

Free Will and the Sciences of the Mind

Philosophy 4930

Spring 2004

Tuesday & Thursday 5:15-6:30

Dodd Hall 181

INSTRUCTOR:

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Office Hours: Tuesday 3:30-5:00, Wednesday 2:00-3:00, and by appt.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The more science tells us about human nature, the more it suggests that our freedom and conscious control over our own lives is limited. We will examine this problem. First, we will try to figure out what free will is and why it is important to us. We will discuss various conceptions of freedom and responsibility as well as some traditional philosophical threats to free will, such as God's foreknowledge and causal determinism. We will examine the relationship between determinism, predictability, scientific practice, and mechanism. In discussing some recent theories of free will, we will try to find a conception of free will that we want to defend against certain scientific threats.

We will then turn to various scientific theories to see how they conflict with our freedom to deliberate about and control our actions:

- The Freudian unconscious suggests we are moved by internal forces whose origins and effects are hidden from us.
- Skinnerian behaviorism suggests we are controlled by our external environments through a history of reinforcement schedules.
- Research in social psychology claims we often do not know why we do what we do.
- Some neuropsychological theories suggest that conscious will is an illusion.
- Evolutionary psychology claims that our behavior evolved to maximize our fitness, and genetics offers the mechanisms by which such behavior is controlled.

What are we to make of all of this scientific information? Is it true? Does it leave any room for our selves (souls, minds) to exercise free will? In the 21st century, we will hear a lot more about ourselves from various sciences of the mind. This course will help us understand how we should interpret what we hear in light of our conceptions of ourselves as free and responsible agents. We will keep in mind these questions throughout:

- What is free will? What is its relation to responsibility? Why is it important?
- What philosophical views might threaten free will?
- What scientific theories seem to threaten free will? How?
- How might we respond to these threats?
- What are the ethical and legal implications of all this?

COURSE GOALS:

- To understand current philosophical theories and debates about free will.
- To improve our ability to read and analyze philosophical texts and arguments.
- To understand some important theories and research in the sciences of the mind.
- To improve our ability to read and analyze scientific texts and interpret them in light of philosophical and commonsensical views.
- To improve our ability to write clearly and persuasively.

ASSIGNMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

- **Attendance and Participation:** You should read assigned texts before class and re-read them after class discussions whenever possible. This class is a seminar, so being prepared and willing to discuss the topics will be essential. Your success in this course and the success of the course itself depend on each of you actively participating. Excellent attendance and participation will be considered in determining your final letter grade. You will lose 5 points for every class you miss unexcused after the first two.
- **Tutorials:** Following the British model, students will meet (in groups of two or three) once with me during office hours to discuss a particular text's argument in more detail. You will prepare for the tutorial by writing a 2-3 page paper, summarizing the argument and responding to it. You will receive up to 30 points for your paper and active participation in the tutorial.
- **Blackboard Discussion Notes and Responses:** You will each post on Blackboard at least 4 responses to one of the readings (MAIN), at least 4 notes in response to each others' responses (2ND), and at least 4 notes in response to discussions we have in class (3RD). MAIN responses should be about 300-500 words. They are not summaries: either (1) pick a very particular claim or implication of the author's argument and explain what you think is wrong with it or (2) discuss the most interesting *unanswered* question raised by the reading. You may be creative; you should try to be engaging, since these responses will sometimes drive class discussion and they will allow us to have an ongoing discussion outside of class. I will respond online to most MAIN responses but not grade them (you will get 10 points as long as they are satisfactory, which includes writing them with care). 2ND responses should address some specific point made by one of your peers in their MAIN response. 3RD responses should address some specific issue or question that comes up in class discussion. 2ND and 3RD responses should be as long as it takes to make your point (e.g., a paragraph or two) and will receive 10 points as long as they are satisfactory. So, if you post all the Blackboard notes you are supposed to, you should get 120 points. We'll discuss the timing of these posts in class.
- **Tests:** There will be two tests worth 100 points each. Tests will include some fixed-response questions (true/false, matching, etc.) and some essay questions.
- **Papers:** You will write two papers. The first (4-6 pages) will discuss the philosophical problem of free will, and the second (8-12 pages) will involve researching a scientific theory or experiment and examining its implications for a particular conception of free will (you'll also present your findings to the class). I'll give you specific instructions for writing these papers.
- **Extra Credit:** You can earn up to 10 points twice for bringing in articles relevant to our class.

GRADING SUMMARY

Blackboard discussion notes (+ attendance):	120
Tutorial:	30
Test 1:	100
Test 2:	100
Paper 1:	100
Paper 2:	<u>150</u>
Total:	600 points*

* Final grades will be based on the percentage of points you earn (>93% = A, 90-92 = A-, 87-89 = B+, 83-86 = B, 80-82 = B-, etc.)
Borderline cases *may be* adjusted upwards with excellent attendance, participation and/or improvement.

