (* rest of chapter)

Week 3: *Responses to Incompatibilist Arguments*
9/8: Lewis, "Are We Free to Break the Laws?" [FW 6]; Watson pp. 5-8
Perry, "Compatibilist Options" [H]
Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" [FW 8]
* Dennett, "I Could Not Have Done Otherwise—So What?" [JSTOR]
Short Paper 1

Week 4: *Alternative Possibilities*
9/15: Fischer, "Frankfurt-Style Compatibilism" [FW 10]
Nahmias, "Where Frankfurt Cases Meet the Consequence Argument" [H]
* Widerker, "Libertarianism and Frankfurt's Attack..." [FW 9]

Week 5: *Event-Causal Libertarianism, Deliberation, and Alternative Possibilities*
9/22: Kane, "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance ... Free Will and Indeterminism" [FW 15]
Nahmias, "Close Calls and the Confident Agent..." [H]
Dostoyevsky, from *Notes From the Underground* [H]
* van Inwagen, "When is the Will Free?" [JSTOR]

Week 6: *Experimental Philosophy on Free Will and Moral Responsibility*
9/29: Watson pp. 22-25
Nahmias et al., "Is Incompatibilism Intuitive?" [H], pp.1-10 (* rest of article)
Nichols "Folk Intuitions on Free Will" [H]
Nahmias "Folk Fears Regarding Determinism vs. Reductionism" [H]
* Nichols and Knobe "Moral Responsibility and Determinism..." [online]
(Shaun Nichols will join us for class; his talk is at 3:30 pm)
Short Paper 2

Week 7: *Agent-Causal Libertarianism*
10/6: Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self" [FW 1]; Watson pp. 9-14
O'Conner, "Agent Causation" [FW 13]
* Clarke, "Towards a Credible Agent-Causal Account of Free Will" [FW 14]

Week 8: *Skepticism about Free Will and Moral Responsibility*
10/13: G. Strawson, "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility" [FW 11]
Pereboom TBA [H]
Butler, *Erewhon* ch. 11 [H]
* van Inwagen, "Van Inwagen on Free Will" [online]

Week 9: *Some Compatibilist Approaches to Free Will and Moral Responsibility*
10/20: Smart, "Free Will, Praise, and Blame" [FW 3]; Watson pp. 14-17
P. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment" [FW 4]
Scanlon, "The Significance of Choice" [FW 18]
Short Paper 3

Weeks 10: *Some More Compatibilist Approaches*
10/27: Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" [FW 16]
Watson, "Free Agency" [FW 17] ; Watson pp. 17-19
Wolf, "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility" [FW 19]

Week 11: *Even More Compatibilist Approaches*
11/3: Pettit and Smith, "Freedom in Belief and Desire" [FW 20]
Nahmias, "Free Will as Knowledge" [H]
Paper Proposal Due

**** NO CLASS 11/10: Work on paper ****

Week 12: *"Neurotic Compatibilism"*
11/17: Wegner TBA [H]
Nahmias, "The Psychology of Free Will" [H]

****Paper Due no later than 11/22**** (Email one copy to me and one copy to referee)

**** Thanksgiving Break, No Class 11/24 ****

Weeks 13: *Psychological Threats to Free Will*
12/1: Skinner, from *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* [H]
Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*
Referee Report (plus 1-page on *Clockwork Orange*) Due

Weeks 14: *Grand Conclusions, Paper presentations, and Pizza*
12/8: Nagel, "Freedom" [FW 12]
Final Paper Due