

Philosophy 131: Topics in Metaphysics
Free Will and Causation
Winter 2013
Syllabus

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Course Description: We will begin with a set of challenges to the familiar assumption that we are all free and responsible agents. (For example, can we be free if all of our actions are caused by prior events? Can we be free if our actions are not caused by anything? Is there any kind of cause that would be compatible with free action?) Many responses to these challenges come in the form of accounts of free action that incorporate assumptions about the nature of causation. Yet these assumptions are not always examined, or presented in detail. In this course, after examining some of the main accounts of free action, we will explore and evaluate some classic theories of causation. With an enhanced understanding of the metaphysics of causation in hand, we will return to some key problems for accounts of free will and assess whether, and if so, how, insights about the nature of causation in general can help in finding solutions.

Course Requirements:

Midterm (15%): 2/11
Paper (25%): Due 3/11
Take-home Final (40%): Due 3/22
Weekly Quizzes on readings and lectures (20%)

Up to 5% extra credit for class participation

- Please note that all assignments must be completed to pass the class, and that those taking the class Pass/No Pass must achieve a grade of C- or above in order to pass.

Course Readings: All course readings are available through our TED website or library reserves. Please note that the schedule might change slightly, but all changes will be announced in class. I will sometimes make recommendations for further optional readings for those interested in pursuing a topic in more depth.

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS
1/7	Introduction	
1/9	Basic Issues and Challenges	Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self"
1/11	Basic Issues and Challenges	Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities"
1/14	Accounts of Free Will	Pereboom, "Hard Incompatibilism"
1/16	Accounts of Free Will	Frankfurt, "Free Will and the Concept of a Person"
1/18	Accounts of Free Will	Fischer and Ravizza, <i>Responsibility and Control</i> excerpt
1/21	MLK Day	
1/23	Accounts of Free Will	Wolf, <i>Freedom Within Reason</i> , excerpt
1/25	Accounts of Free Will	Kane, "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on Free Will and Determinism"
1/28	Accounts of Free Will	O'Connor, <i>Persons and Causes</i> excerpt
1/30	Accounts of Free Will	O'Connor, continued
2/1	Theories of Causation	Mackie, "Causes and Conditions"
2/4	Theories of Causation	Davidson, "Causal Relations"
2/6	Theories of Causation	Salmon, "Causal Connections"
2/8	Theories of Causation	Tooley, "The Nature of Causation: A Singularist Account"
2/11	MIDTERM	No new reading
2/13	Theories of Causation	Harre and Madden, <i>Causal Powers: A Theory of Natural Necessity</i> , excerpt
2/15		Watkins, <i>Kant and the Metaphysics of Causation</i> , excerpt
2/18	President's Day	No new reading
2/20	Reasons and Causes	Davidson, "Reasons and Causes"
2/22	Application to Free Will: Agent Causation	O'Connor, <i>Persons and Causes</i> , chapter 5
2/25	Application to Free Will: Agent Causation	Markosian, "A Compatibilist Version of the Theory of

		Agent Causation”
2/27	Application to Free Will: Agent Causation	Nelkin, <i>Making Sense of Freedom and Responsibility</i> , chapter 4
3/1	Application to Free Will: Agent Causation	No new reading
3/4	Application to Free Will: Agent Causation	Pereboom, <i>Living Without Free Will</i> , excerpt
3/6	Application to Free Will: Contrastive Causation, Explanation and Luck	Clarke, “Contrastive Rational Explanation of Free Choice”
3/8	Application to Free Will: Contrastive Causation, Explanation, and Luck	Northcott, “Causation and Contrast Classes”
3/11	Application to Free Will: Laws and Determinism	Beebe, “Humean Compatibilism” PAPER DUE
3/13	Application to Free Will: Laws and Determinism	TBA
3/15	Putting It All Together	No new reading

Notes:

- If accommodations are needed for a disability or for religious reasons, please notify as soon as possible during the first week of class.
- **The Academic Honor Code** must be observed in this course. All violations must be reported to the Academic Integrity Office, and an “F” on the assignment, and possibly for the course, will result.
- Laptops and other electronic devices may not be used in class except to take notes on lectures. **No exceptions.**
- If you find yourself struggling with any aspect of the course, or would simply like to explore some ideas further, please don’t hesitate to see me in office hours or make an appointment to talk.