**Philosophy 350: Freedom and Responsibility**
Mount Holyoke College
Spring 2017

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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.

**Meetings.** W 1:15-4:05 in Skinner 212

**Readings.** All readings are available on Moodle, as PDFs. You will need to bring hard copies to class, however, so you will need to **print all of the readings** ahead of time.

**Requirements.** (See schedule for tentative due dates.)
- Presentations: 8%
- Reading Responses (R1-R8): 12%
- First Paper: 35%
- Second Paper: 45%

**Schedule.** This is tentative. We may adjust topics and dates depending on our interests.

**Please do the readings in the order in which they are listed.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Due</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/25</td>
<td></td>
<td>None for today, but we'll discuss Harry Frankfurt's (1969) &quot;Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility&quot;.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Due</td>
<td>Reading</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Paper topics due</td>
<td>Submit online and meet with me to discuss during week of 2/15</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>Depending on class size, presentations might start the previous week.</td>
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<td>3/8</td>
<td>Paper 1</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
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<td>3/15</td>
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<td>Spring break.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/22</td>
<td>R5</td>
<td>Rosen, Gideon and Marcia Baron, “Culpability, Duress and Excuses” (only the Rosen section) Ali, Arden (ms) “Virtue and Excuse”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Paper topics due</td>
<td>Submit online and meet with me to discuss during week of 4/12</td>
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<td>4/12</td>
<td>R8</td>
<td>Smith, Angela (2005) “Responsibility for Attitudes: Activity and Passivity in Mental Life” Robison, John (ms) “Epistemic disrespect and excusing agents for their attitudes”</td>
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<td>4/19</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>Depending on class size, presentations might start the previous week.</td>
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<td>4/26</td>
<td>Paper 2</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
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**Papers.** Papers will critically engage with an argument in one of the readings from class. They will reconstruct the argument, attack one of its premises, and evaluate whether the attack succeeds. You will chose which argument to work on, but you must get approval from me before you begin. Presentations will be opportunities to share your argument with the class and get feedback. After you submit the final, polished paper, there will be a peer review and an opportunity to rewrite in light of peer feedback. Rewrites will be due five days after the original due date.

**Presentations.** In preparation for each paper, you will present for 4 minutes on a topic of your choosing. 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 (from one of our readings).
2. The premise you find most suspicious.
3. A brief explanation of why we might want to reject it.
4. An anticipation how someone might object to your argument.

Reading responses. Answer the following questions for one of the weekly readings.

1. What is the thesis? (One sentence answer.)
2. What is the argument for the thesis? (No more than 150 words. List the premises and intermediate and final conclusions. Show the reasoning—i.e., what follows from what.)
   Is there more than one thesis or more than one argument? Probably. Try to find the main one. Not sure which that is? Pick the most interesting one.
3. What do you think of the argument? (No more than 150 words. Pick a premise to evaluate or present a counterexample.)

Assignment submission instructions part 1: where.
* Submit reading responses to Moodle by 10 am on the due date. Type straight into Moodle.
* Submit paper 1 to Moodle as a PDF. Max 1500 words (~6 double spaced pages).
* Submit paper 2 the same way. This is your final for the class. Max 2000 words (~8 double spaced pages).

Assignment submission instructions part 2: how.
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](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. (Respecting deadlines and formatting in a simple, standard, professional way are also important for this reason: late or unusually formatted papers compromise anonymous grading.)

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.
In light of these, late reading responses will not be accepted for credit. The goals of these assignments are (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 are defeated if you do not complete the assignment on time.

Late papers will be accepted up until the day that we discuss the assignment 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.

Finally, keep in mind first, that I am here to help. Get in touch if you’re worried about anything. Second, when it comes to assignments, late > never > plagiarized.

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 email demands are crazy-making. To stay sane:
- I do not answer emails in the evening or on weekends.
- I respond as promptly as I can, but not always on the same day.
- I can’t guarantee a response to emails about assignments that due within 24 hours of the email.
- I do not answer questions that are clearly answered by the syllabus or assignment instructions. If you’re not hearing back from me, that may be a hint to double check the relevant materials. That said, 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 to respond promptly to questions that do need to be answered via email.

