

PHIL 282:

**FREE WILL
AND DETERMINISM**

Preliminaries

- **On the cards: fill out contact info and relevant background (if any). Make sure the registrar has the address at which you read email regularly, so coursemail will include you.**
- **We'd also like you to fill out a brief questionnaire, just to get your initial opinions, before you've been influenced by the course. You can always change your mind later!**
- **There are different versions of the questions, but the explanatory material is the same -- and can serve as a preview of the subject matter of the course.**

“Free will” questions

- **Universe A on the questionnaires illustrates the doctrine of *determinism*.**
 - **Popular debate about free will usually focuses on the question of whether determinism is *true*.**
 - **Determinism is assumed to be a threat to free will and moral responsibility, at least when the question is posed in the abstract (as in a philosophy class).**
- **But many philosophers dispute that assumption, arguing that determinism doesn't really conflict with free will. So the debate within philosophy focuses on a further question, about what's called *compatibilism*.**

Subject matter

- **This course will try to clarify the issues surrounding free will, in part by making distinctions like the one just outlined, between “the Determinist Question” and “the Compatibility Question” (in the terms used by the author of our text).**
- **Our emphasis will be on understanding the various different positions on free will, such as compatibilism, and the philosophic arguments for them, objections to them, and responses to objections.**
- **It’s a course in “analytic” philosophy, aimed at developing skills in logical analysis and argument, as well as introducing you to a particular area of contemporary debate.**
- **The course satisfies the general education requirement in humanities – though the topic is of particular interest to science majors.**

Readings

- **Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will***
an introductory survey of contemporary philosophers' approaches to free will vs. determinism by a leading philosopher defending his own position, libertarianism (which denies compatibilism and asserts free will – not to be confused with *political* libertarianism)
- **some further recommended articles**
essays on special topics, available on my website:
 - **Nichols and Knobe (the source of our questionnaires):**
experimental evidence that our intuitive views are influenced by emotions
 - **readings for more advanced (or intellectually adventurous) students, on my website or in Kane's anthology.**

Written assignments

■ **midterm and final exams:**

- **short answer or brief essay, explaining and/or assessing terms, views, and arguments discussed in class or in the readings**
- **taken in lecture, but with a study sheet distributed in advance**
- **The midterm counts 30%, the final 35%, of your grade**

■ **quizzes or one-page essays:**

- **15-20 minutes in section, sometimes with no advance warning, but with books and notes allowed**
- **meant to give you regular practice in analysis of arguments, etc., as well as testing comprehension of the material**
- **The four best count 5% each, together 20% of your grade.**

Other policies

- **remaining 15% of grade for class participation**
 - **at a minimum, requires regular attendance in lectures and sections**
 - **may include some further quizzes in lecture (if attendance lags)**
 - **quality of oral participation counts too**
- **ban on use of electronic equipment (except for disabilities) or other potentially distracting behavior; slides will be posted weekly**
- **more detail on policies, along with course materials, available on my website: click on “courses” at the address on the syllabus.**

First assignment

- **For Thursday, read Kane, ch. 1 (a fairly lightweight introduction to the subject)**
- **To get familiar with my website (which I use instead of Canvas), access the supplementary reading by Nichols and Knobe.**
 - **from my homepage: Click on “courses” then “course materials,” then “supplementary readings.” (There’s also a link to “course materials” on the online syllabus.)**
 - **username and password = “Greenspan” (case-sensitive)**

What to expect

- **a complicated subject: no course prerequisites, so we'll go slowly through a single text – accessible, at least if you reach, but not “cut-and-dried”**
- **emphasis on detailed arguments back and forth among proponents of competing positions in an ongoing debate**
 - **careful criticism, rather than freewheeling speculation (though some of the cases discussed will be imaginative)**
 - **best qualification for the course = fascination with arguments, even without a fully satisfying conclusion**
- **close reading needed, to sort out the main positions – and objections to them, and responses to objections**

Our expectations

- **keeping up with the schedule of readings: a first reading *before* the lecture, if at all possible; rereading later, as needed**
- **clear explanation, good reasoning on writing assignments**
- **regular attendance and involvement in discussion**
 - **occasional questions in lecture: on-the-point and addressed to everyone, without unfamiliar terminology**
 - **more extended discussion and debate in sections**
- **coping with difficulties or dissatisfaction in a productive fashion**

Different notions of determinism

- Kane contrasts free will with various forms of determination of action besides the one (listed first) that contemporary philosophers usually mean by “determinism”:
 - (causal) determinism: complete explanation of *all* events, including actions, by prior conditions plus the laws of nature
 - predestination: God’s control over everything that will happen, including what we do (as discussed in ch. 13)
 - constraining causes: special cases of interference with normal human abilities (e.g. paralysis, phobias, etc.)
 - fatalism: fixed outcomes, no matter what we decide to do, in at least some cases
- Though Kane lumps these together in his first chapter, and he has something to say about all of them, he goes on to focus mainly on the issue raised by modern science.