COURSE POLICIES:

- **Attendance and Classroom Courtesy:** As stated above, attendance is essential for success in this course. Given your careful reading and critical responses, you should have insightful questions and comments each class. You will also have disagreements with what I say and with what your classmates say, and you should express these criticisms. But in disagreeing, do not be disrespectful. Practice critiquing ideas without criticizing people and without dominating discussions. Please be respectful as well by (1) showing up to class on time and informing me if you must leave early, (2) staying alert and focused on our discussion, (3) refraining from conversations while others are speaking, and (4) turning off cell phones.
- **Late work:** Papers are due at the *beginning* of class, and late papers will be penalized. Late Blackboard posts will not be given credit. Absences or late work due to *excused* absences require legitimate, written documentation (e.g., medical provider's note). Always inform me ahead of time if you know you will miss a class or deadline.
- **Academic Honor Code:** Students are expected to *strictly* uphold the FSU Academic Honor Code as specified in the *Florida State University General Bulletin* (pages 75-76). Each student has the responsibility to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity and to refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity. The instructor reserves the right to assess penalties for violations, which will likely involve a failing grade for the assignment or for the entire course. Plagiarism includes submitting written work which you have not composed yourself (i.e. downloading passages, paragraphs, or papers from the internet), using another's ideas without proper citation, or failing to use quotation marks appropriately.
- **Students with disabilities:** I am happy to accommodate students with disabilities requiring academic accommodation. Those students should notify me in the first week, register with the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) and provide me with a letter from the SDRC detailing the need for academic accommodations.
- **Blackboard:** The course website is accessible at <https://campus.fsu.edu/webapps/login>. Here, we will post notes for discussion, and I will make course information available.
- **Office Hours:** Please feel comfortable talking with me after class and making use of my office hours for assistance on papers or readings, to discuss grades, or simply to chat about the ideas we're discussing.

TEXTS: Robert Kane, *Free Will* (FW)
 Blackboard (B): <https://campus.fsu.edu/webapps/login>
 Online Reserve (OR): <http://eres.lib.fsu.edu/courseindex.asp>
 TBA = readings to be announced

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

*** Tentative (subject to change, some readings will be added)**

<p><u>Week 1-2</u> What is Free Will?</p>	<p>TH 1/8: Introductions to each other and course. Syllabus TU 1/13: Smullyan "Is God a Taoist?" (handout) Kane, from "Introduction" (FW pp. 1-9, 23-24) TH 1/15: Augustine "Divine foreknowledge ..." (FW 17) TBA</p>
<p><u>Week 3</u> Incompatibilism?</p>	<p>TU 1/20: van Inwagen "The incompatibility of free will..." (FW 5) Kane, from "Introduction" (FW pp. 9-14) TH 1/22: Dennett "I could not have done otherwise" (FW 6) Fischer, from "Frankfurt-style examples" (FW 7, 95-97+)</p>
<p><u>Week 4</u> Libertarianism</p>	<p>TU 1/27: Chisholm "Human freedom and the self" (FW 3) O'Connor "The agent as cause" (FW 13) TH 1/29: Kane "Free will: new directions" (FW 15) Kane, from "Introduction" (FW pp. 14-23)</p>
<p><u>Week 5</u> Libertarianism?</p>	<p>TU 2/3: Searle "The freedom of the will" (B) van Inwagen "Mystery of metaphysical freedom" (FW 12) TH 2/5: Nahmias, TBA</p>
<p><u>Week 6</u> Compatibilism</p>	<p>TU 2/10: Frankfurt "Freedom of the will ..." (FW 9) TH 2/12: Wolf "Sanity and metaphysics of responsibility" (FW 10)</p>
<p><u>Week 7</u> Compatibilism</p>	<p>TU 2/17: Watson "Responsibility and the limits of evil" (FW 11) PAPER 1 DUE TH 2/19: Nahmias, TBA</p>
<p><u>Week 8</u> Conclusions</p>	<p>TU 2/24: Catch-up and Review for test TH 2/26: TEST 1</p>

<u>Week 9</u> Behaviorism	TU 3/2: Skinner, "Walden Two" (FW 1) from <i>About Behaviorism</i> (OR) TH 3/4: Skinner, from <i>Beyond Freedom and Dignity</i> (OR)
SPRING BREAK. ENJOY!	
<u>Week 10</u> Freudian Psychology	TU 3/16: Freud, from <i>Basic Writings</i> (OR) Butler, from <i>Erewhon</i> (B) TH 3/18: Hospers "Free will and psychoanalysis" (OR)
<u>Week 11</u> Social Psychology	TU 3/23: Nisbett and Wilson, TBA TH 3/25: Nahmias "Free will and threat of social psychology" (B)
<u>Week 12</u> Neuroscience	TU 3/30: Libet "Do we have free will?" (OR) TH 4/1: Wegner, from <i>The Illusion of Conscious Will</i> (OR) Nahmias "When consciousness matters" (B) Paper Proposal Due
<u>Week 13</u> Neuroscience	TU 4/6: TBA TH 4/8: <u>NO CLASS</u> (makeup for tutorial!)
<u>Week 14</u> Evolutionary Psychology	TU 4/13: Wilson, from <i>On Human Nature</i> (OR) Wright, from <i>The Moral Animal</i> (OR) TH 4/15: Pinker, from <i>The Blank Slate</i> (OR)
<u>Week 15</u> Conclusions	TU 4/20: TBA. Paper Presentations. PAPER 2 DUE TH 4/22: TBA. Paper Presentations. Review for Final Exam.

FINAL EXAM: TH 4/29 at 5:30 PM