**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.”¹ 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 of class topics with your friends, dogs, parents, etc., are 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 (again if you’ve already done this): [http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/ris/Plagiarism/](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/lits/ris/Plagiarism/). I will trust you have completed it (let’s start this honesty thing on the right foot…). 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.

**In short, do not plagiarize. I will fail you.**

**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.²
* 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](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.

**FAQs.**

**What does it take to pass a reading responses?** Write in clear, grammatical English, don’t bullshit,³ and don’t get it completely wrong.

**What does it take to pass a paper?** To pass? Same as above. For more, or less, than passing, see rubric below.

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¹ [https://www.mtholyoke.edu/deanofstudents/student_handbook](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/deanofstudents/student_handbook)
² [https://www.mtholyoke.edu/saw/peer/center](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/saw/peer/center)
³ I mean ‘bullshit’ here in its many moods and tenses, but especially in Frankfurt’s sense
Can I have comments on reading responses? Reading assignments will be marked pass/fail within a week. I will always read them, but I won't comment on them. Sometimes we will discuss them in class. You can also stop by my office hours to discuss them.

When will my paper be graded? I aim to return papers within at most two weeks of the date they were submitted. I realize it's hard to wait, but it's also hard to grade. I want to give your work the care and attention it deserves.

For the papers, grades and comments will be available on Moodle. I do not automatically provide comments on final papers.

Why do you grade anonymously? Anonymous grading has better, more just results. Studies have repeatedly shown that we have implicit biases: people of all genders tend to give the same paper different grades depending on whether the paper has a "male" name or a "female" name (e.g., John and Jane). This effect also happens due to race-based implicit biases (e.g., Shawn and Quayshawn). Consequently, students absolutely must not include their names anywhere on their graded work. For a particularly striking study, see: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/07/upshot/how-elementary-school-teachers-biases-can-discourage-girls-from-math-and-science.html?_r=1&abt=0002&abg=1

Can I send you a draft to read? I’m happy to help you on your paper, but I don’t read drafts. Feel free to come by my office hours with questions, an outline, an argument you're considering, etc. We can talk through your ideas and questions. Don't forget also that you can go to the SAW mentor and SAW center with drafts.

What sources should I use for writing my paper? 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,…).

I’d like to talk about my grade. Grades are non-negotiable, but I’m always happy to talk about how you did and how you could improve on your next assignment.

Do I have to participate in class? Absolutely. 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. Shy? Nervous? Me too. 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. And 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.
**I'm not a strong writer. Should I be worried?** No, but you should be prepared to work extra hard and get all the help you can from me, your SAW mentor, the SAW center, and other strong writers you know. A major goal of this class *is* to improve your writing skills, so I plan to give you many chances to.

**I'm a strong writer. I'm guessing I don't have to worry.** Not so fast. I will be expecting you to write more clearly, concisely, and carefully than you've probably ever have before. This will be good: it will make you stronger writers capable of producing clear, concise, and convincing prose. Like any skill, this one requires practice and patience. Acquiring it will be difficult: you will have to do a lot of writing and rewriting. I am committed to helping you get there because I know that the ability to think critically and express your ideas in clear, crisp prose will serve you well wherever you go from here.

As for my expectations, David Foster Wallace put it well in his own syllabus:

If you want to improve your academic writing and are willing to put extra time and effort into it, I am a good teacher to have. But if you're used to whipping off papers the night before they're due, running them quickly through the computer's Spellchecker, handing them in full of high-school errors and sentences that make no sense, and having the professor accept them “because the ideas are good” or something, please be informed that I draw no distinction between the quality of one's ideas and the quality of those ideas' verbal expression, and that I will not accept sloppy, rough-draftish, or semiliterate college writing. Again, I am absolutely not kidding. If you won't or can't devote significant time and attention to your written work, I urge you to drop... and save us both a lot of grief.¹

I too am absolutely not kidding. If you chose to be in this class, you'll have the opportunity for deep learning and serious improvement. I hope you will step up and take it.

