

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

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Professor: Carolyn Dicey Jennings

Email: cjennings3@ucmerced.edu

Office Hours: SSM 253A, Tuesdays/Thursdays 2-3 p.m. or by appointment

Teaching Assistant: Sam Spevack

Email: sspevack@ucmerced.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

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.

COURSE STRUCTURE

On Tuesdays of each week the students will be presented with a lecture on the topic of the week.

On Thursdays students will have a discussion on that topic. At the end of class each Thursday a typed, one-page paper will be due on the topic of the week.

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 1 and 4.

Philosophy PLO 1: Criticize philosophical arguments...

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.

Philosophy PLO 4: Use philosophy in an interdisciplinary way...

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 cognitive science and to be able to articulate and analyze the application of the problem within contemporary cognitive science.

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

Cognitive Science 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.

Cognitive Science 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.

GRADING PROCEDURES

All students will be expected to turn in weekly one-page papers on one of the readings for that week (single-spaced with 12 pt Times New Roman font and 1" margins), due Thursdays by the end of class: **12 one-page papers, each worth 2.5% of the final grade, together worth 30% of the final grade.**

A single research paper of five to seven pages (1,500 to 2,000 words, double-spaced with 12 pt Times New Roman font and 1" margins) will be due mid-way through the course: **1 research paper, due March 20th, worth 30% of the final grade.**

The final will be a short answer and essay-based exam: **1 final exam, on May 12th, worth 30% of the final grade.**

Participation in the course will be based on 10 pop quizzes, each worth 1 percent of the final grade. **10 pop quizzes, each worth 1% of the final grade, together worth 10% of the final grade.**

Students can also earn up to 50% of the participation grade by giving a 10 minute in-class presentation on a discussion day, with up to two student presentations allowed per day (first come, first serve basis): **1 presentation, worth up to 50% of the participation grade, and up to 5% 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. Except in emergencies or for students with prior approval from the professor, those using such devices will be asked to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (Oxford University Press, 2005).
PHIL 171/COGS 160 Course Packet (these readings are also posted in CROPS).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction to the Problem of Free Will

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

Reading Challenge: Bobzien, Susanne (1998). "The inadvertent conception and late birth of the free-will problem." Phronesis, 43(2): 133-175.

Jan 21 Tu: Lecture on the Problem of Free Will

Jan 23 Th: Discussion, **First Paper Due**

Week 2: Classical Compatibilism

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 2, David Hume's "Liberty and Necessity"

Reading Challenge: David Hume's "The idea of necessary connection"

Jan 28 Tu: Lecture on Classical Compatibilism

Jan 30 Th: Discussion, **Second Paper Due**

Week 3: The Consequence Argument

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 3, Laura W. Ekstrom's "Freedom, Causation, and the Consequence Argument," section 2, pp. 334-336 (up to second paragraph).

Reading Challenge: Lewis, David (1981). "Are We Free to Break the Laws?" Theoria, 47: 112-121.

Feb 4 Tu: Lecture on the Consequence Argument

Feb 6 Th: Discussion, **Third Paper Due**

Week 4: Libertarianism

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 4, Robert Kane's "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on Free Will and Indeterminism"

Feb 11 Tu: Lecture on Libertarianism

Feb 13 Th: Discussion, **Fourth Paper Due**

Week 5: Agent-Causation

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

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

Feb 18 Tu: Lecture on Agent-Causation

Feb 20 Th: Discussion, **Fifth Paper Due**

Week 6: Simple Indeterminism

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 6

Reading Challenge: Carl Ginet's "An Action Can be Both Uncaused and Up to the Agent"

Feb 25 Tu: Lecture on Simple Indeterminism

Feb 27 Th: Discussion, **Sixth Paper Due**

Week 7: Hard Determinism

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 7, Derk Pereboom's "Determinism al Dente"

Reading Challenge: Smilansky, Saul (1994). "The Ethical Advantages of Hard Determinism." Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 54(2) : 355-363.

Mar 4 Tu: Lecture on Hard Determinism

Mar 6 Th: Discussion, **Seventh Paper Due**

Week 8: 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"

Mar 11 Tu: Lecture on Free Will Skepticism

Mar 13 Th: Discussion

Week 9: Revisionism

Required Reading: Manuel Vargas' "How to Solve the Problem of Free Will," Adina Roskies' "How Does Neuroscience Affect Our Conception of Volition?"

Mar 18 Tu: Lecture on Revisionism

Mar 20 Th: Discussion, **Mid-Term Paper Due**

Spring Recess

Week 10: The Principle of Alternative Possibilities

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 8, David P. Hunt's "Moral responsibility and unavoidable action"

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

Apr 1 Tu: Lecture on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities

Apr 3 Th: Discussion, **Eighth Paper Due**

Week 11: Free Will and Moral Responsibility

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 9, Susan Wolf's "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility"

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

Apr 8 Tu: Lecture on Free Will and Moral Responsibility

Apr 10 Th: Discussion, **Ninth Paper Due**

Week 12: Reactive Attitudes

Required Reading: Kane Ch. 10, Eddy Nahmias et al.'s "Surveying Freedom: Folk Intuitions about Free Will and Moral Responsibility"

Reading Challenge: Strawson, Peter F. (2008). "Freedom and Resentment." Freedom and Resentment and other essays. Taylor and Francis.

Apr 15 Tu: Lecture on Reactive Attitudes

Apr 17 Th: Discussion, **Tenth Paper Due**

Week 13: The Libet Experiment

Required Reading: Benjamin Libet's "Unconscious cerebral initiative and the role of conscious will in voluntary action" (and commentaries)

Apr 22 Tu: Lecture on the Libet Experiment

Apr 24 Th: Discussion, **Eleventh Paper Due**

Week 14: 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”

Apr 29 Tu: Lecture on Critiques of Libet

May 1 Th: Discussion, **Twelfth Paper Due**

Week 15: The Neural Basis of Free Will

Required Reading: Peter Ulric Tse’s *The Neural Basis of Free Will* (selections)

May 6 Tu: Lecture on The Neural Basis of Free Will

May 8 Th: Discussion

Final Exam: May 12th from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.