Free Will and Determinism

Hendley
Office: 322 Humanities Center
shendley@bsc.edu
http://faculty.bsc.edu/shendley/
x4793

REQUIRED TEXTS:

TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS: (subject to change)

T. F. 7  Intro.

*I. Overview of the Debate: Compatibilism, Chance, Agent-Causation, Praise/Blame*

Th. F. 9  “Human Freedom and the Self,” Roderick Chisholm (*FW*, Ch. 1)

T. F. 14  “Free Will, Praise, and Blame,” J.J.C. Smart (*FW*, Ch. 3)

Th. F. 16  Conclude Overview.

*II. Incompatibilism: Van Inwagen’s Consequence Argument*

T. F. 21  “An Argument for Incompatibilism,” Peter van Inwagen (*FW*, Ch.2)

Th. F. 23  “Are we Free to Break the Laws?,” David Lewis (*FW*, Ch. 6)

*III. Perspectival Compatibilism*

T. F. 28  “Freedom and Resentment,” Peter Strawson (*FW*, Ch. 4)

Th. M. 2  Conclude Strawson; Bok’s Critique of Strawson (pp. 25-29 of Bok’s *Freedom and Responsibility* - to be distributed) (*Reflection Paper #1 (on I - II) Due* )

T. M. 7  “Freedom and Practical Reason,” Hilary Bok (*FW*, Ch. 7, pp. 130-144)

Th. M. 9  Continue Bok (*FW*, Ch. 7, pp. 144-156)

T. M. 14  Conclude Bok (*FW*, Ch. 7, pp. 156-166)

*Interlude: Special Relativity, Time and Free Will*


T. M. 21  “On Einstein-Minkowski Space-Time,” Howard Stein

Th. M. 23  Conclude Interlude (*Reflection Paper #2 (on III) Due*)
Spring Break

IV. Frankfurt’s Critique of the Principle of Alternative Possibilities

T. A. 4  “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” Harry Frankfurt (FW, Ch. 8)

Th. A. 6  “Libertarianism and Frankfurt’s Attack on the Principle of Alternative Possibilities,” David Widerker (FW, Ch. 9) (Reflection Paper #3 (on Interlude) Due)

T. A. 11  “Frankfurt-Style Compatibilism,” John Martin Fischer (FW, Ch. 10)

V. Freedom of the Will and Rational Agency

Th. A. 13  “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” Harry Frankfurt (FW, Ch. 16)

T. A. 18  “Free Agency,” Gary Watson (FW, Ch. 17) (Reflection paper #4 (on IV) Due)

VI. Agent Causation: Is Freedom Compatible with Indeterminism?

Th. A. 20  “Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on Free Will and Indeterminism,” Robert Kane (FW, Ch. 15) Research Paper Proposals Due

T. A. 25  Continue Kane.

Th. A. 27  Honors Day - All Classes Cancelled

T. M. 2  Conclude Kane.

Th. M. 4  Reserve Day

T. M. 9  Reserve Day

VII. Student Presentation of Papers

Th. M. 11  Student Presentation of Papers (Reflection Paper #5 (on V - VI) Due)

T. M. 16  Student Presentation of Papers

COURSE GOALS:

(WR) The discipline specific writing skills we will be working on include 1) skills at carefully crafting a logically valid argument in defense of one’s thesis, 2) skills with being clear with terminology, carefully explicating the meaning of those terms and using them in a consistent way (i.e., avoiding equivocation), 3) skills with using Philosophers Index to uncover literature relevant to one’s interests, 4) skills with analyzing and presenting the arguments found in that literature in a sympathetic way that avoids setting up straw man arguments to be easily refuted and reflects a genuine openness to learn from the arguments of others, even when they may call one’s thesis into question, and 5) skills with organizing one’s paper in a way that is most effective to the defense of one’s thesis and avoids discussion of points irrelevant to that end.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1) Attendance. Read all assigned texts and attend class. If you need to miss a class you should discuss it with me
ahead of time. Excessive absence will be taken into account in your grade.

