

Freedom and Responsibility (PHIL 4484-L21)
Professor: Christopher R. Myers (cmyers28@fordham.edu)
Fordham University, Summer 2025
Lowenstein Rm. 904: Mon., Tues., Wed., Thurs. 6:00pm-9:00pm
Tuesday, July 1st – Tuesday, August 5th



In this course we will study the ways in which human beings have grappled with questions related to freedom, agency, and responsibility. We will begin by analyzing older, historically influential philosophical conceptions of freedom. We will then consider more recent discussions about free will, determinism, and responsibility. Finally, we will investigate contributions made by philosophers who have argued that we can't begin to understand the meaning of freedom if we don't fundamentally reconceptualize things like rationality, sociality, the unconscious, and time.

Course description:

The aim of our course is to examine philosophical ideas about freedom, agency, and responsibility. We will consider historical as well as contemporary conceptions of these themes, and we will discuss a wide variety of related concepts including determinism, compatibilism, the ontology of free will, negative liberty, autonomy, moral luck, etc.

Required texts:

(All required reading materials are available for download on the course Blackboard page)

Course requirements:

[1] Attendance/participation	10%
[2] Coursework (on Perusall)	25%
[3] Class Presentation	15%
[4] Research Paper Proposal and Outline	10%
[5] Research Paper Presentation	10%
[6] Research Paper Assignment	30%

[1] Attendance/participation:

I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. You are allowed two unexcused absences before I must start taking points away from your overall attendance/participation grade. I will excuse an absence for a religious holiday, a serious illness, a death in your

immediate family, or your participation in a university-sponsored holiday. To get an absence excused, you must send me a formal, written explanation *before* the class in question.

Your attendance grade is also dependent on (a) your active participation during class time, and (b) your bringing all required reading materials to class (either by physical copy or computer access). Concerning class participation: our in-person class meetings will be devoted *entirely* (100%) to discussion about the assigned readings, and this means that your active participation during class time is absolutely essential. My expectation is that you will not only maintain strong attendance throughout the semester, but also contribute your thoughts during class discussions and act respectfully toward your classmates. Listen thoughtfully, keep an open mind, and contribute what you think. Philosophy is most worthwhile when it is enlivened by discussion and exchange.

[2] Coursework (on Perusall):

For all of our assigned readings this semester, you must complete an online Perusall assignment (via our course Blackboard page). Perusall allows students to collaboratively make annotations and comments on our assigned reading. Everyone in the class is required to post at least *three* comments on our assigned reading in advance of every class meeting, and these comments can be posted directly onto the reading itself or in response to one of your classmates' previous comments. Your grade on these assignments will be based on completion. At the same time, I reserve the right to take off points for inaccuracy or irrelevance.

The deadline for all coursework on Perusall is 5:30pm on the day of the class in question. No late coursework will be accepted as the purpose of these assignments is to create conversation about the readings in advance of our discussions in class.

[3] Class Presentation:

This semester each of you is required to do one in-class presentation. Your presentation will take place immediately after our warm-up discussion, and should run for 10-20 minutes (not including discussion time afterward).

The purpose of these class presentations is to provide an overview of the day's assigned reading, clarify the key points of our author's argument/reasoning, and raise at least three discussion questions that you think deserve attention. Your presentation can be delivered via PowerPoint, Google slides, or simply the whiteboard (I have no preference). However you choose to deliver it, your presentation should consist in an overview, summary, and analysis of the assigned reading, and then a set of concluding thoughts alongside your proposed discussion questions.

You will be graded on the accuracy of your presentation, the quality of your delivery, and your ability to answer questions from the class. Please consult our class' 'Guide for Class Presentations' handout for more detailed information and requirements. Additionally, consult our class' 'Guide for Class Presentations' handout for your presentation date (we will determine presentation dates at the beginning of the semester). You may exchange the

date of your assigned presentation with another student in the class, provided both parties agree and you let me know at least a week in advance.

[4] Research Proposal and Outline + [5] Research Paper Presentation + [6] Research Paper Assignment:

We will have one major writing assignment this semester: a research paper that is due on the last day of class (August 5th). The purpose of this paper assignment is to analyze recent philosophical discourse about freedom and to provide an original contribution of your own which serves to push this discourse forward.

Before the research paper itself is due, you will have two additional deadlines. First, you will be required to submit a research paper proposal and an outline of your proposed research paper on July 25th ([4]). Second, you will be required to deliver a 3-minute thesis presentation of your research paper on August 4th ([5]). The first of these deadlines is meant to get you thinking about theoretical questions and challenges that might be worth pursuing with respect to the material of our class. The second of these deadlines is meant to facilitate a class-wide discussion of our research papers, as well as to improve your rhetorical skills in presenting and defending a thesis of your own.

I will announce further details for each of these requirements (including the research paper prompt itself) once we are closer to the respective deadlines. The required length of the research paper assignment, however, will be 6-8 pages (12 font, double-spaced). Additionally, this paper assignment need to be written in line with the requirements laid out in prompt.

Course policies:

Late penalty policy:

For every day (weekend days included) that an assignment is late, this assignment will be penalized. If you suspect that you will not be able to turn an assignment in on time, reach out to me *at least 24 hours in advance* and we can talk about extending the deadline. I am considerably generous about extending paper deadlines - but I will not extend deadlines *immediately before the deadline*. No late coursework on Perusall will be accepted.