**I like big words and I cannot lie…** Good for you. Don’t use them unless they say what you want to say better than a small word would. In general, take George Orwell's writing advice in his “Politics and the English Language” to heart.

**Secret assignment.** Good job! You found the (a?) secret assignment! Your job, for next time, is to Google “m&m clause”. Then, in 150 words, explain what the point of this secret assignment is. Write up any questions you have about the syllabus or the class as well, and bring a hard copy to class. Now keep reading. There might be another one… or, you might just miss something important.

**Can I bring my laptop to class?** I'd rather you not. The empirical evidence is pretty clear that people don't learn as well with laptops in the classroom. (Please also leave phones and other gadgets at home.) Plus, you won't need it. You'll be expected 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 (ahem) will have brought your print outs of the readings. If for some reason you really do need to bring some technology to class, come see me.

I couldn’t make it to class the other day. Did I miss anything important? Of course you did. To learn what you missed, contact 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.

Of course, things happen. But you are expected to attend every class. Most of the action happens in class—it is where I give away all the answers. Seriously. This is not one of those classes in which you can learn by yourself.

What if I’m late for class? Don’t be. There’s no official penalty for tardiness, because we are all adults, but it is disruptive and disrespectful to me and to your classmates. Try to get to class a few minutes before it starts, settle in, review the readings or your notes, or chat with your classmates.

Can we meet outside office hours? Please, no, please, God, please, no, don’t make me do it. It’s already so hard to negotiate our busy schedules. If you really can’t make it because of a class conflict, send me an email with a list of regular times when you are free to meet during the week, and we will find an alternative.

These readings are hard. Help! 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, and second carefully read each piece before we discuss it in class. Don’t worry too much about understanding while you’re skimming. You’re just trying to get the lay of the land, and will absorb more than you realize. Then, during the careful read, use the reading questions to help focus your attention on what is most important. Make sure to mark arguments (premises and conclusions) and other important points. Also, jot down questions and confusions and raise them in lecture. Third, skim the reading again after we’ve discussed it. It should be much easier to understand at this point. If you’re still unclear about something, get help: ask your classmates, come by my office hours, etc.

A final note on grading.

Your paper will be evaluated along three dimensions of roughly equal weight:
1. The clarity and soundness of the argument for your thesis.
2. Your demonstrated understanding of readings and material covered in class.
3. Your insight and creativity in engaging the issues.

Here is what the Mount Holyoke College student handbook says about grades: “As a general guide to instructors, the faculty has agreed to the following equivalencies to letter grades:

A = excellent;  B = good;  C = satisfactory;  D = minimally passing;  F = failing.”

Consider: ‘B’ means ‘good’. The obvious question is: what does ‘good’ mean? I take ‘good’ to mean good. Therefore, if you do a good job on a paper, you will get a B. This means you have done a good job, and should be happy. ‘A’ means ‘excellent’. This does not mean you have to write a publishable paper or be the next Immanuel Kant to get an A. It does mean that you have to demonstrate some real understanding and aptitude for doing philosophy.

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5 [https://www.mtholyoke.edu/deanofstudents/student_handbook](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/deanofstudents/student_handbook)
N.B. Merely completing the assignment without making any mistakes doesn't suffice for an A. (More on this in a moment.) Also, do not panic if you don't do well on your first assignment. Track record data suggests that there will be a steep learning curve. N.B. This paragraph applies for you even if you have taken a philosophy class before. (Again, inductive evidence suggests that it applies to you even if you don't think it applies to you.) Few students are initially able to write above a B-level. Don't let this discourage you. Writing is hard, but it is a skill you can learn. People who make a serious effort often write B+ or A- papers by the end of term. Work hard, focus on understanding, write, rewrite, and the grades will take care of themselves.

