

PHIL 137: Philosophy of Action, Winter 2011
Instructor: Eric Campbell
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MWF Solis 109 12 – 1
Office Hours: W 1- 3 Roma Café

SYLLABUS

Requirements

- Short paper (2 - 3 pages) (15%) Due: 1/27
- Midterm exam (20%) Date: 2/10
- Final Paper (7 - 9 pages) (40%) Due: 3/21 at 11:30 a.m.
- Final Exam (25%) Date: 3/21 at 11:30 a.m.
- Final Paper Proposal (1 – 2 pages) Due: 3/9 via email.

You will notice that the final paper is due on the same day as the final exam. There are two primary sources of feedback I want you to make use of in your final papers. The first is the feedback you get on your short papers. The second is from my response to your **proposal**. You will notice above that the proposal is a requirement, though it is not graded. That means that I won't accept your final paper unless you have given me a proposal. I want to be able to respond to your proposals in time for you to use the feedback in your papers, so I want you to give them to me by the 9th (it will probably take me a few days to get back to all of you, and I also want you to be able to talk to me about my responses in office hours). Proposals are to include a thesis and a general outline of how you plan to argue for it. We will talk more about this when the time approaches.

Course Description

In this course we will focus on three related topics. The first begins with challenges to our commonsense idea that we at least sometimes act freely in a way that can ground or justify being held morally responsible. Then we'll examine a number of attempts to overcome these challenges, that is, to show that we are and/or can be morally responsible for at least some of our actions. Finally, we'll look at an attempt to use empirical moral psychology to inform our theorizing about moral responsibility. Our next topic deals with the relationships between action, agency and motivation. We begin with the causal theory of action, which holds that all actions are caused (at least in part) by agents' desires and/or intentions. As plausible as this sounds, in spelling out these views, it has proven difficult to retain a picture of 'full-blooded' agency, wherein an agent is the one acting, as opposed to various events taking place within an agent, resulting in actions that might be alienated from or at least not proceed from our agency as we (loosely) understand it. We will look closely at the relationship between motivation and agency, specifically whether our actions always ultimately proceed from nonrational desires or whether 'pure practical reason' can motivate us to act. Finally, we will explore the nature of and relationships between rationality and the will (or willpower). 'Weakness of will'—understood as acting contrary to one's best judgment—has traditionally been thought of as the paradigmatic form of practical irrationality. However, both this claim and the traditional conception of weakness of will itself have recently been powerfully criticized. We will take a look at an influential, empirically-driven conception of willpower, as well as philosophical criticisms and employments thereof, in order to gain traction on the nature of both weakness and strength of will and their relationships to practical rationality. We will finish by examining how our answers

to these general questions might inform and perhaps be informed by our understanding of whether and in what ways or contexts people should be held (criminally and/or otherwise) responsible for behavior that leads to and/or stems from various addictions.

Academic Integrity

UCSD policy: <http://senate.ucsd.edu/manual/appendices/app2.htm>. You'll have to turn your papers into turnitin.com. Further information on how to do so will be forthcoming.

GoogleGroup

Here is the googlegroup for the course: <http://groups.google.com/group/phil137winter2012>. You can email me anytime, but our primary means of communication will be on the group. **All students must immediately sign up for the group** (you don't need a gmail account). Just go to the site, request to be added, and I will add you. Make sure you elect to receive email updates from the group at least daily (this does not mean that you will get an email at least once a day from the group, just that you won't miss it when a message is sent to the group). I reserve the right to make important announcements to the group, including adding and/or changing readings or the midterm date. If you miss these announcements, it is on you, so sign up! I will also post any lecture notes there. Finally, you are encouraged to discuss course material and ask questions to me and/or one another on the group. Consider sharing interesting (and relevant) news, information, or websites you run across.

Miscellaneous

Laptops are not allowed in class. Seriously. I know it's lame for those of you who would really only take notes on them if I allowed them, but experience has shown that no matter how much I insist that laptops are only to be used for note-taking, people cannot (or do not) resist using them in naughty ways, and this distracts other students as well. Also, I think it's very easy to get too focused on taking notes anyway. I want you to come to class having done the readings and ready to listen, think about what I'm saying and ask questions. You should take notes when reading, and I am perfectly happy for you to take notes when I'm talking, but what is most important in lecture is that you're paying attention and *thinking*. The notes you take should be limited to main ideas and/or things not in the readings. It should take only a few minutes to transfer them to your computers after class (I will also post lecture notes, but not necessarily for every lecture, and not necessarily in great detail). Also, **no texting or any electronic gadgetry whatever**. If you expect to receive a vitally important message while in class, sit in the back and leave the class to take the call or message. Nobody's perfect; I'll give you a friendly reminder if you forget. The second time, I will ask you to withdraw from the class.

