

PHIL 290: SCIENTIFIC AND THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES TO FREE WILL

Dr. Christopher E. Franklin
M/W/F 10-10:50am, HAL 323
Fall 2016

CONTACT INFORMATION

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will investigate the nature and scope of free will and consider two perennial challenges to its existence: the deliverances of science and the nature of God. The first part of course will survey different conceptions of free will, investigating questions such as: What is free will? How is free will related to moral responsibility? Is free will compatible with determinism? The second part of the course will investigate the following question: Do current findings in neuroscience and social psychology show either that humans do not possess free will or possess it only to a very limited degree? The final part of the course will investigate questions concerning whether and how God's omnipotence and omniscience are compatible with human freedom. We will investigate questions such as: does God's sovereignty require him to determine all human choices? And if so, can God legitimately hold humans responsible for sin? Is it possible for God to foreknow what humans will freely choose to do?

TEXTS

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

(Many of the readings will be available through hyperlinks below under the course schedule)

COURSE OUTCOMES

Through the course, students will:

1. Demonstrate detailed knowledge of the main compatibilist theories of free will (#2, 3, 7; midterm, final)
2. Demonstrate detailed knowledge of the main incompatibilist theories of free will (#2, 3, 7; midterm, final)
3. Demonstrate detailed knowledge of the main objections to compatibilist and incompatibilist theories of free will (#2, 3, 9; midterm, final)
4. Demonstrate detailed knowledge of the main scientific challenges to the existence of free will and proposed solutions (#2, 3, 7; final)

5. Demonstrate detailed knowledge of the main theological challenges to the existence of free will and proposed solutions ((#2, 3, 7; final)
6. Develop critical analysis and reasoning skills (Department objectives 4, 6, 8, 9; papers)

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENTAL OBJECTIVES:

1. Demonstrate the ability to understand and evaluate philosophical questions from a Christian theistic framework. This will require the student to see the relationship between faith and learning and how such a perspective applies to the critical and analytical questions posed by humans in the great search for wisdom.
2. Demonstrate ability to read, comprehend, and evaluate the thought of great philosophers of the past and present in terms of the presuppositions and historical contexts of their claims about the philosophical task as well as the implications of such thought in terms of ethical and social practice. This will require observation of and interaction with primary source texts that approach the great questions and concerns that philosophers have been asking for many millennia.
3. Demonstrate ability to comprehend the major issues in philosophy from the aforementioned Christian theistic perspective as well as the ability to interact with the concerns and perspectives of other philosophies, religions, and worldviews in order to develop the skills necessary to think through what one believes and why. This will require the development of skills necessary to evaluate an argument or a belief critically in terms of strengths and weaknesses.
4. Demonstrate basic and maturing research skills. This will include the ability to state theses, show those theses through analysis of primary texts, discuss the possible weaknesses of one's own analysis, and test those theses against the best scholarship.
5. Articulate a worldview that integrates knowledge of philosophy with other disciplines in order to see the consequences of a consistent Christian theistic worldview. Students will recognize the tensions in this integration process rather than accepting simplistic answers and thus will be helped to grow into mature and thoughtful persons.
6. Demonstrate basic research and writing skills. This ability will be assessed through the evaluation of the assigned paper, both in draft and completed versions.
7. Demonstrate basic knowledge of philosophical concepts.
8. Demonstrate ability to research, write, and speak in the content area of Philosophy.

9. Be competitive and prepared for graduate school and seminary opportunities, as assessed by placement data and alumni surveys.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance: Each student will be allowed 3 unexcused absences. Beyond this, each unexcused absence will result in a 2% loss of the student's total course grade. Excessive or frequent tardiness will count as an unexcused absence. If the student arrives late it is his responsibility to make sure he is marked 'present.' Excused absences are restricted to authorized college activities, loss of immediate family member, and illness/injury. See the Academic Policies Section of the *College Bulletin* for more information.

Participation—10%

For each class meeting, students are expected to have carefully read all the assigned reading and to be prepared for class discussion. Students really will be evaluated for their participation. If a student never says anything in class, the student will receive a 0 for participation.

Two Papers—25% each

For each paper, the student is to select an idea, argument, or puzzle covered in any part of the course reading that he or she so chooses. *The topic must come from the reading.* The first part of the paper should set out to explain the central argument or puzzle that the student is engaging. The second, and most important, part of the paper should, in the case of an idea or argument, seek to defend or critique the idea or argument or, in the case of a puzzle, offer a solution or explain why you think there is no solution. This part of the paper is not to be a summary of someone else's thought/argument, but is to be something of *your own creation*. This is difficult and success requires time. Thus, you should select your topic as soon as possible and consider and cultivate your response over a couple of weeks. If you wait to the last minute it will be impossible for you to articulate any *well-developed* thought of your own. You are welcome and encouraged to discuss all parts of this paper with me in office hours.

The first paper is due on 10/24 and the second paper on 12/14. Both papers are due at the beginning of lecture and must be submitted in hard-copy form. The assignment should be typed, double-spaced, and between 1500-1800 words (excluding notes and bibliography). The word count should appear at the top of the paper, under the student's name. Any of the major forms of citation (e.g. APA, MLA, CMS, etc.) are permitted, but the student must be consistent in formatting.

See my **minimal standards handout** posted on my.gcc concerning formatting requirements (these requirements apply to both précises and papers). Any work that fails to meet *any* of the minimal standards will automatically receive a half letter grade penalty and will receive an additional half letter grade penalty for each 24 hour period until the student turns in a properly formatted paper.

