



Freedom and Responsibility (PHIL 4484-L21)
Professor: Christopher R. Myers (cm Myers28@fordham.edu)
Fordham University, Summer 2026
Lowenstein Rm. 904: Mon., Tues., Wed., Thurs. 6:00pm-9:00pm
Tuesday, June 30th – Tuesday, August 3rd



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 examining the beginnings of Western philosophical thinking about the nature of freedom. We will then trace these beginnings forward to multiple lines of modern philosophical inquiry. First, we will discuss the free will-determinism debate and related accounts of compatibilism/incompatibilism. Second, we will discuss accounts of moral responsibility which abstract from the question of determinism. Third, we will examine Berlin's distinction between positive and negative liberty. Fourth, we will discuss accounts of freedom which identify it as the ontological character of life itself.

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] Midterm Exam	15%
[5] Final Exam	15%
[6] Final Project	20%

[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 6:00pm 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 at least 15 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] Midterm exam + [5] Final exam

We will have two reading exams this semester: a midterm exam (July 16th) and a final exam (August 3rd). The purpose of these reading exams is to test your comprehension of the main philosophical positions and claims of our class. They will be conducted in class and they must be written in line with the requirements laid out in the provided writing prompts. I will provide the writing prompt for each of these exams in advance.

[6] Final Project:

We will have one major assignment this semester: a final project that is due on the last day of class (August 3rd). Your project can have a format of your own choosing—an academic paper, a visual model or poster, a painting, a podcast, a short film, a short story—but whatever you choose to do, you must present your project in class on August 3rd, and you must submit the project itself on August 3rd with a written summary of the reasoning behind the project. The basic task of this assignment is to connect and articulate together two different modules of the course. For example: you might write a short story in which the main character struggles to reconcile their pursuit of positive liberty with a hard incompatibilist worldview. Another example: you might record a podcast in which you discuss the nature of moral responsibility from the perspective of immanent, ontological freedom. Both examples would be good project ideas—but both would need to be presented effectively in class on August 3rd to receive high marks, and both would need to be supported by a written summary of your reasoning.

Your grade on the final project assignment, then, will be determined on the basis of the following: a project proposal (due July 23rd), a presentation (August 3rd), and a submission of the project itself along with a written summary of the reasoning behind the project (500 words) (August 3rd). I will announce further details for each of these requirements once we are closer to the respective deadlines.

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 Laura Specker-Sullivan (lspeckersullivan@fordham.edu). (Rose Hill)

Reading Schedule:

Date: Reading: Notes:

What is freedom?

Tues., June 30 th	Kane: <i>A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will</i> (2005), "The Free Will Problem"
Wed., July 1 st	Zeno: "Paradoxes of Motion" (summary of <i>Arguments</i> (Λόγοι) Fragments) (~440 B.C.E.)
Thurs., July 2 nd	-- No class meeting --
Mon., July 6 th	Aristotle: <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (~330 B.C.E.), Bk. I Ch. 1 & 4-7; & Bk. III Ch. 1-4
Tues., July 7 th	Kant: <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> (1781), "Preface" & "Third Antinomy"

Freedom as free will: free will versus determinism

Wed., July 8 th	Kane: <i>A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will</i> (2005), "Compatibilism" & "Incompatibilism"
Thurs., July 9 th	Frankfurt: "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" (1969)

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reading:</u>	<u>Notes:</u>
Mon., July 13 th	van Inwagen: "An Argument for Incompatibilism" (1983)	
Tues., July 14 th	Nagel: "Moral Luck" (1979)	
Wed., July 15 th	Kane: "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on Free Will and Indeterminism" (1999)	

Freedom as responsibility: recovering the interpersonal, participant attitude

Thurs., July 16 th	Strawson: "Freedom and Resentment" (1963)	-- Midterm exam --
Mon., July 20 th	Scanlon: "The Significance of Choice" (1986)	
Tues., July 21 st	Watson: "Two Faces of Responsibility" (1996)	

Freedom as liberty: positive liberty versus negative liberty

Wed., July 22 nd	Berlin: "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1969)	
Thurs., July 23 rd	Taylor: "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty" (1985)	

Freedom as immanent life: life between unfreedom and autonomy

Mon., July 27 th	Khurana: "Life and Autonomy: Forms of Self-Determination in Kant and Hegel" (2013), p. 155-174	
Tues., July 28 th	Khurana: "Life and Autonomy: Forms of Self-Determination in Kant and Hegel" (2013), p. 174-193	
Wed., July 29 th	Gould: <i>Marx's Social Ontology</i> (1978), "The Ontology of Freedom"	
Thurs., July 30 th	Foucault: "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom" (1984)	
Mon., August 3 rd	(Final project presentations)	-- Final exam -- -- Final project presentation --