

Free Will

St-Catherine's College, MT2018
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General information on the classes

I. Course content

Free will offers an introduction to several aspects of the so-called 'free will' debate. While many philosophers acknowledge that 'the will' is a lump of distinct mental elements, the concept of 'free will' has stuck mainly as a way to refer to 'the ability to do otherwise' or as 'the kind of power necessary for moral responsibility for our conduct'. What is free will? Do we have it? Is it compatible with determinism? Such are the most common questions asked about the topic. But the class also explores other questions. How is free will linked to deliberation? To manipulation? To blame?

II. Assignments

Each week you will write an essay of approximately 1500–2000 words on the essay question that I give for each topic, below. During the class, you will quickly present your essay. Make sure you are able to sketch your arguments in less than five minutes.

Here are ten tips to help you writing your essays. (1) Reread your essay at least twice before sending it to me. (2) Use topic sentences, that is reread the first sentence of each of your paragraphs: ideally, this would give you a summary of your essay. (3) Upon rereading a sentence, if you do not immediately understand it, rewrite it. (4) Never write sentences that are longer than three lines. (5) Never use technical vocabulary without defining it. If you feel like there are too many definitions, try to cut down the number of technical words you are using. (6) Always illustrate abstract principles with examples. (7) If you present a counterexample to a principle, try not only to make it clear how it is a counterexample, but what structural reason we have for believing that the principle is false. (8) State your conclusions clearly at the beginning and end of the essay, and include plenty of 'signposts' throughout the essay so that the intended structure of your argument is easy to discern. (9) Spare us long and literary introductions. (10) Read the following guide and try to apply its lessons: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.htm>

It is crucial that you do the readings, especially the mandatory readings (marked with a star (*)). Without them, tutorials will be much less valuable. There will be times (trust me) when you regret not having read more (both during finals and after, when you're busy with other things).

III. Marking and late work

If you hand in your essay on time, I will read it and supply written comments, and email it to you in the tutorial or a few hours before. You get to decide whether you want me to give you a general grade (2.2, low-high-mid 2.1, first) or not. Beware, however, that I have to give a final grade to visiting students. Especially in these cases, it's useful to receive indicative grades along the way. If your essay is late, I can't make any promises. It is still important that you hand your essay in even if I do not have time to comment on it, as I am required to report to your college how many pieces of work you have completed to a satisfactory standard. Notify me by email as soon as possible, and at any rate before the start of the tutorial, if you will be late handing in your essay, and/or unable to attend one of the tutorials, giving your reasons. If you are experiencing difficulties (academic or otherwise) that are affecting your ability to work at your normal standard, or you are concerned about your level of understanding of this topic, don't suffer in silence. Rather, let me know as soon as possible.

IV. Study questions and finals preparation

Finals questions are quite specific. They do not simply say 'write an essay on free will', and you cannot count on the Finals paper containing questions that happen to match your tutorial essay questions. Every single examiners' report complains that many students simply recycle their tutorial essays in response to Finals questions that were asking something quite different. To be well prepared for Finals, you will need to know (at least) two or three topics with enough depth and breadth that you can understand and intelligently discuss almost anything the examiners choose to ask on that topic. Study strategies vary, and only you can discover what works for you, but one sensible strategy would be:

1. As you read for tutorials: write out (in note form) your answers to the 'Study questions' that I have included with each topic. Try to identify other important questions. This will ensure that you are picking up most of the basic material from the readings.
2. During the vacations, when you have more time: choose the two or three topics that interest you most, and do further readings for that topic. Think through your own views in detail, and review your original answers to the study questions. Be original – is there anything that you think the authors whose work you've read have been missing? Work out what you think each of the listed past finals questions is getting at, what you think about the issue it is raising, how you could structure an essay, answering precisely that question, that you could write in fifty minutes.
3. Read widely around the subject (beyond these reading lists), and keep an eye out for non-core lectures and seminars related to free will that interest you.

Week 1: Determinism and Abilities

Essay question: Does determinism imply that we lack the ability to do otherwise?

(*) van Inwagen, Peter. 'The Power of Rational Beings', in van Inwagen, P., *Metaphysics*, 2014, OUP. (Read first)

(*) Fischer, John Martin. 1994. *The Metaphysics of Free Will: An Essay on Control*. (ch. 3, 4) Blackwell.

(*) Lewis, David. 1981. 'Are We Free to Break the Laws?' *Theoria* 47 (3): 113–21.

(*) Vihvelin, Kadri. 2017. 'Arguments for Incompatibilism' (sections on choice and the consequent argument) in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Steward, Helen. 2012. 'The Metaphysical Presuppositions of Moral Responsibility'. *The Journal of Ethics* 16 (2): 241–71. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10892-012-9127-5>.

Vihvelin, Kadri. 2000. 'Libertarian Compatibilism'. *Philosophical Perspectives* 14: 139–66.

Week 2: Indeterminism and Other Determinisms

Essay question: Is determinism required for free will?

(*) Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section VIII.

(*) Hobart, R. E. 1934. 'Free Will as Involving Determination and Inconceivable Without It'. *Mind* 43 (169): 1–27.

