

FREEDOM, WILL, AND ACTION

PHI 105
Spring 2020
TTh 8:30-10:00am
TBD

James Sares
james.sares@stonybrook.edu
Office: Harriman Hall 141
Office Hours: TTh 10:00-11:00am

This course is an introduction to philosophical debates about human freedom, will, and action. During the semester, we will examine historical texts that consider whether the human being is free or determined, whether the human being can be held responsible for its actions, and in what sense the human being can introduce something truly 'creative' into the world, as a disruption or excess to its determined causal series. Thus, unlike many political philosophy courses, this course focuses on the *metaphysical* question of free will. This conceptual grounding will serve, in turn, to inform discussions about political and social imaginations about what a good and justice society ought to look like. If we are *not* 'metaphysically' free in terms of our individual will, should we be resigned to our unfreedom in society? Is the individual person free, or does freedom only emerge in relation to a community? More generally, is there *actually* a relationship between the metaphysical question of free will and the question of justice?

The semester is divided into three units:

1. *Classical Debates Between Libertarianism and Determinism*. We will examine the 'classical' opposition between libertarianism, which takes human freedom to be real and indeterministic, and determinism, which takes the actions of the human being to be causally determined and thus 'unfree.' We will question whether this opposition is valid and how it might be overcome, especially in relation to the problem of responsibility and action.
2. *Human Existential Freedom*. We will think beyond the limitations of the libertarian-determinist debate by considering the unique existential situation of the human being, in other words by questioning what kind of *being* the human being is. We will question in what sense temporality and language complicate the question of free will and the ability of the human being to 'transcend' the immediacy of the world as it *is*, into how it *should be*.
3. *Freedom, Justice, and the Good*. We will examine, in light of the metaphysical texts above, how human freedom is restricted or enabled in relation to others and what kinds of social and political systems are best equipped to enable freedom—depending on what precisely we mean by this concept.

Degree Requirements and Prerequisites

This course fulfills DEC G and SBC Cer and Hum requirements. Although this is an introductory course and does not assume prior philosophical knowledge, there will be a number of intensive readings and difficult writing assignments requiring serious commitment from each course member.

Required Texts

Most of the texts we will read are available in PDF form on Blackboard. These texts must be printed out and brought to class when appropriate. Otherwise, I have ordered students to purchase:

Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*. ISBN: 978-0872201880.
Schopenhauer, *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*. ISBN: 978-0199297221.
Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. ISBN-13: 978-0671867805.
Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*. ISBN: 978-0192806109.
Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. ISBN: 978-0879754464.

If you have financial concerns about obtaining these texts, please contact me.

Assignments and Grading

Attendance, Participation, and Short Writing Assignments (20%): Attendance will be taken every class. You must arrive on time and participate regularly during class sessions. You must bring all relevant course materials in hard copy to class. In addition to in-class discussions and debates, your participation grade will include short 1-2 page doubled-spaced responses to questions I give throughout the semester. Expect 5-6 or so of these short assignments, graded check, check-minus, or check-plus. Based on these assignments, I reserve the right to raise (or lower) your grade by up to 2/3 of a letter grade (e.g. B+ to A).

Reading quizzes (20%, 10 quizzes for 2% each): There will be ten short reading quizzes consisting of straightforward reading comprehension questions. Being absent and thus missing a quiz will automatically result in a 0 for that quiz, unless due to medical emergency or other extenuating circumstances.

Midterm Exam (30%): An in-class midterm exam will consist of short open responses to be written during the course of a designated class period.

Final Exam (30%): The take-home final exam will consist of two short essay topics. I will distribute a list of possible questions before the exam, along with my expectations. Each essay must be 900-1000 words, for a total of 1800-2000 words.

Grading Scale: A (93-100%), A- (90-92%), B+ (87-89%), B (83-86%), B- (80-82%), C+ (77-79%), C (73-76%), C- (70-72%), D+ (67-69%), D (63-66%), D- (60-62%), F (below 60%)

Course Policies

Lateness and absences: You are allowed two unexcused absences during the semester. After you miss two classes unexcused, your participation grade will begin to drop by a letter grade per absence. If you miss five classes or more without a valid excuse, you

will fail the course. Lateness will not be tolerated. If you are consistently late more than five minutes for class, I will begin counting late arrivals as absences.

Technology Policy: This is a no-screens course, meaning that laptops and cellphones are not allowed. However, exceptions will be made for students who require the appropriate services.

Disability Support Services (DSS) Statement: If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, Room 128, (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations, if any, are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

Academic Integrity Statement: Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Faculty is required to report any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. Faculty in the Health Sciences Center (School of Health Technology & Management, Nursing, Social Welfare, Dental Medicine) and School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty please refer to the academic judiciary website at: http://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/academic_integrity/index.html.

Critical Incident Management: Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of University Community Standards any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn. Faculty in the HSC Schools and the School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. Further information about most academic matters can be found in the Undergraduate Bulletin, the Undergraduate Class Schedule, and the Faculty-Employee Handbook.

Course Schedule. * = Assignment Due

I. Classical Debates Between Libertarianism and Determinism

January 28	Introduction to course. Plato on the soul's order, <i>Republic</i> Book IV.
January 30	Aristotle on rational desire, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> Book III. Quiz 1.
February 4	Augustine on Free Will, <i>On Free Choice of the Will</i> Book I.
February 6	Augustine on Free Will, <i>On Free Choice of the Will</i> Book II. Quiz 2.
*February 11	Spinoza on Freedom, <i>Ethics</i> selections from Book IV.
February 13	Spinoza on Freedom, <i>Ethics</i> selections from Book IV. Quiz 3.
February 18	Kant's Third Antinomy, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> selections.
*February 20	Kant's Third Antinomy, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> selections. Quiz 4.

February 25	Schopenhauer, <i>The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics</i> .
February 27	Schopenhauer, <i>The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics</i> , Quiz 5.
*March 3	Schopenhauer, <i>The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics</i> .
March 5	Schopenhauer, <i>The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics</i> , Quiz 6.
March 10	Review for the midterm exam.
March 12	MIDTERM EXAM.
March 17	SPRING BREAK.
March 19	SPRING BREAK.

II. Human Existential Freedom

March 24	Sartre, <i>Being and Nothingness</i> selections.
March 26	Sartre, <i>Being and Nothingness</i> selections. Quiz 7.
March 31	Sartre, <i>Being and Nothingness</i> selections.
*April 2	Sartre, <i>Being and Nothingness</i> selections. Quiz 8.
April 7	Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> selections.
April 9	Beauvoir, <i>Ethics of Ambiguity</i> selections.

III. Freedom, Justice, and the Good

April 14	Hegel, <i>Philosophy of Right</i> selections.
April 16	Hegel, <i>Philosophy of Right</i> selections.
April 21	Hegel, <i>Philosophy of Right</i> selections.
April 23	Hegel, <i>Philosophy of Right</i> selections.
April 28	Marx, "Estranged Labor"
*April 30	Marx, "Estranged Labor"
May 5	Marx, "The Communist Manifesto"
May 7	Buffer Class / Review of the Course