

Prof. Benjamin Huff  
benjaminhuff@rmc.edu

office hrs: 3-4pm Mon-Th  
office: 240 Copley

## **Freedom, Agency and Determinism**

Philosophy 404, Spring 2007

In this course we will consider how we should understand human freedom, particularly how the causality of the human will is to be understood in light of other kinds of causes, such as the operation of the laws of nature. Is freedom simply the ability to carry one's desires into action? To be truly free, must we also be free with respect to the contents of our wills? If humans are a part of the natural world, governed by the laws of biology, physics and chemistry, can we be free?

The course begins with a historical prelude, helping to motivate the central problems and giving a sense of how these problems have arisen in the past, particularly during the scientific revolution. The body of the course focuses on contemporary analytic article literature, which forms a quite tight discussion. As the course concludes, we will consider what some limitations of this contemporary discussion may be, in light of Plato's *Lysis*.

### **Course texts**

- Robert Kane, ed. *Free Will* (Blackwell, 2002)
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* (edition TBA)
- other readings to be distributed

### **Assignments and grading**

Students will be expected to actively participate in discussion, and hence must carefully read beforehand the texts to be discussed each day. They will write two shorter papers (6-7 pages), one longer paper (13-15 pages), and a final exam. The exams will test broad competence on the course material, but overall emphasis in the course is on intelligent engagement with the issues being considered, in class and in papers.

Students are to formulate their own paper topics and for each paper submit a paragraph describing the topic for approval prior to writing the paper. The longer paper may be partly based on one of the shorter papers.

Students will be asked to hand in a response card at the end of each class. Students submitting fewer than 8 cards before break, or fewer than 10 after break, will be penalized one step in their overall course grade.

Class participation	20%
Paper 1 (6-7 pages)	15%
Paper 2 (6-7 pages)	15%
Paper 3 (13-15 pages)	30%
Final Exam	20% each

**Reading Schedule**  
(subject to change)

- Feb T 13 Introduction; historical prelude (selections from Aristotle, Laplace)  
H 15 Holbach, Kant selections  
T 20 Skinner, Nielsen [Kane]  
H 22 Chisholm [Kane], Nagel, "Moral Luck"  
T 27 Peter Van Inwagen, "Incompatibility" [Kane]
- Mar H 1 Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities" (handout), Dennett [Kane]  
T 6 Fischer, Pereboom [Kane]  
H 8 Watson, "Free Agency" (handout), paper 1 due  
T 13 Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person" (handout)  
H 15 Wolf, "Sanity" [Kane]  
T 20 Hobart, "Free Will as Involving Determination" (handout)  
H 22 *no class* (Dr. Huff at conference)  
*Spring Break*
- Apr T 3 Van Inwagen "The Mystery of Metaphysical Freedom", O'Connor [Kane]  
H 5 Ginet [Kane], Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics III.2-5, IX.4  
T 10 Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment" (handout)  
H 12 Emerson, "History" (handout)  
T 17 Nietzsche, "On . . . History" §§1-6; paper 2 due  
H 19 Nietzsche, "On . . . History" §§7-10  
T 24 Nietzsche, selections from Beyond Good & Evil, Genealogy of Morals  
H 26 Emerson, "Fate" (handout)
- May T 1 Mill, "Of Individuality" plus (handout)  
H 3 Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator" §§1-6  
T 8 Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator" §§6-8  
H 10 Emerson, "Circles" (handout)  
T 15 Review and reflection, paper 3 due  
*Final Exam* — Monday, May 21st, 8:30am