

Philosophy 350: Freedom and Responsibility

Mount Holyoke College | Spring 2017 | Wednesdays 1:30-4:20 in Skinner 212

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office hours. M 12:30-2:30 + by appointment

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About the course. Is free will possible if all our actions are causally determined? Might we be justified in blaming, praising, rewarding, or punishing people even if their actions are not free? Abstract metaphysical questions about freedom intersect in important ways with everyday problems in our relationships with others and our attitudes about moral ignorance, addiction, and madness. This course will examine these issues side by side in the hope of improving our understanding of freedom and responsibility.

Tentative schedule. Please do the readings in the order in which they are listed. All readings are available on Moodle, as PDFs. You will need a hard copy in class, however, so please print them.

Date	Reading
1/23	None, but some relevant background: Nagel, Thomas (1979) "Moral Luck" Frankfurt, Harry (1969) "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"
1/30	The syllabus for this class. All of it. Really. Wolf, Susan (1988) "Sanity and the metaphysics of responsibility" Wolf, Susan (1980) "Asymmetrical Freedom"
2/6	Calhoun, Cheshire (1989) "Responsibility and Reproach"
2/13	Strawson, P. F. (1962) "Freedom and Resentment" (only sections 3-4) Watson, Gary (2004) "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil: Variations on a Strawsonian Theme"
2/20	Fine, Cordelia and Jeanette Kennett (2004) "Mental impairment, moral understanding and criminal responsibility: Psychopathy and the purposes of punishment" Vargas, Manuel (2009) "Are Psychopathic Serial Killers Evil? Are they Blameworthy...?"
2/27	Pickard, Hanna (2015) "Psychopathology and the Ability to Do Otherwise" Morse, Stephen (2018) "Compelled or Cajoled? The Criminal Responsibility of Opioid Addicts"
3/6	Pickard, Hanna (2014) "Responsibility without blame: therapy, philosophy, law" Pickard, Hanna (2013) "Responsibility without Blame: Philosophical Reflections on Clinical Practice"
3/20	Tannenbaum, Julie (ms) "Responsibility without wrongdoing or blame"
3/27	Austin, J.L. (1956) "A Plea for Excuses"
4/3	Sliwa, Paulina, (ms.) "The Power of Excuses"
4/10	Presentations
4/17	Presentations
4/24	Catch up or TBD

Requirements.

- Presentations: 10%
- Reading Responses: 15%
- First Paper: 30%
- Second Paper: 45%

Reading Responses.

- **What.** Answer reading questions (posted on Moodle). This is a brief assignment, so be direct — answer the question(s) and cite any source. Don't include introductory material, but do clearly define any jargon either in your own words or with your own examples. Most people's (not just students'!) writing is too wordy—once you are sure you've answered the question completely and defined/explained anything technical, you should err on the side of fewer rather than more words.

Note. Your target audience for all writing in this class is an intelligent tween who is unfamiliar with the material. Your writing needs to be clear to *her*, not me or to your classmates.

- **When/how.** Submit the Weekly Writing assignments on Moodle as PDFs by 8 pm the night before class.
Note. All writing should be standard formatting (12 pt font, 1" margins, double spaced).
- **Feedback.** I'll mark these pass/fail within a week. If the submission is excellent, I will note that so you can see what earns that distinction. Otherwise, my feedback here will focus on how to improve. I won't always comment on these. I will provide more feedback toward the beginning of the semester, when you're getting the hang of things, than at the end. You are always welcome to come to my office hours to discuss an assignment—whether or not I've commented on it.
- **Why.** To guide you through the reading, help you prepare for class discussion, and practice writing and arguing.
- **Credit.** These are low-stakes assignments meant to help you learn. So, there is a lower bar to pass them. (Of course, the harder you work on them the more you'll learn!) To pass, all you need to do is write in clear, grammatical English, answer all parts of the question, don't bullshit,¹ and don't get it completely wrong. In other words, put in a good-faith effort, but don't worry if you haven't completely figured out the text. I don't expect that at this stage.

Presentations.

- **What.** In preparation for the final paper, you will prepare a short presentation on an argument we've discussed in class or that you found in a related reading (if the latter, run it by me first). Presentations will be followed by a brief discussion with questions and suggestions from the class. You should prepare a handout for the class (max one page, double-sided, double-spaced including references). Your handout and presentation should include the following:
 1. The argument you will engage with in premise conclusion form.
 2. The premise you find most suspicious.
 3. A brief explanation of why we might want to reject it.

¹ I mean 'bullshit' here in its ordinary sense, but especially in as Frankfurt defines it in "On Bullshit".