**Rubric.** Students are often puzzled by the grading standards for papers. Some ask, "If I answered the question competently without making any significant errors, why didn't I get an A?" Here is a guideline for how papers in this course are graded.

**B** is the baseline grade for good, competent, but not exceptional work; a solid paper, with some notable mistakes or obscurities, but no serious misunderstandings. At the very least, a B paper does the following:
- addresses all parts of the paper topic
- offers consistent, coherent arguments for a clearly articulated position that makes sense
- considers a significant objection to that position
- replies to that objection
- makes relevant use of course readings and lectures, displaying a grasp of their content
- is generally well-written and well-organized
- does not contain significant misunderstandings

*Papers deserving a grade higher than a B meet all these criteria, but do something more.*

**B+** This is a well-written paper with nothing terribly wrong. It meets all the criteria for a B paper, but also shows more promise or originality. It may do this by working out ordinary ideas to a greater depth than usual, or develop relevant arguments that demonstrate real mastery of the course readings without merely replicating them. Alternatively, a B+ paper might present an unusually apt analogy that illuminates a previously obscure aspect of the problem; a clever counterexample to a seemingly persuasive claim; a sharp distinction that does real philosophical work; a subtle point drawn from a close reading of a text; a compelling illustration or application of a principle, and so forth. A B+ paper receives the beginnings of distinction, but its ideas need further development: it doesn’t stand out like or operate at as advanced a level as an A- paper.

**A or A-** These grades are reserved for outstanding work that operates at an advanced level. A paper that just gives a straightforward or obvious response to some philosophical or interpretative problem would not merit an A or A-, even if it is clear. An A or A- paper does something extra—but not at the cost of a clear treatment of the problem. If there are any significant problems with the writing or the organization of the paper, then it won’t merit even an A-: this is because good clear writing and organization are not separable from good thinking. An A or A- paper thus meets all the criteria for a B+ paper, but does something more. For example:
- working out the original, striking, or powerful idea, argument, or illustration/application fully and deeply, demonstrating a firm grasp of the underlying concepts, principles, facts, and argumentative strategy
- offering an unusually comprehensive survey of possible moves by both sides, and clearly and systematically evaluating them, to come to a closely reasoned conclusion. The survey is systematic, not scattershot: it develops the alternatives logically and to substantial depth.
- offering an unusually sophisticated, close and systematic reading of a text, paying attention to tensions and contradictions in the author’s work, alternative interpretations of passages (offering persuasive arguments for preferring one interpretation to another), or interpretations that bring out philosophically significant points, especially if they offer fresh, unconventional readings

Papers deserving a grade lower than a B fail to meet the criteria and demonstrate carelessness or confusion.

B- This paper contains significant errors, omissions or misunderstandings, but still, there is an effort. The author has some understanding of the problem and of the relevant texts. She does offer some argument. A paper with no argument won’t merit a B-. Some ways such a paper might go wrong include:
- the writing is distractingly unclear
- organization is poor: important points aren’t logically ordered or signposted
- there are straightforward mistakes and misunderstandings about what the problem is, or about what other philosophers say
- the problem is presented clearly but not really addressed
- doesn’t answer one part of the paper topic
- misunderstands a substantial philosophical point or confuses distinct positions
- doesn’t articulate a consistent position
- doesn’t consider objections to one’s position
- wastes space on issues not pertinent to the paper topic
- offers a confused, sloppy, superficial, or erroneous interpretation of course readings or other cited texts

C+ There are more serious problems. Either the writing is really hard to get through; or the paper has no discernible structure; or the author doesn’t understand the text or the positions she is discussing; or the paper doesn’t really attempt to offer any argument.

Papers with more problems will earn grades of C or below. Papers that plagiarize or don’t make a serious effort will not pass.

Do keep in mind: a low grade on the first assignment is not cause for immediate concern. It’s cause for reflection, learning, and working harder. A failure to improve over the course of the assignments is cause for concern. Even if you submit an A paper, I will expect you to do better on your next assignment. If you aren’t improving, wherever you start from, neither of us is doing our jobs well.