2) Reflection Papers. You will have five opportunities to write three papers reflecting on the readings we have discussed in class. You must write at least one of the first two papers. You may also write a fourth paper to substitute for the weakest of your first three papers (i.e., the one with the lowest grade). If that fourth paper’s grade should turn out to be lower than your previous lowest grade I will average these two grades together and count them as the grade for one of your three papers. Papers may only be turned in, however, on the due dates stipulated on the syllabus. So you will only have an opportunity to write a fourth paper if there is still an opportunity available to you to turn it in (for instance, if you decide to write on the topics designated for Paper #2 and Paper #4 you must write on the topics designated for Paper #5, leaving you no other opportunities to turn in a fourth paper. You will not be allowed to decide at the end of the course that you would like to write a fourth paper on the topics designated for, say, Paper #1 or #3 since the due dates for those papers would have already passed.).

Each should be at least 5 full pages in length. Each should deal with what you believe to be the most significant issue or related set of issues emerging from our readings, the one issue or related set of issues that, in your mind, is key to helping you to figure out what to believe with respect to the issues being examined (though I may narrow the scope of the paper somewhat by setting a more specific question for you to address).

These papers will serve two purposes: 1) They will function as exams of sorts in which you will need to demonstrate your understanding of some portion of the material we have studied. One of the ways I will be assessing the paper is in terms of how accurately you explain the concepts and arguments from the readings. 2) They will also function as opportunities for you to come to your own tentative conclusions regarding some of the issues raised by the readings. I will be assessing this on the basis of how well you support your conclusions with reasons, either your own or those provided in the readings. I will also be looking for whether you respond to all of the relevant considerations that have been raised by the readings, lecture and class discussion.

Each of the three reflection papers will be worth 20% of your course grade.

General Expectations for the Reflection Papers. The papers should be expositional and critical. The expositional dimension of your paper should present and clarify the claim(s) made by the author(s) with which you are dealing and, especially, her/his arguments for that claim(s). The critical dimension of your paper should move beyond presenting the claims others have made to responding to those claims, by critically evaluating the validity of the arguments made for that claim. In the critical dimension of your essay you should be assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the claims you are considering, with an eye toward formulating what you believe is the most reasonable position to take onto your issue. What you should be working toward is 1) the formulation of your own position with respect to the issues you deal with in your paper and 2) a defense of that position on the basis of your critical assessment of the author's arguments for the claims s/he makes on that issue. Your own position should, in other words, emerge as an implication of your critical assessment of the author's work. It should not emerge from thin air without justification. The point of a critical essay is to convince other people of your position on a topic. And the only way you can do that is by showing how it responds to the strengths and weaknesses of other positions that have been adopted by building on their strengths and overcoming their weaknesses.

It is also worth nothing that you need not disagree with the author(s) you are considering in your essay. But even then you should not simply reproduce her/his work on an issue. There are always weaknesses to an author's work that need to be considered even if you are otherwise in complete agreement with an author's position. Conversely, if you disagree with your author there are always strengths to an author’s work that need to be considered and taken into account in your own contrasting position. The best papers will provide a balanced critical consideration of both the strengths and weaknesses of an author’s position.

Hints in Writing your Paper: An essay in philosophy is not that different from any other sort of essay, except you deal primarily with ideas and arguments rather than facts, characters, or plots. Rules which apply to writing any other essay apply here as well. For example,
1) When presenting your position, remember that no one is interested in what you think for its own sake. Your reader wants to know why we should accept your position as an implication of your evaluation of the position of your author. In other words, your essay should not be divided into two parts - 1) What the author believes and 2) What you believe - with no real connection between the two except, perhaps, that they both refer to the same issue. Your position should emerge as a reasoned response to the strengths and weaknesses of the claims and arguments of your author.

2) Document all references to your author's work with appropriate citations. Whenever you attribute a distinct claim or position to an author you should provide a citation to substantiate that reference. And citations should be specific, giving the specific page numbers in a text where the author’s elaboration of the position in question can be found. Brief quotations will also enhance your essay by allowing you to more accurately present your author's position on an issue. But your paper should be more than just a string of quotations. The essay should present your understanding (in your own words) of your author's positions, with quotations used only to illustrate and enhance the positions to which you are referring.

3) Make sure your writing style is clear. Don't introduce ideas without elaboration. Make sure your sentences make sense. Proofread your paper before handing it in.

