



PH 380 ASPECTS OF THE FREE WILL DEBATE

IES Abroad Vienna

DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of this course is to introduce one of the oldest and most exciting philosophical problems – the problem of free will and moral responsibility. The topic is complex: it is closely connected to metaphysical questions about causation, determinism, and human agency; has obvious moral significance; and has been challenged by scientific research throughout the centuries. On one hand, the belief in free will seems to be one of our most persistent intuitions about ourselves as moral agents. On the other, it is often treated as an esoteric, unscientific (or outright incoherent) concept, as a remnant of a bygone age.

While the course highlights the philosophical answers to the various challenges, its goal is not to defend the concept of free will, but to give the students the necessary means to be able to critically reflect on the philosophical arguments, as well as on the relevant scientific findings. To this end, the first half of the course focuses on the main philosophical positions and aims to clarify the most important terms. In the second half, the goal is to utilize this knowledge and take a stand on related issues.

Although the course focuses on the contemporary Analytic discussion of the problem, several historical aspects of it are going to be taken into account, in addition to insights from the Continental tradition, in order to give a diverse and more complete picture about the topic.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: Previous courses in philosophy is an advantage but is not a prerequisite. Some genuine interest in philosophical problems is, however, presupposed.

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

We will be discussing the pieces below, assigned for each meeting. The compulsory readings will be available on Moodle. The course is intended as a real dialogue: it will, besides the traditional lecture format, heavily rely on student participation in the form of short class presentations and contributions to the discussions.

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Midterm - 30%
- Presentation – 20%
- Final – 40%
- Participation – 10%

Midterm, Take-home assignment

Three short essays (about 2 pages each), answering three questions out of the choice of at least six. Students will receive the questions two weeks before the deadline.

Presentation

Students will be asked to give a short presentation of approximately 15 minutes on a chosen topic. Students can choose a topic at the first meeting of the course. The presentations will take place at the beginning of each class.

Final, Take-home assignment



A longer (around 10 pages) essay about one of the topics discussed. Students are expected to choose their topic at least two weeks before the deadline, but they can start working on their paper even before that. Students can ask for feedback and additional readings for their paper, if needed.

Participation

Students are expected to take part in the discussions.

Grading Rubric for Student Participation

A	Excellent participation The student's contributions reflect an active reading of the assigned bibliography. Skillfully synthesizes the main ideas of the readings and raises questions about the applications and implications of the material. Demonstrates, through questions and comments, that he or she has been capable of relating the main ideas in the readings to the other information discussed in the course, and with his or her own life experience. The student makes informed judgments about the readings and other ideas discussed in class, providing evidence and reasons. He/she respectfully states his/her reactions about other classmates' opinions, and is capable of contributing to the inquiry spiral with other questions. The student gets fully involved in the completion of the class activities.
B	Very good participation The student's contributions show that the assigned materials are usually read. Most of the time the main ideas are identified, even though sometimes it seems that applications and implications of the information read were not properly reflected upon. The student is able to construct over others' contributions, but sometimes seems to interrupt the shared construction to go over tangents. He/she is respectful of others' ideas. Regularly involved in the activities but occasionally loses concentration or energy.
C	Regular participation The participant evidences a regular reading of the bibliography, but in a superficial way. He/she tries to construct over others' ideas, but commonly provides comments that indicate lack of preparation about the material. Frequently, contributions are shallow or unarticulated with the discussion in hand.
F	Insufficient participation Consistently, the participant reads in a shallow way or does not read at all. Does not participate in an informed way, and shows lack of interest in constructing over others' ideas.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students are expected to

- become familiar with the most important issues concerning some current theories about freedom;
- acquire the ability to analyze and evaluate philosophical arguments and to construct and articulate their own arguments;
- learn how to identify and execute an appropriate writing project;
- acquire basic skills relevant to interdisciplinary research, such as the ability to make connections between different aspects of a complex topic.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

IES Vienna requires attendance at all class sessions, including field study excursions, internship meetings, scheduled rehearsals, and all tests and exams. Attendance will be taken for every class. If a student misses more than the equivalent of a week of classes without an excuse, the final grade will be reduced by one-third of a letter grade (for example, A- to B+) for every additional unexcused absence.