Midterm—15%

There will be a midterm exam given on October 19. Prior to the exam I will post *the exam* on my.GCC. The exam will consist of 5 numbered (1-5) essay questions. On the day of the exam, I will roll a six-sided die twice: whatever numbers the die lands on will be the essay questions students write on. If I roll the same number twice or if I roll a 6, there will be a surprise.

Final—25%

There will be a final cumulative exam given on December 19. Prior to the exam I will post *the exam* on my.GCC. The exam will consist of 10 numbered (1-10) essay questions. On the day of the final exam, I will roll a ten-sided die twice: whatever numbers the die lands on will be the essay questions students write on. If I roll the same number twice, there will be a surprise.

Consult the exam schedule now, and make appropriate travel preparations in light of the exam schedule published by the Registrar's office. College policy is that final exams may only be administered during finals week, in accordance with the times scheduled by the Registrar's office, and may not be changed or eliminated to suit the convenience of either the instructor or the students. Students who have 3 exams on a particular calendar day during the final exam period may request permission to change the exam time, but I cannot guarantee that there will be a time that will work for the student.

Honesty

College policies with regard to honesty in taking quizzes and tests will be strictly followed. The college administration and faculty are very concerned about cheating and take active steps to prevent it. See the college's policy on Academic Integrity in the 2014-2015 college *Bulletin*. The use (or possession) of former examinations from this course in preparing for tests is considered a violation of the GCC honesty in learning policy as stated in the college *Bulletin*.

Policy on late assignments:

Do not ask for exceptions for late work; I accept no excuses except Provost excuses. Without a Provost excuse, late work is assigned whatever grade strikes me as appropriate, including a 0.

Disability

Accessibility & Accommodations: It is Grove City College's goal that learning experiences be as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on a disability, please let me know immediately so that we may discuss options. You are also welcome to contact the disability services office to begin this conversation or to establish accommodations. The Disability Services Coordinator may be reached at 724-264-4673 or DisabilityServices@gcc.edu

TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS (schedule subject to change)

I. The Nature of Free Will

Introduction

8/29-8/31 Introduction to the problem of free will

Reading: Kane chapter 1; 'A Free Will Lexicon'

Classical Compatibilism

9/2 Classical compatibilism

Reading: Kane chapter 2; A.J. 'Freedom and Necessity'; 'A Semantics for Subjunctive Conditionals'

9/5 **Labor day**

9/7 Problems with classical compatibilism

Reading: Keith Lehrer ['Cans without Ifs'](#)

First Argument for Incompatibilism

9/9-9/12 The Consequence Argument

Reading: Kane chapter 3; Peter van Inwagen 'An Argument for Incompatibilism'

9/14-9/16 **No Class: Fischer Legacy Agency Workshop**

9/19 Objections

Reading: David Lewis 'Are We Free to Break the Laws?'

New Compatibilists

9/21-9/23 Free Will and Alternative Possibilities

Reading: Kane chapter 8; Harry Frankfurt '[Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility](#)'; Alfred Mele and David Robb '[Rescuing Frankfurt-style Cases](#)' (just section 2)

9/26-9/28 Hierarchical Accounts

Reading: Kane chapter 9, sections 1-4; Gary Watson '[Free Agency](#)'

9/30-10/3 Semi-compatibilism

Reading: Kane chapter 10, only section 5; John Fischer 'Responsiveness and Moral Responsibility'

Second Argument for Incompatibilism

10/5-10/7 Manipulation Arguments

Reading: Alfred Mele selections from *Free Will and Luck*; Derk Pereboom selections from *Living without Free Will*

Libertarianism

10/10 The Libertarian Dilemma

Reading: Kane chapter 4

10/12-10/14 Agent-Causal Libertarianism

Reading: Kane chapter 5; Roderick Chisholm 'Human Freedom and the Self'

10/17 Event-Causal Libertarianism

Reading: Christopher Franklin 'The Problem of Luck'

10/19 **Midterm**

10/21 **Fall break**

II. Scientific Challenges to Free Will

10/24-10/26 The Challenge from Neuroscience

Reading: Benjamin Libet 'Unconscious Cerebral Initiative and the role of Conscious Will in Voluntary Action', pp. 529-539

10/24 Paper one due

10/28-10/31 The Challenge from Psychology

Reading: Daniel Wegner and Thalia Wheatley 'Apparent Mental Causation: Sources of the Experience of Will'

11/2-11/4 **Conference in honor of Gary Watson**

11/7-11/9 The Challenge from Social Psychology

Reading: Dana Nelkin 'Freedom, Responsibility, and the Challenge of Situationism'

11/11 Review and catch up

III. Theological Challenges to Free Will

Problems for Libertarians

11/14-11/16 The Problem of Freedom and Omniscience

Reading: Nelson Pike '[Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action](#)'

11/18-11/28 Boethian solution

Reading: Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzman '[Eternity](#)'

11/21-11/25 **No class Thanksgiving Break**

11/30-12/2 Ockhamist solution

Reading: Alvin Plantinga '[On Ockham's Way Out](#)'

12/5-12/7 Open theist solution

Reading: Dale Tuggy selections from 'Three Roads to Open Theism'

Problems for Compatibilists

12/9-12/12 God as cosmic manipulator?

Reading: Patrick Todd '[Manipulation and Moral Standing](#)'

12/14 Review

Paper two due

12/15 Study day

Final Exam Monday December 19th, 9am