Technical Specifications for your Paper: Your papers should be typewritten, double-spaced, using a standard sized font, allowing you to get 23 lines of text per page. Your margins are to be no more than 1.25 inches on the left and right, and 1 inch on the top and bottom (default settings for Microsoft Office 2003). A paper of 5 full pages will consist of 5 pages of the sort just specified. In addition, you are to place your name and title of the paper on a separate title page that is not counted in the length of the paper. You are to use endnotes for any substantial notes (beyond very brief bibliographical citations for quotations which may be in the body of the text) that are also not to be counted in the length of the paper. Citations may be of any form as long as they are clear enough to easily lead the reader to the source of the citation. You should refrain from using headers or footers unless you can use them and still get at least 23 lines of text per page.

Guidelines for Internet Research: Although research beyond what we have read is not required for any of your three reflection papers, you may want to do some additional research (and you are required to do so for the research paper). If you do research on the internet it is very important to remember that anyone can publish anything at all on the internet. As such, the most prudent attitude to take toward the documents you find there is to assume they are worthless unless you have good reason to believe otherwise. For this class, there are two types of acceptable literature to use in writing your papers that you may be able to find on the internet: 1) a document that is merely an electronic version of an article published in a scholarly publication such as an academic journal. In this case, you should provide a citation to the textual publication just as you would if you had found it in the library. If the web version does not provide page numbers which correspond with the original text enabling you to cite specific pages, you should find the original text in the library or through inter-library loan. 2) Documents that have been posted by someone with expertise in the topic of the document. Say, for example, you find an essay on a topic of interest that has been posted by a scholar teaching at a University. It should be a relatively easy matter to document the author’s position at her/his institution and, in this way, document her/his expertise in the matter. Any citation of an internet reference that is not an electronic duplication of an article which has already appeared in a scholarly publication should have a brief list of the author’s credentials, sufficient to document her/his expertise in the matter. It might look something like this: “Hines Ward, “Free Will, Determinism and Quantum Physics,” http://www.harvard.edu/~hward/freequantum.html. Ward is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University. This is a paper he presented at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, December, 2004.”

A Warning about the use of “Secondary Texts” Again, there are no additional readings beyond what we have already read for the course that you are required to do in order to write these reflection papers. But there are additional readings required for the research paper and you may decide to use additional readings for the reflection papers as well. In your use of additional readings, you should be careful in how you use “secondary texts.”
secondary text is any text which presents the claims and arguments of someone else, either with an eye toward helping us understand that author’s ideas better or as a prelude to a critical assessment of that author’s ideas. You should never, however, rely exclusively on what a secondary text says about someone’s ideas. You should always turn back to the author whose work is being discussed to verify that what the secondary text says is correct. In particular, you should never attribute a specific claim or argument to an author and then cite a secondary source as your only reference (though you may also want to cite a secondary author whose understanding of an argument or idea has helped you with the presentation of it you are making in your paper). Any ideas attributed to an author need to be documented with a reference to that author’s own work.

3) Research Paper Proposal: You will need to turn in a proposal for your research paper (see part 4 below) by the date specified on the calendar for “topics and assignments” above. It should be approximately 1 double-spaced typewritten page. The purpose of the proposal is twofold: 1) to give me a chance to give you some feedback on your ideas before you get substantially underway, and 2) to make sure you have some idea as to what you might want to do at least a couple of weeks before it is due.

I will need to see the following information in your paper proposal: 1) a statement of your thesis, 2) an overview of the argument you plan to make to support your thesis and 3) a bibliography of the literature you plan on using explaining how you plan on using it in your paper. Though the paper proposal will not be graded (that is beside the point, it’s the final paper that should be evaluated, not your initial ideas!) they are required. If you fail to turn one in or turn in an inadequate one I will deduct up to one letter grade from the grade assigned to your final paper.

4) Research Paper: You will need to write a research paper on some issue related to the themes examined in the course. It should be at least 8 full pages in length (see “technical specifications” above for what I mean by “full pages”). Calling it a “research” paper means it should be based not only in the readings we have undertaken and discussed in class, but also in additional readings we have not done for the course which enables you to substantially add to what we have already considered in class with respect to an issue. Though your paper does not need to be on a topic we have not discussed in class (though it should be on some issue or work of relevance to the issues we are considering this term) it should extend our consideration of any topic discussed in class substantially beyond what we were able to do in class with that topic. This is where your research is important. By finding additional readings of relevance to some issue examined in class you should be able to find different perspectives or questions to bring to bear to that issue.

