

# Moral Responsibility and Free Will

Spring 2016

UCLA Extension  
Philosophy XL 154B  
Instructor: Jonathan Gingerich

## Meeting Times, Type, and Location

This course will be taught online. A video lecture will be posted on the course website each Monday. Students will participate on the discussion board on the course website every week.

## Contact Information

**Email:** [jgingerich@humnet.ucla.edu](mailto:jgingerich@humnet.ucla.edu) (You can also contact me using Canvas Conversations, which is the preferred means of contacting me about this course.)

**Office Location:** TBA

**Office Hours:** I will hold two hours of video office hours on the course website each week. I'll conduct a poll when class begins to figure out a time that is convenient for as many students as possible.

**Contacting Me:** On weekdays I'll typically respond to Canvas Conversation messages, emails, and questions posted on the discussion boards within 24 hours unless I'm traveling or there are other extenuating circumstances, in which case I'll answer within 48 hours at most. On weekends, I may take longer to respond. I'm also available for videoconferencing through Canvas by appointment, and I'm available by appointment to meet face to face with students who are in Los Angeles.

## Course Description

This course explores basic questions about moral responsibility and free will. Are we free to choose what we do or are our actions determined by God, physics, genetics, or our social environment? If we are free, in what sense are we free? Does answering the question of whether or not we can freely choose what to do bear on the issue of whether we are morally responsible for the actions that we perform? Are we responsible for doing things that, in some sense, we can't help but to do? Can we legitimately punish criminals whose crimes appear to be the result of their social background, genetics, or basic psychology? Finally, we will consider questions about free will that extend beyond moral responsibility: what is creativity? Does the capacity for creativity require special causal powers that compatibilist theories of free will cannot accommodate?

There are no prerequisites for this class, but it is an upper-division philosophy class that will include difficult philosophical reading.

## Learning Objectives

During the course, students will:

- Summarize and evaluate complex philosophical arguments
- Ask insightful questions about difficult philosophical texts
- Write clear and careful philosophy essays
- Revise their own philosophical writing
- Provide constructive criticism on the philosophical writing of other students
- Assemble philosophical arguments and anticipate objections to them
- Debate controversial philosophical topics with people who have different views

## Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, an effective learner should be able to:

- Write clear and persuasive philosophical essays
- Appreciate the pleasure of reading dense philosophical texts
- Describe libertarian, determinist, and compatibilist views of free will
- Argue for and against the view that people can be responsible for actions even if they “couldn’t have done otherwise”
- Apply philosophical accounts of free will to debates about the legitimacy of criminal punishment Discuss the relationship between human nature and freedom

## Materials

Gary Watson, ed., *Free Will*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), ISBN 019925494X (Note: You must have the 2nd Edition, as it contains very different materials from the 1st Edition)

Course Reader (available from the UCLA Store) (Note: I anticipate that the course reader will be available in both a print an electronic form; you need only purchase it in one form or the other.)

Please do the reading at least once before the lecture at which it will be discussed. Most of the readings are complex, and you will find it helpful to read the material at least twice. If you’re having trouble with the reading, please talk with me about strategies for approaching this material.

## Evaluation

Course requirements include doing the assigned reading and watching the recorded lecture each week, submitting homework assignments and participating on the course discussion board every week, a short paper (4-5 pages), and a final paper (6-8 pages). Each of these assignments are discussed in greater detail below.

You will receive a letter grade in each of the following categories, from which your course grade will be calculated using the weightings below:

- 30%: Weekly homework assignments due every Thursday by 11:59 PM
- 10%: Replies to at least two other homework assignments due every Sunday by 11:59 PM
- 20%: Short paper (4-5 pages) due Friday of week 5 by 5:00 PM
- 5%: Rough draft of final paper (6-8 pages) due Friday of week 9 by 5:00 PM
- 35%: Final paper (6-8 pages) due Monday of week 12 by 5:00 PM

Extra credit may be given for thoughtful (not necessarily frequent) contributions in office hours or for participation on the discussion board that goes above and beyond that required by the homework assignments.