I am not taking a grade for **attendance**, but it is nevertheless required. For one thing, unless you are very talented and experienced and studious, you will do quite badly if you don't come to lecture. Lectures are not just me telling you what is in the readings. I will be saying lots of things in lecture that are not in the readings, making connections between readings, criticisms thereof, etc. I will expect you to know about these things. Also, I will take quite different stances toward someone who is having trouble in the class despite showing up to class regularly and giving evidence of having done the readings, vs. someone who I barely recognize when they come to me after the midterm or paper, gnashing their teeth.

If you require special accommodations of any sort, please let me know on the first day of class.

Readings

Since googlegroups no longer hosts large documents, readings will be on the course website: <https://sites.google.com/site/philactionucsdwinter2012>

I will be uploading articles and chapters from books to the website. Below, I list required readings first, then sometimes add recommended readings. Some articles are from *A Companion to the Philosophy of Action*, edited by Tim O'Connor and Constantine Sandis. I label these with '(C)'. These readings are short and very helpful. Where these are recommended, they are strongly recommended (otherwise they are required).

Part 1: Freedom and Responsibility

Week 1:

M: Galen Strawson 'The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility' (I will talk about this in the introductory lecture, but I want you to read it afterwards)

W: Robert Kane, sections 3 and 6 – 12 of 'Libertarianism'

F: Peter Strawson 'Freedom and Resentment' (W)

Recommended: Fischer, 'Responsibility and Autonomy' (C)

Week 2:

M: MLK Holiday

W: Frankfurt, 'Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility' and 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person'

F: Pereboom, 'Hard Incompatibilism'; Alfred Mele, 'A Critique of Pereboom's Four Case Argument'

Recommended: Gary Watson 'Free Agency' (W), Fischer, "Frankfurt-Style Compatibilism"¹

Week 3:

M: Dennett: 'Mechanism and Responsibility'

W: Manuel Vargas, 'Revisionism about Free Will: A Statement and Defense', Eddie Nahmias: 'Scientific Challenges to Free Will' (C)

F: Knobe and Doris, 'Responsibility' (**Paper 1 due**)

Part 2: Action, Agency and Motivation

Week 4:

M: Davidson, 'Actions, Reasons and Causes'

W: Velleman, 'What Happens When Someone Acts'

¹ Found here:

http://scholar.googleusercontent.com/scholar?q=cache:Zo_t7RNyPW8J:scholar.google.com/+fischer+frankfurt-style+compatibilism&hl=en&as_sdt=0,44

F: Bratman 'Reflection, Planning and Temporally Extended Agency'
Recommended: Davis, 'The Causal Theory of Action' (C), Frankfurt 'A Problem for Action'

Week 5:

M: Bratman, 'Two Problems for Human Agency'
W: Schlosser 'Agency, Ownership, and the Standard Theory'
F: **Midterm Exam**

Week 6:

M: Mele, 'Motivational Strength'; Smith 'Humeanism about Motivation' (both in 'C')
W: Wallace 'How to Argue About Practical Reason'
F: Video. I'm showing a video this day because I have to be in Chicago; someone else will show the video and take attendance. I have not finalized my decision about which video yet.

Week 7:

M: President's Day
W: Sinhababu, 'The Humean Theory of Motivation Reformulated and Defended'
F: May, 'Because I Believe It's Right'

Part 3: Rationality, Responsibility and the Will

Week 8:

M: Tenenbaum, 'Akrasia and Irrationality' (C); Davidson, 'How is Weakness of Will Possible?'
W: Arpaly and Schroeder, 'Praise, Blame and the Whole Self'
F: Ainslie, *Precis of Breakdown of Will*

Week 9:

M: Bratman, 'Planning and Temptation'
W: Holton, 'Intention and Weakness of Will'
F: Holton, 'How is Strength of Will Possible?'

Week 10:

M: Levy, 'Addiction and Autonomy'
W: Morse, 'Addiction and Criminal Responsibility'
F: Levy 'Addiction, Responsibility and Ego-depletion'
Recommended: Levy, 'Addiction and Compulsion' (C)