- 4. An anticipation how someone might defend it against your suspicions or rejection.
- **When/how.** You'll submit a PDF of a handout on Moodle before your presentation and bring hard copies to class. Presentations will be in the last few weeks of the semester.
- **Feedback.** Substantive feedback on the content of your presentation will happen in class and will come from me and from your classmates.
- **Why.** To share our ideas but also to help you prepare for the final paper.
- **Credit.** I will provide some guidelines and further instructions about expectations for this assignment as it approaches.

Papers.

- **What.** You'll present and critically analyze an argument from the readings. You'll reconstruct it, explain it, and raise *one* objection to *one* premise. You'll consider a reply and then provide a verdict. I'll provide further instructions as well as a sample essay closer to the due date.
 - Important: You will chose which argument to work on, but you must get approval from me before you begin. ***For the first paper, plan on coming to my office hours at least two weeks before the paper is due. For the second, plan to come at least two weeks before your presentation.***
- **When/how.** Submit papers to Moodle as PDFs.
- **Feedback.** I will return paper 1 with comments within two weeks. I don't automatically provide comments on final papers, but am happy to do so for those who want them.
- **Why.** To put together and demonstrate all the skills and knowledge you've acquired.
- **Credit.** Papers are evaluated along three dimensions: clarity, accuracy, and critical thought. I will provide a rubric with more details.

Formatting guidelines.

Presenting your assignments in a professional manner is important. It demonstrates respect for yourself and for your audience. Don't waste your reader's time with easy to fix mistakes, like typos, and don't distract them with crazy fonts or weird formatting. Here's what I'll expect:

- Use a standard font in a standard size and cite your sources using the Chicago Parenthetical style. The Chicago Manual of Style is free online and they provide a quick summary of parenthetical ("author-date") format here: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html
- Papers should be uploaded to Moodle as PDFs. (Why PDFs? Because I can't reliably open other kinds of files on my computer. PDFs are also more professional: they allow you to control how your work looks to your audience. Don't know how to convert a file to PDF? Ask a friend, Google, or the help desk.)
- Name the file as follows: assignment_MMDDYY.pdf
- **Very important:** I use Moodle's anonymous-grading option, so please ***do not put your name anywhere in or on your assignment.***

How to approach the readings. Some of the readings we will look at are short, but all are tricky. Give yourself time to digest them. I recommend a three step approach. **First**, skim the article. Note where the thesis and major argument(s) are. Don't worry too much about understanding while you're skimming. You're just trying to get the lay of the land. (Also, you will absorb more than you realize.) **Second**, carefully read each piece *before* we discuss it in class. Use the reading

questions to help focus your attention. Again, note where the action is: mark arguments, note their premises and conclusions. Along the way, jot down questions and confusions so you can raise them during our discussion. **Third**, skim the reading again after we've discussed it. It should be much easier to understand at this point. Edit your notes: correct any misunderstandings and jot down any new thoughts you have. (These notes will come in handy for later assignments.) If you're still unclear about something, get help: talk with classmates, come by my office hours, etc. For further reading help, take a look at the Concepción handout on Moodle.

Participation. Philosophy is a communal activity, and you've chosen to join our community this semester. Don't talk just for the sake of talking, but also don't wait for brilliance or insight to hit you before raising your hand. Much of doing philosophy is about asking simple, clarificatory questions. I'll expect you to do at least that much regularly. As a rule of thumb, every student should, at least, ask one question during class. (This question can be one of the ones you jotted down during your reading.) Shy? Nervous? Me too! My heart still races sometimes when I raise my hand at a professional gathering or talk. Participation *is* more difficult for some of us than others. But writing papers, understanding the readings—these too are more difficult for some of us than others. We all have our challenges and strengths. All of these are skills we must work on. If you have trouble speaking in class, please see me and we will work on it together—just as we would on any other aspect of the class that you find difficult.

Attendance. You are expected to attend every class. That's where the action happens, and where I give away all the answers. (Seriously. You can't succeed in this class without showing up.) If you're sick and contagious or not well enough to come in, of course, stay home. When you *do* miss a class, for any reason, get in touch with your classmates, check Moodle for handouts, and make sure you get caught up. *After* you've done all that, come see me in office hours with questions and comments on the readings.

Late policy. Three principles guide my late policy.

1. Work should be assessed on its quality and on whether it demonstrates learning.
2. Each assignment has a purpose; that purpose can only be fulfilled within a certain timeframe.
3. Deadlines allow us to organize our time and learning and to meet our goals.

Thus, late Daily Writing assignments will not be accepted for credit. Besides writing practice, these assignments fulfill three goals: (1) for you to practice working through and understanding the readings on your own, (2) to prepare you for class discussion, and (3) for you to show me where you're struggling before we begin discussions. These goals aren't met if you don't complete the assignment on time. (If you still want the learning, I'll happily look at a late assignment. But it won't get credit.)