Your grades will be available on the course website as assignments are completed.

### Homework and Discussion Board Participation

A homework assignment will be due on the discussion board **each Thursday night by 11:59 PM**.

You should substantively and thoughtfully reply to at least two other student's discussion board postings by **each Sunday night by 11:59 PM**.

For week 12, there will not be a homework assignment.

Each week, I will grade your homework assignment and discussion board participation on a scale of distinguished/proficient/basic/unsatisfactory. (I'll use the "Discussion Rubric" posted on the course website under "Resources" to assess your postings and participation.)

If you receive a "proficient" grade for your homework assignment and participation each week, you will receive a B+ for the homework and participation portions of your grade. "Distinguished" grades will bring your grade up from a B+; "basic" and "unsatisfactory" grades and missed assignments will bring it down.

Extensions for weekly homework assignments will only be granted in exceptional circumstances because these assignments provide the basis for class discussion on the discussion board each week. You may miss up to *two* homework assignment without penalty, and if you complete all of the homework assignments, I will drop your two lowest scores when calculating your grade.

### Papers

This course requires a short paper (4-5 pages) and a longer final paper (6-8 pages).

The short paper is due **Friday of week 5 by 5 PM**.

A rough draft of the final paper is due on **Friday of week 9 by 5 PM**.

You will revise your final paper in light of the comments that I give you on your rough draft, and the final draft of the final paper is due on **Monday of week 12 by 5 PM**.

Paper topics will be posted on the course website at least a week before each paper is due, and papers will be assessed using the "Grading Rubric for Papers" posted on the course website under "Resources"

It is important to meet the deadlines for the short paper and for both drafts of the final paper. If you think that the deadlines for these assignments will pose any problem for you, you should contact me *at least 48 hours in advance* so we can discuss an alternative.

## Schedule

Date	Lecture Topic	Readings	Quizzes/Exams and Assignment Due Dates
Week 1	Introduction	Materials on Jared Lee Loughner, James E. Holmes, and Anders Breivik [course reader] Robin D.G. Kelley, <i>Freedom Dreams</i> , ch. 1 [course reader]	Wednesday: Post brief bio on website Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 2	Freedom and explanation	Roderick Chisholm, "Human Freedom and the Self" [Watson 26-37]	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 3	Freedom and explanation (cont.)	Galen Strawson, "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility" [Watson 212-228]	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 4	Alternate Possibilities	Harry G. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" [Watson 167-176]	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 5	Willing and Acting	Rogers Albritton, "Freedom of Will and Freedom of Action" [Watson 408-423]	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. <b>Friday: Short paper due by 5:00 PM</b> Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 6	Willing and acting (cont.)	Calvin Normore, "Freedom, Contingency, and Rational Power" [course reader]	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due

Week 7	The Intuitive Moral Importance of Alternate Possibilities	P.F. Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment" [Watson 72-93]	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 8	The Intuitive Moral Importance of Alternate Possibilities (cont.)	Thomas Nagel, "Freedom" [Watson 229-256]	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 9	Conditions of Moral Responsibility	Susan Wolf, "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility" [Watson 372-387]	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. <b>Friday: Rough draft of final paper due by 5:00 pm</b> Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 10	Moral Responsibility and Punishment	Materials on Criminal Law and Punishment, Part I [course reader]	Comments on rough drafts returned by 5:00 pm on Wednesday Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 11	Moral Responsibility and Punishment (cont.)	Materials on Criminal Law and Punishment, Part II [course reader]	Thursday: Homework due on discussion board. Sunday: Substantive replies to at least two other students on discussion board due
Week 12	Free Will Beyond Moral Responsibility: Novelty and Creativity	Maria Kronfeldner, "Creativity Naturalized" [course reader]	<b>Monday: Final paper due by 5:00 PM</b>