

PHIL 171/COGS 160: Free Will in Philosophy and Cognitive Science

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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REQUIRED TEXT

Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS

This course will explore the concept of free will and the plausibility of its existence through both philosophy and cognitive science. This course aims to supply students with the skills and knowledge to accurately discuss the latest developments in debates on free will.

GRADING PROCEDURES

All students will be expected to **post on a discussion board each week**. Before class each Tuesday students will be expected to post one or more questions about the reading, which should be distinct from any questions that have already been posted. Before class each Thursday students will be expected to respond to the questions of at least two other students, using material from the reading. Participation in a weekly discussion counts for **up to 1% of the final grade per discussion for a total 12 possible discussions**.

A **midterm exam** with short-answer questions will occur on March 9th in class, covering concepts from weeks 1 through 7. The mid-term exam will be worth **up to 30% of the final grade**.

A **final research paper** will be due before the last week of class, on April 27th. The final research paper should be around 1,500 words, with a word count printed on the cover page with the student's name and paper title (the name should not appear on any other page of the paper). Students must also turn in a draft of the final research paper on March 23rd for feedback from the instructor(s). This draft will be assessed and that assessment will form part of the final research paper grade. Students should expect to read between 3 and 5 external sources for the research paper, the references for which should be included in the paper. Total: **up to 30% of the final grade**.

The **final exam**, on May 9th, will be in the same style as the midterm exam, but will cover concepts from the second half of the course (weeks 9 through 15). The final exam will be worth **up to 30% of the final grade**.

RESOURCES, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES

Academic Support: For free academic support, go to the Calvin E. Bright Success Center located at KOLLIG 222 or email learning@ucmerced.edu.

Students with Disabilities: Upon identifying themselves to the instructor and the university, students with disabilities will receive reasonable accommodation for learning and evaluation. For

more information, contact UCM Disabilities Services at SSB 230, 209-228-6996, or disabilityservices@ucmerced.edu.

Lateness Policy: Late assignments will not be accepted without prior approval by the instructor, except in the case of a verifiable emergency.

Academic Honesty Policy: Any student found guilty of cheating, plagiarism, or collusion (defined here: <http://studentlife.ucmerced.edu/what-we-do/student-judicial-affairs/academicy-honesty-policy>) will be reported to Judicial Affairs and may be given a failing grade for the course.

Laptop/Tablet/Cell Phone Policy: The use of laptops, tablets, cell phones, smart phones, or other mobile communication devices is disruptive, and is therefore prohibited during class. The only exception to this policy is to allow students to access the required readings during class. Except in emergencies or for students with prior approval from the professor, those using such devices may be asked to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Jan 17 & 19): Introduction to the Problem of Free Will

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 1, B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two*, pp. 240-8 [Total: 19 pages]

Week 2 (Jan 24 & 26): Compatibilism

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 2, David Hume's "Liberty and Necessity" [Total: 24 pages]

Week 3 (Jan 31 & Feb 2): Libertarianism

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 4, Robert Kane's "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on Free Will and Indeterminism" pp. 217-227 (read up to section IV) [Total: 19 pages]

Week 4 (Feb 7 & 9): Hard Determinism

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 7, Derk Pereboom's "Determinism al Dente" pp. 21-26 (to the end of section I) and 27-31 (section III) [Total: 25 pages]

Week 5 (Feb 14 & 16): Agent-Causation

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 5, Lynne Rudder Baker's "What is Human Freedom?" pp. 1-11. [Total: 21 pages]

Reading Challenge: Chisolm, Roderick (1964). "Human Freedom and the Self."

Week 6 (Feb 21 & 23): The Principle of Alternative Possibilities

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 8, David P. Hunt's "Moral responsibility and unavoidable action" [Total: 17 pages]

Reading Challenge: Frankfurt, Harry G. (1969). "Alternate possibilities and moral responsibility." The Journal of Philosophy, 66(23): 829-839.

Week 7 (Feb 28 & Mar 2): Free Will and Moral Responsibility

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 9, Susan Wolf's "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility" [Total: 22 pages]

Reading Challenge: Frankfurt, Harry G. (1971). "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." The Journal of Philosophy, 68(1): 5-20.

