

Course Outline KULIS 2019/20

Course title	Freedom of will – recent positions and debates
Date/duration	Winter term 19/20
Lecturer	Ass.-Prof. DDr. Max Gottschlich
Teaching language	English
ECTS	3

Contents

There are two main problems for philosophical ethics that have been discussed throughout the millennia within the philosophical tradition, namely the problem of freedom of will and the question as to the principle according to which freedom has to qualify itself in a rational way, the “moral law”. The first problem will be the subject of this course. This is of paramount importance - for if freedom is merely an illusion, we can neither legitimately speak of action nor of responsibility, nor of good and evil. Is there anything like freedom of choice at all or must we conclude that our conduct has to be described as a series of events determined by natural causality? How is freedom to be understood in relation to the necessity of nature at all? Is freedom “compatible” with natural causality? Can we conceive of freedom in the same way as we describe and recognize empirical objects? We will be dealing with these questions with regard to recent positions and debates on this issue in the English-speaking world. We will get familiar with the main arguments of positions such as “libertarianism,” “determinism” and “compatibilism.” Furthermore, we will have to consider their respective underlying assumptions and implications.

Learning outcomes

- Deeper understanding of a fundamental problem of philosophy or ethics
- Critical appreciation of recent positions dealing with this fundamental problem
- Testing and strengthening the ability to engage with philosophical texts and forms of argumentation: being able to reconstruct arguments properly and to assess them with regard to both their underlying presuppositions and their consequences
- Furthering the ability to write philosophical texts

Teaching and learning methods

After a thematic introduction at the beginning, texts (in English) will be provided. Each student will choose one of the texts, which he or she will present in one of the following sessions. The task is to produce and to present a one-page handout that highlights the essential concepts and arguments provided in the chosen text. Questions or problems that may have emerged during the reading should be noted and presented as well. This presentation will be followed by a joint re-reading and discussion of the text. All participants are required to read all texts carefully and to prepare themselves for an active participation in the discussion in the seminar sessions. Finally, the students will have to write a paper in which they engage more deeply with one of the presented positions or draw a comparison of different standpoints.

Course preparation

There will be a reader containing the relevant texts. In preparation to the course, relevant articles can be read in philosophical encyclopaedias (such as the online "Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy") and manuals. A brief overview can be found in:

Thomas Pink, Free Will. A Very Short Introduction, New York: Oxford University Press 2004.

Additional literature

Anthologies and Collections:

- Robert Kane (ed.), Free Will, 8th edition, Blackwell Publishing 2009
- Derek Pereboom (ed.), Free Will, 2nd edition, Indianapolis: Hackett 2009
- Gary Watson (ed.), Free Will, 2nd edition, Reprint Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013
- For further literature, cf. also the selected bibliography in these volumes.

Assessment (%)

(methods of examination, requirements for awarding credit points)

- 1) Continuous attendance and participation
- 2) Preparation of a handout and its presentation
- 3) Paper (approx. 15 pages, Times New Roman 12 point, 1.5 line spacing)

Contact details (lecturer)

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