Technology policy:

During class time you are permitted to use a computer, laptop, or tablet. Your use of these devices is restricted to class use, however, and I expect that you will not allow these devices to divert your attention or the attention of others away from discussion. Remember: this course revolves around active discussion and participation. If your use of electronic devices inhibits class discussion, I reserve the right to adjust our technology policy accordingly.

Academic integrity:

All students are expected to abide by the rules of academic integrity as laid out in the Fordham Handbook. This especially includes plagiarism. Any assignment that is found to

have involved plagiarism will automatically receive a failing grade. Furthermore, your professors (including me) are obliged to automatically report all cases of plagiarism to the Dean. With this in mind, it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with what qualifies as plagiarism.

The Fordham Handbook defines plagiarism as follows: "Plagiarism occurs when individuals attempt to present as their own what has come from another source. Plagiarism takes place whether such theft is accidental or deliberate." In a nutshell, plagiarism involves taking credit for someone else's work in one's own writing – intentionally or unintentionally. Plagiarism might mean copying an idea or quotation exactly as it is written elsewhere (in a book, online article, Chat GPT, a newspaper, etc.), paraphrasing an idea or quotation without properly including a citation, or using an idea that is not your own without citing the author(s) of this idea. To avoid plagiarism make sure you properly cite the sources you use. If you're unsure of whether you are properly citing something, come and ask me before you submit the assignment. Stay on the safe side.

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ChatGPT and GenerativeAI policy:

ChatGPT is capable of many things, but ChatGPT is not you. Having a bot answer questions or generate essays is not the same as working out your own thoughts. This semester our class will adhere to three guidelines concerning AI technology: (1) If you use ChatGPT/GenAI in any way, you *must* cite it—that is to say, you must cite the AI technology you used, indicate what prompt you gave it, and indicate how you revised it. (2) Uses of ChatGPT/GenAI without citation will be penalized. Submitting ChatGPT/GenAI products without citation is a violation of Fordham's academic integrity policies—specifically, it is a form of plagiarism and outsourcing. (3) ChatGPT/GenAI are tools and they are here to stay—so we will keep our channels of communication open about their advantages and the best frameworks in which to deploy them. Additionally, we will use the reading skills we develop in this class to reflect critically *on* information that ChatGPT/GenAI provide about the history of philosophy.

Students with special needs and/or disabilities:

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Fordham University. If you believe that you have a disability that may interfere with your ability to participate in the activities, classwork, or assessment of the object of this course, you may be entitled to accommodations. Please schedule a meeting to speak with someone at the Office of Disability Services (Phone number: 718-817-0655). (Locations: Lincoln Center – Lowenstein, Room 207; Rose Hill - O'Hare Hall, Lower Level).

Further study in philosophy:

For further information on majoring/minoring in philosophy, contact one of our undergraduate studies department chairs: Professor Brian Johnson (brjohnson@fordham.edu) (Lincoln Center) or Professor Christina M. Gschwandtner (gschwandtner@fordham.edu) (Rose Hill)

Reading Schedule:

Date:

Reading:

Notes:

What is freedom?

Tues., July 1 st	Kane: <i>A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will</i> (2005), "The Free Will Problem"	
Wed., July 2 nd	Aristotle: <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (330 B.C.E.), Bk. I Ch. 1 & 4-7; & Bk. III Ch. 1-4	
Thurs., July 3 rd	Kant: <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> (1781), "Preface" & "Third Antinomy"	
Mon., July 7 th	Berlin: "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1969)	
Tues., July 8 th	Taylor: "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty" (1985)	

Free will versus determinism

Wed., July 9 th	Kane: <i>A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will</i> (2005), "Compatibilism" & "Incompatibilism"	
Thurs., July 10 th	Frankfurt: "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" (1969)	(Presentation #1)
Mon., July 14 th	van Inwagen: "An Argument for Incompatibilism" (1983)	(Presentation #2)
Tues., July 14 th	Nagel: "Moral Luck" (1979)	(Presentation #3)
Wed., July 16 th	Kane: "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on Free Will and Indeterminism" (1999)	(Presentation #4)
Thurs., July 17 th	(Discussion about research paper assignment)	

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reading:</u>	<u>Notes:</u>
Responsibility and accountability		
Mon., July 21 st	Strawson: "Freedom and Resentment" (1963)	(Presentation #5)
Tues., July 22 nd	Scanlon: "The Significance of Choice" (1986)	(Presentation #6)
Wed., July 23 rd	Watson: "Two Faces of Responsibility" (1996)	(Presentation #7)
Reconceptualizing freedom and responsibility		
Thurs., July 24 th	Khurana: "Life and Autonomy: Forms of Self-Determination in Kant and Hegel" (2013), p. 155-174	(Presentation #8)
Fri., July 25 th		Research paper proposal and outline DUE
Mon., July 28 th	Khurana: "Life and Autonomy: Forms of Self-Determination in Kant and Hegel" (2013), p. 174-193	(Presentation #9)
Tues., July 29 th	Gould: <i>Marx's Social Ontology</i> (1978), "The Ontology of Freedom"	(Presentation #10)
Wed., July 30 th	Nietzsche: <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> (1886), "On the Prejudices of Philosophers"	(Presentation #11)
Thurs., July 31 st	Cronan: "Bergson and Free Will" (1937)	(Presentation #12)
Mon., August 4 th	(Research paper presentations)	Research paper presentation DUE
Tues., August 5 th		Research paper assignment DUE