

PHIL 20420.01 – Agency, Responsibility, and Determinism (Spring 2009)

Classroom: DeBartolo 117
Class Time: TR, 9:30–10:45 am
Instructor: Dr. Alan Rhoda
Office: Malloy 419
Office hours: Tues. & Thurs., 2:30–5:00 pm and by appt.
E-mail: rhoda.1@nd.edu
Website: <http://www.alanrhoda.net>
Phone: 631-8678

Course Description

In this course we will explore a number of philosophical problems involving free will, determinism, and moral responsibility. The course will be divided into two parts.

During the first part (covering the first two thirds of the semester) we focus on human free will in relation to *causal determinism* (roughly, the idea that past and present events plus the laws of nature causally necessitate all future events). Questions to be considered under this rubric include: What is the proper analysis of free will? In what sense, if any, is free will necessary for moral responsibility? Does free will require having a choice among alternate possibilities? Is free will compatible with determinism? Is free will compatible with indeterminism? And do we actually have free will, or is it just an illusion? In addition to strictly philosophical approaches to these questions, we will also look at what physics and neuroscience have to say.

During the second part of the course, we will shift our focus to *logical* and *theological* challenges to free will, both human and divine. We will discuss logical fatalism, the view that there are determinate truths about what you will do in the future and that these truths are incompatible with your having the ability to do otherwise. We will also discuss theological challenges to free will connected with divine foreknowledge and foreordination. Are either of these doctrines, as traditionally conceived, compatible with human free will and moral responsibility? If not, should we give up human freedom or challenge the theological tradition? Finally, we will also look at a problem for divine freedom. Can God be free? Maybe not, some have recently argued.

Course Texts

Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (Oxford, 2005)
Gary Watson (ed.), *Free Will*, 2nd edition (Oxford, 2003)
Supplementary course readings will be located either on e-reserve or on the Internet.

Summary of Course Requirements

Short papers (4 @ 17.5% each)	70%
Final exam	25%
Participation	5%

Short Papers

You will also be asked to write four 1000-1200 word (4-5 page) essays on assigned topics. Each is worth 17.5% of your final grade. While I encourage you to discuss matters with each other outside of class, I expect you to compose your answers by yourself. *Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted to the full extent the University allows* (an "F" for the paper, at least). You must not pass off someone else's work as your own, and you must fully document all your sources. Similar penalties apply to students who willingly allow their work to be copied. In short, you will be held to the standards of Notre Dame's Academic Code of Honor.

Final Exams

There will be an in-class, closed-notes essay final. It will be worth 25% of your final grade. My plan is to give you a list of four or five or so questions to prepare for about a week ahead of time and randomly pick two of them for you to answer on the final.

Participation

Participation encompasses several things. **First**, you are expected to come to class regularly and promptly. I will take role each class to track attendance. Every *unexcused* absence after the second will result in a half-grade reduction of your final grade (e.g., a B would become a B-). Tardiness will also be penalized. To be excused, an absence must be officially approved by the university (specifically, by the assistant vice-president for residence life). **Second**, you should always come to class prepared, having read the assigned material and being ready to

participate in class discussion. The readings in this course are typically short, but often difficult, so make sure that you get an early start. To enforce preparedness, I reserve the right to have a “pop quiz” whenever I feel like it. If and when I should hold a pop quiz, it will be graded as pass/fail, and a failure will count as one-half of an unexcused absence. **Third**, your quality contributions to class discussion are essential for a highly successful class experience this semester. I suggest preparing some questions ahead of time as you are doing the readings. Obviously, you should always be respectful in your comments toward your fellow students and myself.

Schedule: This is a guideline subject to revision at my discretion. Chapter numbers are given for readings in the course textbooks (**K** = Kane, **W** = Watson). Readings on e-reserve are tagged with an (E), Internet resources with an (I).

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
1	1/13: Course introduction	1/15: K , ch. 1, “The Free Will Problem” Borges, “The Garden of Forking Paths” (E)
2	1/20: W , ch. 12 (Nagel, “Freedom”)	1/22: K , ch. 2, “Compatibilism” W , ch. 3 (Smart, “Free Will, Praise and Blame”)
3	1/27: K , ch. 3, “Incompatibilism” W , ch. 2 (van Inwagen, “An Argument for Incompatibilism”)	1/29: K , ch. 4, “Libertarianism, Indeterminism, and Chance” Mele, “A Problem about Luck for Libertarians” (E)
4	2/3: K , ch. 5, “Minds, Selves, and Agent Causes” W , ch. 1 (Chisholm, “Human Freedom and the Self”)	2/5: K , ch. 6, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes” W , ch. 13 (O’Connor, “Agent Causation”)
5	2/10: W , ch. 14 (Clarke, “Toward a Credible Agent-Causal Account ...”) W , ch. 15 (Kane, “Responsibility, Luck, and Chance ...”)	2/12: K , ch. 7, “Is Free Will Possible? ...” W , ch. 11 (Strawson, “The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility ...”) First paper due in class
6	2/17: Pereboom, “Meaning in Life without Free Will” (I)	2/19: No class. I’ll be away at a conference.
7	2/24: K , ch. 8, “Moral Responsibility and Alternative Possibilities” W , ch. 8 (Frankfurt, “Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”)	2/26: W , ch. 9 (Widerker) W , ch. 10 (Fischer)
8	3/3: K , ch. 9, “Higher-Order Desires, Real Selves, ...” W , ch. 16 (Frankfurt)	3/5: No class. I’ll be away at a conference. Second paper due by 5:00 pm Friday, March 6
9	Mid-term break (no class)	
10	3/17: K , ch. 10, “Reactive Attitude Theories” W , ch. 4 (Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment”)	3/19: K , ch. 12, “Free Will and Science”
11	3/24: Libet, “Do We Have Free Will?” (E) Mele, “Free Will and Neuroscience” (E)	3/26: van Inwagen, “When Is the Will Free?” (E)
12	3/31: K , ch. 11, “Ultimate Responsibility” K , ch. 14, “Conclusion: Five Freedoms”	4/2: Taylor, “Fate” (E) Third paper due in class
13	4/7: Bernstein, “Fatalism” (E)	4/9: K , ch. 13, “Predestination, Divine Foreknowledge, ...” Pike, “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action” (E)
14	4/14: Hasker, “The Foreknowledge Conundrum” (E)	4/16: Rhoda, “Four Models of Divine Providence” (I)
15	4/21: Hasker, “Providence and Evil: Three Theories” (E) Morrison, “Explanatory Priority and the ‘Counterfactuals of Freedom’” (E)	4/23: Rowe, “Can God Be Free?” (E)
16	4/28: Rhoda, “The Openness of the Future” (I)	4/30: Rhoda, (cont.) Fourth paper due in class
17	Final exam: Friday, May 8 @ 10:30 am	