The only real differences between this “research” paper and the “reflection” papers is 1) the research paper needs to be 8 rather than 5 pages in length, 2) the research paper needs to be based in additional readings beyond what you’ve already done in class, and 3) the research paper needs to substantially add to or extend our consideration of issues taken up in class. Beyond that, all of the comments made above concerning the reflection papers apply as well to the research paper.

You will also be required to present and discuss your paper in class on one of the days scheduled for Presentations of Papers at the end of the course. Your paper will be due at the time of your presentation. You will be required to revise your paper in the light of the questions raised during class discussion of it. Your revised paper will be due one week after your presentation.

Your paper will count toward 40% of your course grade with the quality of your presentation taken into account in that grade.

Course Grade: Your final course grade will be determined as follows: 20% for each reflection paper and 40% for your research paper.

I use the standard college grading scale with 90-100 for A, 80-89 for B, 70-79 for C, 60-69 for D and 0-59 for F. Pluses and minuses (as in B+, B-) are given in the following way: minuses for a score in the bottom 3 points for that grade (e.g., 80-82 = B-), an unqualified grade for a score in the middle 4 points for that grade (e.g., 83-86 =
B), pluses for a score in the top 3 points for that grade (e.g., 87-89 = B+).

**Turning in Assignments:** All assignments are to be turned in personally at the time it is due. Unless prior arrangements have been made I will not accept any assignments turned in by e-mail. If circumstances prevent you from turning in an assignment personally and e-mail is the only feasible way to do it, you must contact me ahead of time and seek permission to do so. If I approve, you are responsible for insuring that I have received it. You can verify my receipt of your assignment by looking for a reply from me informing you that I have received it. You should save this reply to verify my receipt of the assignment in case there is any question about it. If you do not receive such a reply, I did not receive it and it is your responsibility to determine what the problem is and rectify it. Anyone who has not successfully turned in an assignment and when informed of this exclaims, “But I e-mailed that to you!” will be immediately placed in stocks and publically humiliated for using the high tech version of “the dog ate my homework” excuse (seriously, if I claim I didn’t get it and you don’t have a copy of my e-mail verifying receipt, then the assignment was never turned in and you will not receive any credit for it).

**Late or Missed Assignments:** All work should be done by the time and date specified in class or on the syllabus. I will not give unpenalized extensions except in the case of illness or some sort of personal emergency. To inquire about an unpenalized extension for these sorts of circumstances, you should speak with me ahead of the time the work is due or, in the case of emergencies, as soon as possible. In the case of papers which are turned in late without an unpenalized extension, the grade will be penalized 10 points if it is turned in less than 1 day (to be precise, 24 hours) late, 10 more points if it is turned in more than 1 day but less than 2 days late, 10 more points if it is turned in more than 2 days but less than 3 days late, 10 more points if it is more than 3 days but less than 4 days late, 10 more points if it more than 4 days but less than 5 days late. A paper turned in 5 or more days late will receive a grade of zero. Late paper proposals will follow an analogous pattern. I will take one point off your grade for the corresponding paper for a proposal that is less than 1 day late, 2 points off for a proposal that is more than 1 day late, 24 hours late, but less than 2 days late, etc. A proposal turned in 5 or more days late will result in a penalty of 10 points. It is the student’s responsibility to make appropriate arrangements for turning in late papers. You should discuss your plans with me ASAP to make sure I approve of it. If you do not discuss your plans with me and, for instance, simply slip a late paper under the door of my office, I will count it as turned in on the date and time I find it in my office, not the date and time you turned it in.

**CONTACTING ME:** When I am not in my office, I can be contacted by e-mailing me at shendley@bsc.edu. I would not recommend calling my office and leaving a voice mail as I am very bad at remembering to check my voice mail.

Though you are always welcome to leave a message for me on voice mail or e-mail, this should not be used as a substitute for contacting me personally regarding any problems that may arise with meeting your course responsibilities. I will always need to discuss these sorts of problems with you, personally, as soon as possible.

**Honor Code:** The honor code applies to all work done in this course. A violation of the honor code on any work done for this class will result in a grade of F for the course.