

Philosophy A294-001/H295-035: Free Will in Action and Thought

Loyola University of New Orleans

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Course description

Whether free will exists or could exist in a deterministic universe is a question that is hotly debated by philosophers today, as it was in the ancient world. Although this course will briefly review early modern figures who helped shape the debate about free will, it will focus primarily on surveying the contemporary debate, mostly among Anglo-American philosophers. Special attention will be devoted to the conceptual question of whether or not free will is compatible with determinism (compatibilism vs. incompatibilism). Towards the end of the course, we will discuss whether leading accounts of freedom and responsibility can be applied not only to human *action* (a question that is important for moral and political philosophy) but to human *thought* as well (a question that is richly relevant to both metaphysics and epistemology).

Lecture and reading schedule

(CP # refers to course pack page numbers; PFW # refers to page numbers in Pereboom's anthology. Assigned readings may be shortened as the semester progresses.)

Introduction

Monday, August 25th

Introduction

Freedom and moral responsibility

- Sam Harris, from *Free Will*. Read pp. 1-14 online at Google Books: <http://is.gd/xkpBW4>

Historical background for the modern problem of free will and determinism

Wednesday, August 27th

Freedom and science

- John Searle, "Free Will as a Problem in Neurobiology (Blackboard)

Monday, September 1st—NO CLASS—LABOR DAY HOLIDAY

Wednesday, September 3rd

Materialistic determinism

- d'Holbach, from *System of Nature* (Blackboard)

Monday, September 8th

Classical compatibilism: freedom as absence of compulsion

- Hume, from *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (PFW 87–104)

Wednesday, September 10th

Reconceptualizing causality: the agency theory

- Reid, from *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (PFW, 130–38)

The twentieth century compatibilism-incompatibilism debate about freedom of action

Monday, September 15th

Neocompatibilism

- Ayer, "Freedom and Necessity" (PFW 139–47)

Wednesday, September 17th

Neocompatibilism

- Ayer, “Freedom and Necessity” (continued)

Critique of compatibilism; the contemporary agency theory (continued)

- Chisholm, “Human Freedom and the Self” (PFW 172–84)

Monday, September 22nd

Critique of compatibilism; the contemporary agency theory (continued)

- Chisholm, “Human Freedom and the Self” (continued)

Wednesday, September 24th

EXAM #1

Monday, September 29th

The contradiction of determinism

- James Jordan, “Determinism’s Dilemma” (CP 1–10)

Revisions to compatibilism about freedom of action

Wednesday, October 1st

Reactive attitudes compatibilism

- Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment” (PFW 148-171)

Monday, October 6th

Reactive attitudes compatibilism (continued)

- Strawson, “Freedom and Resentment” (continued)

Wednesday, October 8th

Reevaluating the principle of alternative possibilities

- Frankfurt, “Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility” (PFW 185–95)

Monday, October 13th—NO CLASS—FALL BREAK HOLIDAYS

Wednesday, October 15th

Reevaluating the principle of alternative possibilities (continued)

- Frankfurt, “Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility” (continued)

Monday, October 20th

Hierarchical compatibilism

- Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” (PFW 196–212)

Wednesday, October 22nd

Semi-compatibilism

- Fischer, “My Compatibilism” (PFW 243–267)

Friday, October 24th

PAPER #1 DUE, 11:59pm

Monday, October 27th

Semi-compatibilism (continued)

- Fischer, “My Compatibilism” (continued)

Responses to revised compatibilism about freedom of action

Wednesday, October 29th

Incompatibilism via the consequence argument

- van Inwagen, “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism” (FWP 213–227)

Monday, November 3rd

Incompatibilism via the consequence argument (continued)

- van Inwagen, “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism”

Wednesday, November 5th

Defending agency theory from objections

- O’Connor, “Agent-causal power” (FWP 366–388)

Monday, November 10th

Defending agency theory from objections (continued)

- O’Connor, “Agent-causal power” (continued)

Wednesday, November 12th

Freedom as cognitive self-regulation

- Binswanger, “Volition as Cognitive Self-Regulation” (CP 11–23)

Monday, November 17th

EXAM #2

The problem of freedom of belief (doxastic freedom)

Wednesday, November 19th

The incoherence of direct belief choice

- Williams, “Deciding to Believe” (CP 24–31)

Monday, November 24th

The psychological implausibility of belief choice and its epistemic consequences

- Alston, “The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification” (CP 32–53)

Wednesday, November 26th –Friday, November 28th—NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING HOLIDAYS

Monday, December 1st

Mental focus as the source of doxastic freedom

- Salmieri and Bayer, “How We Choose Our Beliefs” (CP 54–62)

Wednesday, December 3rd

Doxastic compatibilism

- Steup, “Doxastic freedom” (CP 63–71)

Monday, December 8th

Critique of doxastic compatibilism

- Bayer, “The Elusiveness of Doxastic Compatibilism” (Updated version is on Blackboard; please ignore version in the course pack)

Tuesday, December 9th

FINAL PAPER DUE, 11:59pm