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**FREEDOM OF THE WILL**

The problem of free will is one of the most vexing philosophical problems. On the one hand, human agents seem to be free to choose among different courses of action. On the other hand, there is strong evidence that a combination of factors such as upbringing, unconscious desires, social conditions, and neural processes determines our choices. Both of these thoughts are compelling. Yet it seems that they cannot both be true. What are we to conclude? Is there no free will? Or do these factors not fully determine our choices? Is there, perhaps, a middle ground, a kind of determination that leaves room for freedom? In this course, we will approach these questions by asking what we mean when we say that we are free. This, it turns out, is a lot harder than it seems. Accordingly, our focus will be on different accounts of human freedom which have been offered by philosophers both past and present.

In the first part of the course we will consider the view that our actions are free only if they are not subject to determination by social, biological, or physical factors. We will begin with a classic articulation of this position due to Kant and then turn to a more recent elaboration of it.

In the second and third part of the course we will consider the opposing view, according to which freedom is compatible with determination. To be free, on this view, is to be determined in the right way. We begin, in Part Two, with the classic formulation of this position (going back to Hume, and elaborated by A.J. Ayer). After considering an important objection, we look at an improved version of the position in Part Three. Central to this version is the idea that our choices are free when they are authentic, where this means that we can identify with them, that they reflect who we really are. We will examine the notion of a person's identity that is at work here and ask how it is related to the capacity for critical reflection. This will lead us to examine the role of values, including moral values, in the constitution of identity.

In the final part of the course, we will think about the relation between science and ordinary life. We will discuss the suggestion that scientific discoveries cannot possibly show that we are not free, because the perspective of science and the perspective we occupy as agents are irreducibly different, but equally legitimate.

Throughout the course we will confront the philosophical theories we consider with concrete examples of human agents in their social and natural environments. For this purpose, we will read literary works by Denis Diderot, Theodore Dreiser, B.F. Skinner, and Richard Wright.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

Gary Watson (ed.), *Free Will*  
Richard Wright, *Native Son*

Denis Diderot, *Jacques the Fatalist*  
B. F. Skinner, *Walden Two*

The remaining readings are available through e-reserve

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Class Participation:** Regular attendance and participation in class discussion is required for all students who wish to take the course for credit. Participation in Chalk discussion forums is not mandatory, but may earn you extra credit. Participation accounts for 15% of the final grade.
2. **Discussion Question:** Before each class, you must submit a question about the reading assigned for that class to the Chalk discussion board. The question can be no longer than one paragraph and must be submitted at least three hours before the class meets. This accounts for 15% of the final grade.
3. **Class Summary:** Each week two students will collaborate on writing a summary of the discussions we had during that week's class meetings. The summary will be distributed to the class through Chalk at the end of the week. This accounts for 15% of the final grade.
4. **Midterm Exam:** There will be a take-home midterm exam, which will be due in fifth week. The midterm accounts for 15% of the final grade.
5. **Final Paper:** Students must write a final paper (max. 2500 words), which is due in 11<sup>th</sup> week and accounts for 40% of the final grade. By Tuesday of 8<sup>th</sup> week students must submit a paper topic (max. one page). Students are also encouraged to discuss their paper topics with me.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Class	Topic	Readings	Comment
1	Introduction	<i>To be distributed in class:</i> Leonie Welberg, "Neuroimaging: Free will?"	According to the article, neuroscience shows that our decisions are pre-determined by our brains.

### Part I: Incompatibilism

2	The incompatibilist conception of freedom	Immanuel Kant, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> , Third Antinomy (selections)	On Kant's view all events in nature are causally determined, but free action is not. Therefore, if there is free action, agents cannot be part of
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			nature.
3	Deterministic laws of nature	Peter van Inwagen, "The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism"	van Inwagen explains what it might mean for events in nature to be causally determined.
4	Case Study I	Denis Diderot, <i>Jacques the Fatalist</i>	Jacques is an incompatibilist. He claims that all his actions are pre-determined. But does he live according to his conviction?

### Part II: Classic Compatibilism

5	The classic compatibilist conception of freedom	David Hume, "Of liberty and necessity" A. J. Ayer, "Freedom and Necessity"	Hume and Ayer deny that determinism is a threat to freedom. They argue that Kant and van Inwagen have the wrong definition of freedom.
6	Compatibilist freedom evaluated: insights and problems	Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork</i> (selections) Roderick Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self"	Kant and Chisholm both argue that the notion of freedom advocated by Hume and Ayer is not worth having. But there is an insight in compatibilism: free actions must express a person's character
7	Making the compatibilist insight work	Chisholm continued	Chisholm argues that the compatibilist insight requires a re-thinking of our notion of causation
8	Case Study II	B. F. Skinner, <i>Walden Two</i>	Skinner's novel puts Hume's notion of freedom into practice. He envisions a utopian community in which people are free and happy because they have been conditioned in the right ways.

### Part III: New Compatibilism

9	Freedom as Identification I	Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"	Frankfurt proposes a different notion of freedom: the will is free if the agent can stand back from her motivations and decide which of them she wants to act on.
10	Freedom as Identification II	Harry Frankfurt, "Identification and Wholeheartedness"	Frankfurt explains what he means by saying that the free agent can decide how she wants to be motivated. His core idea is the notion of identification.
11	Case Study III	Theodore Dreiser, "Free"	Dreiser's protagonist laments that he was never able to do what he really wanted. Does Frankfurt's notion of identification help us understand his

			case? Or is it inadequate?
12	Reflective distance and rational evaluation	Gary Watson, "Free Agency"	Watson criticizes Frankfurt for neglecting the evaluative dimension of the capacity for standing back from one's motivations.
13	Case Study IV	Richard Wright, <i>Native Son</i>	Wright's protagonist seems to meet Watson's criteria for free will. But is he really free? And if not, what does this tell us about compatibilism a la Frankfurt and Watson?
14	Freedom and Morality	Susan Wolf, "Insanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility"	Wolf argues that Watson's criticism of Frankfurt does not go deep enough. She claims that freedom is connected to morality: an agent who is morally incompetent can't be free.
15	Case Study V	"Icy Killer's Life Steeped in Violence" <i>LA Times</i> , May 16, 1982	Wolf's claims about moral competence compared with an actual criminal case.

#### Part IV: Theoretical Reason vs. Practical Reason

16	Science and ordinary life	Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment"	Strawson shifts the debate to another level: Even if science and philosophy show that there is no freedom, what consequences does this really have? Strawson's answer is: None. It cannot have any impact on our lives and our image of ourselves as free.
17	Moral emotions and freedom	Strawson continued	Strawson's argument rests on the role of certain types of emotions in our lives. What is the connection between these and the problem of freedom? Can they bear the argumentative weight Strawson assigns to them?
18	Practical reason	Hilary Bok, "Freedom and Practical Reason"	Bok argues that determinism is no threat to freedom because when we act we occupy a distinctly practical standpoint, which presupposes freedom for its very possibility.
19	Final discussion	No reading	