Week 8 (Mar 7 & Mar 9): Mid-term Review and Exam

Midterm Exam: March 9th

Week 9: (Mar 14 & 16): Free Will Skepticism

Required Reading: Daniel Dennett's "Please Don't Feed the Bugbears," Daniel Wegner and Thalia Wheatley's "Apparent Mental Causation: Sources of the Experience of Will" [Total: 32 pages]

Week 10 (Mar 21 & 23): Revising the Problem of Free Will

Required Reading: Manuel Vargas' "How to Solve the Problem of Free Will," [Total: 20 pages]

Paper Draft Due: March 23rd

Spring Recess**Week 11 (Apr 4 & 6): The Libet Experiment**

Required Reading: Benjamin Libet's "Unconscious cerebral initiative and the role of conscious will in voluntary action" [Total: 11 pages]

Week 12 (Apr 11 & 13): Critiques of Libet

Required Reading: Patrick Haggard and Martin Eimer's "On the relation between brain potentials and the awareness of voluntary movements," Aaron Schurger, Jacobo D. Sitt, and Stanislas Dehaene's "An accumulator model for spontaneous neural activity prior to self-initiated movement" [Total: 14 pages]

Week 13 (Apr 18 & 20): Updates to Libet Required Reading: C. S. Soon et al.'s "Unconscious determinants of free decisions in the human brain," M. Schultze-Kraft et al.'s "The point of no return in vetoing self-initiated movements" [Total: 9 pages]

Week 14 (Apr 25 & 27): Predicting Free Choice

Required Reading: S. Bode et al.'s "Predicting perceptual decision biases from early brain activity," C. S. Soon et al.'s "Predicting free choices for abstract intentions" [Total: 15 pages]

Final Paper Due: April 27th

Week 15 (May 2 & 4): The Neural Basis of Free Will and Final Review

Required Reading: Adina Roskies' "How Does Neuroscience Affect Our Conception of Volition?" [14 pages]

Final Exam: May 9th from 8 to 11 a.m.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, students are expected to be able to:

CLO 1. Describe free will from the perspective of both philosophy and cognitive science.

CLO 2. Articulate and analyze the progress of ideas on free will from within philosophy.

CLO 3. Articulate and analyze the latest developments in the debate on free will from within cognitive science.

These CLOs help students to reach the **Philosophy** Program Learning Outcomes 2, 3, & 4.

PLO 2: Topics: Identify and explain the central questions within major topics of philosophical research.

This PLO is supported by CLO 2, in which students are expected to be able to articulate and analyze philosophical arguments in the free will debate by the end of the course.

PLO 3: Ideas: Describe the contributions of major thinkers in the philosophical canon.

This PLO is also supported by CLO 2, since many of the philosophical arguments considered in this course are due to major thinkers in the philosophical canon.

PLO 4: Application: Apply philosophical knowledge...to a subject in another discipline, and/or apply knowledge from another discipline to a subject in philosophy.

This PLO is supported by CLO 1, in which students are expected to be able to understand the free will debate from the perspective of both philosophy and cognitive science.

These CLOs help students to reach the **Cognitive Science** Program Learning Outcomes 1 & 4.

PLO 1: Understanding foundational concepts in cognitive and information sciences.

This PLO is supported by CLO 1, in which students are expected to understand the foundational concept of agency.

PLO 4: Ability to integrate knowledge across the disciplines that compose cognitive and information sciences.

This PLO is supported by CLO 1 and 3, in which students are expected to be able to understand the free will debate from the perspective of both philosophy and experimental science.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This course supports the UC Merced guiding principles of *communication, self and society, and development of personal potential*.

On *communication*: The one-page paper requirement should aid students in learning to communicate efficiently and effectively in writing. The in-class discussions should encourage students to communicate differences orally in a reasoned and controlled manner.

On *self and society*: The question of whether we have free will is a perennial, cross-cultural question that is essential to understanding self and society. Discussing how and whether we are able to make free choices helps one to understand both one's self and a society in which this has been an important topic of debate.

On *development of personal potential*: Thinking about self-control and how it works is likely to help one better develop one's personal potential, since it puts one into close contact with questions of how one could better control one's choices.