(*) List, Christian. 2014. 'Free Will, Determinism, and the Possibility of Doing Otherwise'. *Noûs* 48 (1): 156–78.

A. J. Ayer, 'Freedom and Necessity', in Ayer, *Philosophical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1954), pp. 271–84. Reprinted in Gary Watson (ed.), *Free Will*, 1st edition (Oxford UP, 1982).

Kenny, Anthony J. P. 1978. *Free Will and Responsibility*, ch. 2. Routledge.

Week 3: Deliberation and Free Will

Essay question: Can determinists rationally deliberate about what to do? Can leeway sceptics rationally (those who claim that we lack the ability to do otherwise) deliberate about what to do?

(*) Inwagen, Peter van. 1983. *An Essay on Free Will* (§5.1-5.2). Oxford University Press.

(*) Clarke, Randolph K. 1992. 'Deliberation and Beliefs About One's Abilities'. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 73 (2): 101–13.

(*) Nelkin, Dana Kay. 2011. *Making Sense of Freedom and Responsibility*, ch. 7-8. Oxford University Press.

(*) Pereboom, Derk. 2008. 'A Compatibilist Account of the Epistemic Conditions on Rational Deliberation?'. *The Journal of Ethics* 12 (3–4): 287–306.

Nelkin, Dana Kay. 2004. 'Deliberative Alternatives'. *Philosophical Topics* 32 (1/2): 215–40.

Taylor, Richard. 1966. *Action and Purpose* (ch. 12). New York: Humanities Press.

Week 4: Shifting towards moral responsibility – Frankfurt & Strawson

Essay question: 'Moral responsibility has nothing to do with the ability to do otherwise.'
Comment.

(*) Frankfurt, Harry. 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility', *Journal of Philosophy*, 66 (1969): pp. 829-839. Reprinted in Gary Watson (ed.) *Free Will*, 2nd edition (OUP 2002), pp. 167-176; and in Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge UP, 1988).

(*) Strawson, P.F. 2008. *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*. Routledge.

(*) McKenna, Michael. 2005. 'Where Frankfurt and Strawson Meet'. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 29 (1): 163–80.

Widerker, David. 2000. 'Frankfurt's Attack on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities: A Further Look'. *Philosophical Perspectives* 14: 181–201.

Alvarez, Maria. 2009. 'Actions, Thought-Experiments and the "Principle of Alternate Possibilities"'. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1): 61–81.

Inwagen, Peter van. 2008. 'How to Think about the Problem of Free Will'. *The Journal of Ethics* 12 (3–4): 327–41.

Week 5: Attributionism and Volitionism

Essay question: Are we only morally responsible for our choices and for what results from our choices?

(*) Arpaly, Nomy. 2002. 'Moral Worth'. *The Journal of Philosophy* 99 (5): 223–45.

- (*) Levy, Neil. 2005. 'The Good, the Bad and the Blameworthy'. *Journal of Ethics & Social Philosophy* 1: 1–16.
- (*) Smith, Angela M. 2005. 'Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life'. *Ethics* 115 (2): 236–71.
- (*) Watson, Gary. 1996. 'Two Faces of Responsibility'. *Philosophical Topics* 24 (2): 227–248.
- Fischer, John Martin, and Neal A. Tognazzini. 2009. 'The Truth about Tracing'. *Noûs* 43 (3): 531–56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0068.2009.00717.x>.
- Vargas, Manuel. 2005. 'The Trouble with Tracing'. *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 29 (1): 269–91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4975.2005.00117.x>.

Week 6: Sourcehood and Scepticism

Essay question: What is the greatest weakness of free will scepticism?

- (*) Pereboom, Derk. 2014. *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life* (ch. 1, 4, 6). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (*) Strawson, Galen. 1994. 'The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility'. *Philosophical Studies*, 75 (1,2): 5–24.

Week 7: Blame

Essay question: Should we be pluralists about blame?

- (*) Wallace, R Jay. 1994. *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments* (ch. 3). Harvard University Press.
- (*) Scanlon, Thomas M. 2008. *Moral Dimensions: Permissibility, Meaning, Blame* (ch. 4). Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap.
- (*) Hieronymi, Pamela. 2004. 'The Force and Fairness of Blame'. *Philosophical Perspectives* 18: 115–48.
- Carlsson, Andreas Brekke. 2017. 'Blameworthiness as Deserved Guilt'. *The Journal of Ethics* 21 (1): 89–115.
- Wolf, Susan. 2011. 'Blame, Italian Style'. In *Reasons and Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T.M. Scanlon*, edited by R. Jay Wallace, Raoul Kumar, and Samuel Freeman, 332–46. Oxford University Press.

Week 8: Blameworthiness and Praiseworthiness

Essay question: Is there an asymmetry in the requirements of blameworthiness and of praiseworthiness? If so, does it tell us anything about the nature of moral responsibility?

(*) Hyman, John. 2016. 'Voluntariness and Intention'. *Jurisprudence* 7 (3): 692–709.

(*) Nelkin, Dana Kay. 2011. *Making Sense of Freedom and Responsibility* (ch. 1, 5). Oxford University Press.

(*) Wolf, Susan. 1993. *Freedom within Reason* (ch. 6). Oxford University Press.