

Freedom and Responsibility

East College 300, TR 9-10:15

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Office Hours: TR 10:30-11:30, or by appointment

Course Description

The chocolate pretzels stare back at me from the cupboard. It's late, I'm tired, I don't need any more to eat, but I finish the bag. I feel as if I can't help myself. Is my action voluntary? Maybe it is. But is it freely done? If I am a matter in motion, like a stone rolling down a hill, it's hard to see how any of my actions could be genuinely free. If that's true, then it seems human affairs should be dramatically altered. Would it make more sense for us to treat one another like rocks propelled by forces beyond our control? Should we cease blaming and praising one another for what we do? What is it about an action that makes it worthy of praise or blame? By reflecting on these questions among others, you will be introduced to thinking philosophically about freedom and responsibility.

Goals

- improve ability to identify arguments when reading philosophical texts
- improve ability to construct, reconstruct, and assess arguments in discussion and writing
- learn significant concepts, distinctions, claims and disputes in thinking about freedom and responsibility

Texts

Free Will, Derk Pereboom (ed.), ISBN 0872203727

Unprincipled Virtue, Nomy Arpaly, ISBN 0195179765

+ PDFs available on Moodle [marked with * in the schedule]

Evaluation

Essays

1. Voluntary action	3 pages	15%	Feb 10
2. Free will and determinism	3 pages	20%	Mar 5
3. Compatibilism	5 pages	20%	Apr 2
4. Reason, praise, and blame	5 pages	30%	May 4

Assignment details will be distributed at least a week before the due date.

Participation

Philosophical issues are often more easily grasped when discussed with others. Our meetings will be a mix of interactive lectures and discussions. Your **participation** in these meetings is worth **15%** of your final grade. You need **15 points** to receive “full credit” for participation. I will track this on Moodle each week. **You are responsible for checking regularly** to be sure that this record is accurate. Please email me immediately if you notice a discrepancy.

What participation is:

- A comment or question on a specific claim or argument made by an author, or one of your peers, or me.
- This can be interpretive. E.g. ‘What does Kant mean when he says S on page P?’ Here you have the burden of saying what you think S means.
 - Or it can be critical. E.g. ‘Kant claims S, but he doesn’t seem to have a good reason for it.’ Here you have the burden of saying why you think the person has a bad reason.

What participation is not:

- Asking what the assignment is for next time.
- Saying ‘yea’ to what someone else says.
- Sitting in your chair and saying nothing.
- Saying things like, “The central impediment to a transcendental deduction of the systematic marginalization of the epistemic condition of the proletariat is what the post-structuralist movement has called ‘the malaise of language.’”
Aim to **speak plainly** and to the issues at hand. One way to achieve this is by rooting your comments in specific claims in the text.

Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading (for class on this day)
1/20 T	Introduction. What will we be doing in this course?	None
Voluntary Action		
1/22 R	Voluntary action	Aristotle, <i>FW</i> pp.1-4
1/27 T	Refresher on Arguments View: <i>Intervention</i> , “Bret,” (episode 93) (45m)	None
1/29 R	Voluntary action	Aquinas, <i>FW</i> pp.41-56
2/3 T	Free choice	Aquinas, <i>FW</i> pp. 34-41 Aquinas, Additional excerpts*
2/5 R	Psychological Determinism Essay Guidelines	Hume, <i>Treatise</i> , II.iii.1: pp. 447-455* View: <i>The Postman Always Rings Twice</i> (113m)

Free Will and Determinism		
2/10 T	Hume's Conception of Liberty 1st PAPER DUE	Hume, <i>FW</i> 79-80 Hume, <i>Treatise</i> , II.iii.2, pp. 455-460* Hume, <i>Treatise</i> , II.ii.3, pp. 397-400* 1st PAPER DUE
2/12 R	Reason and Passion	Hume, <i>Treatise</i> , II.iii.3, pp. 460-465* View: <i>Gattaca</i> (106m)
2/17 T	Egoism	Hume, <i>Treatise</i> , II.iii.4-6 & 9, pp. 466-474 & 485-494*
2/19 R	Kant against Hume	Kant, <i>FW</i> pp.101-104
2/24 T	Hume's Response to Kant	Hume, <i>Treatise</i> , II.ii.2 pp.455-60 [re-read!]
2/26 R	Kant on Freedom	Kant, <i>FW</i> pp.91-100 View: <i>Blade Runner</i> (117m)
Contemporary Compatibilism		
3/3 T	Does moral responsibility require alternate possibilities?	Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" (<i>FW</i>)
3/5 R	What is the will? 2nd PAPER DUE	Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" (<i>FW</i>) 2nd PAPER DUE
3/10 T	<i>SPRING BREAK</i>	<i>SPRING BREAK</i>
3/12 R	<i>SPRING BREAK</i>	<i>SPRING BREAK</i>
3/17 T	Participant and objective attitudes	P.F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment" (<i>FW</i>)
3/19 R	The participant attitude	P.F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment" (<i>FW</i>) (Reconsider <i>Intervention</i>)
3/24 T	Hard incompatibilism?	Pereboom, "Determinism <i>al dente</i> " (<i>FW</i>) Or: Pereboom, "Hard Incompatibilism"*
3/26 R	Essay Brainstorming	Essay Brainstorming
Reason, Praise, Blame		
3/31 T	Why do we do what we do?	Arpaly, <i>Unprincipled Virtue</i> , Chapter One
4/2 R	3rd PAPER DUE	3rd PAPER DUE
4/7 T	What is weakness of the will?	Arpaly, Chapter Two
4/9 R	Is weakness of the will always irrational?	Arpaly, Chapter Two
4/14 T	What makes an action worthy of praise or blame?	Arpaly, Chapter Three
4/16 R	What makes an action worthy of praise or blame?	Arpaly, Chapter Three
4/21 T	Autonomy	Arpaly, Chapter Four

4/23 R	Autonomy	Arpaly, Chapter Four
4/28 T	Problem cases	Arpaly, Chapter Five
4/30 R	Essay Brainstorming	Essay Brainstorming
5/4	4TH PAPER DUE 2pm	4TH PAPER DUE 2pm

Academic Honesty

Any case of suspected academic dishonesty must be reported. Note: “To plagiarize is to use without proper citation or acknowledgment the words, ideas, or work of another. Plagiarism is a form of cheating that refers to several types of unacknowledged borrowing.” When in doubt, cite it. For more information, please see the handbook on Community Standards here: <http://www.dickinson.edu/student/files/commstand0809.pdf>

Disabilities

I will make reasonable academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities. If you think you are eligible for such accommodation, please first register with Disability Services in Biddle House, specifically Stephanie Anderberg (717-245-1734; disabilityservices@dickinson.edu). If you are eligible, Marni Jones, Director of Learning Skills and Disability Services, will provide you with a letter attesting to that. Once you have that letter, we can meet to discuss what we need to do. All of that must happen in the first three weeks of the semester.