Late *papers* will be accepted up until the day that we discuss them together in class (this day won't be announced, and will vary, but it will typically be within a week). After that, they will not be accepted for credit. However, you'll still want to get papers in by the due date otherwise I cannot guarantee you comments. This is not about punishing you for getting in late work. It's about enabling me to schedule my time.

Getting your assignments in on time allows us to stay together as a class—to discuss assignments after everyone has finished and long before the next assignment is due (so you have time to reflect and improve). We all have so many demands on our time, and we need to be able to plan ahead. If people complete assignments late, they fall behind, cannot contribute to class discussions, and can hold us back during assignment based in class activities. Worse yet, they hurt their own learning.

Meeting deadlines is thus an opportunity to show respect: respect for yourself, your time, and your learning; respect for your classmates' time and learning; and respect for my time and my teaching. That said, I won't be offended or assume you're disrespectful if you don't manage to do that. Things happen; we can't always do what is best. First and foremost, I'm here to help. So, don't hesitate to talk to me.

A note about communication. Important announcements and assignments will be communicated to you via email or in class. It is your responsibility to make sure you are up to date with the latest news. So check your email daily and don't miss class. If you do miss class, check with your classmates. Gather some names and emails here, for convenience:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Of course, you are always welcome to email me with any questions. But please keep in mind that there are a lot more of you than there are of me and modern digital communication demands are crazy-making. To stay sane:

- I don't check my email constantly, and not at all in the evenings or on weekends.
- I respond as promptly as I can, but not always on the same day.
- I do not answer questions that are clearly answered by the syllabus or assignment instructions. (I delete those emails.) Of course, after you've carefully examined the assignment *and* checked with your classmates, you shouldn't hesitate to ask me to clarify anything. These rules are here so that I can manage my time and respond promptly to urgent questions that need to be addressed.

Academic Honesty. Upon entering Mount Holyoke College, you each signed a pledge to uphold the honor code. It is your responsibility "to read *A Guide to the Uses and Acknowledgment of Sources* and the Student Handbook, which define the standards adopted by the College; to observe the established procedures in preparing assignments and writing papers and examinations, and to submit as [your] own only that work that [you have] originated."² I expect you will all honor the pledge you signed. Therefore, **everything you turn in should be your own work and in your own words.** If your discussions with friends, dogs, parents, etc., were helpful, cite them. Credit all sources appropriately, even (especially) Wikipedia and anything from your Googling bounty.

Important. It is a requirement of this class that you take the plagiarism tutorial (please do it again even if you've already done it): <https://sites.google.com/a/mtholyoke.edu/proper-use-of-sources->

² https://www.mtholyoke.edu/deanofstudents/student_handbook

[mhc/home/](#). Do it before our next class and email me to let me know you have completed it. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty and to avoid it. Accidental plagiarism should not be possible. If in doubt, cite, cite, cite.

Outside sources. You *do not* need to read any additional material beyond the assigned reading—and I don't encourage it. If you think, it might be helpful to read one or two additional articles connected to your topic—especially if you're having trouble understanding it, I am happy to give you additional reading suggestions. You may also find searching the following sources helpful: [philpapers.org](#), [plato.stanford.edu](#), and [mtholyoke.edu/lits](#). Do not blindly rely on what you Google, however, and remember to *always* cite your sources—whatever they are (parents, friends, dogs, Wikis,...).

Assistance. Besides myself, there are many resources to help you succeed in this class.

- * You should go to the SAW center for help on your assignments. Well-trained peers are there to look over your drafts, help you plan your arguments, etc. There are drop-in hours, and you may go as many times as you want. This is a great resource. Use it.³
- * There may be a SAW mentor in this course. If there is, *go to them*. They are there to read drafts, help you organize your thoughts, and so forth.
- * In order to receive reasonable accommodations for a disability, you must register with the Office of AccessAbility Services (<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/accessability>). This office will provide a letter describing the appropriate accommodations. Once you have this letter, set up an appointment with me and we will discuss how to accommodate you.
- * If there is anything I can do to help you learn, don't hesitate to get in touch—even if you don't have an official accommodation.

Electronics. Please silence all devices and store them in your bag during class. This includes phones and laptops. The empirical evidence is pretty clear that laptops in the classroom impede learning—sometimes they impede the learning of those using them, other times they impede the learning of the rest of the class. Laptops are super useful for taking detailed, transcript-like notes, but I don't want you doing that in this class. I want you to join in the discussion, not keep a written record of everything that is said. I'll often provide handouts that summarize the main points, and you will have your print outs of and notes on the readings in front of you. This, and some extra paper is all you need. If you're waiting for a very important phone call, or there is some other urgent situation, please let me know. Also, *if you believe that your learning will suffer if you do not have access to certain technology, please let me know*—whether this is because you have an official accommodation from AccessAbility Services, or because you think you learn better a certain way. Be in touch either way.

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³ <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/saw/peer/center>