Excused absences are permitted only when:

- 1) a student is ill (health issues),
- 2) when class is held on a recognized religious holiday traditionally observed by the particular student, or
- 3) in the case of a grave incident affecting family members;
- 4) exceptions may be made for conflicting academic commitments, but only in writing and only well in advance of missed class time.

Any other absences are unexcused.

CONTENT:

Week	Topic	Reading
Week 1	Introduction, the „Basic Problem” of Free Will	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pink, Thomas. “The Free Will Problem,” in <i>Free Will: A Very Short Introduction</i>. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Pp. 1-21.
Week 2	Morality and the Control Requirement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kant, Immanuel. <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (tr.: Mary J. Gregor). CUP, 1998 (1785). Pp. 52-66. Nagel, Thomas. “Moral Luck,” in: <i>Moral Luck</i> (ed.: Daniel Statman). State University of New York Press, 1993. Pp. 57-72.
Week 3	Incompatibilism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Van Inwagen, Peter. “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism,” in <i>Philosophical Studies</i> 27, 1975. Pp. 185-199. Kane, Robert. “Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on Free Will and Indeterminism,” in <i>The Journal of Philosophy</i> 96/5, 1999. Pp. 217-240.
Week 4	Compatibilism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schlick, Moritz. “When is a Man Responsible?” in <i>Problems of Ethics</i>. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1939. Pp. 143-158. Frankfurt, Harry G. “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” in <i>The Journal of Philosophy</i> 66/23., 1969. Pp. 829-839.
Week 5	Hard Incompatibilism and the Source Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pereboom, Derk. „Determinism al Dente,” in <i>Nous</i> 29/1, 1995. Pp. 21-45. Strawson, Galen. „The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility,” in <i>Philosophical Studies</i> 75:1/2, 1994. Pp. 5-24.
Week 6	Free Will and Unconscious Mental Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bouveresse, Jacques. “The Problem of the Reality of the Unconscious,” in <i>Wittgenstein Reads Freud</i> (tr. Carol Cosman). Princeton University Press, 1995. Pp. 22-41. Nelkin, Dana K. „Freedom, Responsibility and the Challenge of Situationism,” in <i>Midwest Studies in Philosophy</i> 29, 2005. Pp. 181-206.
Midterm	Due date TBA	
Week 7	The Brain Decides: Libet-style Experiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wegner, Daniel M. <i>The Illusion of Conscious Will</i>. MIT Press, 2002. Pp. 50-59; 63-70. Mele, Alfred R. “Benjamin Libet: If Not Now, When?” in <i>Free: Why Science Hasn’t Disproved Free Will</i>. OUP, 2014. Pp. 8-25.

Week 8	Free Will and Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smilansky, Saul. "Control, Desert and the Difference between Distributive and Retributive Justice," in <i>Philosophical Studies</i> 131, 2006. Pp. 511-524. Thompson, Michael J. "False Consciousness Reconsidered: A Theory of Defective Social Cognition," in <i>Critical Sociology</i> 41/3., 2015. Pp. 1-13.
Week 9	Free Will and God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kane, Robert. „Predestination, Divine Foreknowledge, and Free Will," in <i>A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will</i>. OUP, 2005. Pp. 147-162. Sartre, Jean-Paul. <i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i>. Yale University Press, 2007. Pp. 17-54.
Week 10	Free Will and Art, Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Russell, Paul. „Free Will, Art and Morality," in <i>The Journal of Ethics</i> 12/3-4, 2008. Pp. 307-325.
Final	Due date TBA	

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Bouveresse, Jacques. "The Problem of the Reality of the Unconscious," in *Wittgenstein Reads Freud* (tr. Carol Cosman). Princeton University Press, 1995. Pp. 22-41.
- Frankfurt, Harry G. "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," in *The Journal of Philosophy* 66/23., 1969. Pp. 829-839.
- Kane, Robert. "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on Free Will and Indeterminism," in *The Journal of Philosophy* 96/5, 1999. Pp. 217-240.
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- Pink, Thomas. "The Free Will Problem," in *Free Will: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Pp. 1-21.
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- Van Inwagen, Peter. "The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism," in *Philosophical Studies* 27, 1975. Pp. 185-199.
- Wegner, Daniel M. *The Illusion of Conscious Will*. MIT Press, 2002. Pp. 50-59; 63-70.