Spring 2018 TTH 12:30-1:50 Prof. Kadri Vihvelin

Classroom: GFS 228 MHP 212, 740-5185Office Hours: TTH 2-3 and by appointment vihvelin@usc.edu

**GESM 120**

**FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM**

**DESCRIPTION OF COURSE:**

There is a long tradition, at least in the history of western thought, of thinking of persons as very different from everything else in the universe. The difference is widely assumed to consist in the fact that, whereas the behavior of even the most intelligent animals is caused by events and conditions outside the animal’s control, our voluntary actions are the product of our free will. Our criminal justice system is based on this belief; unless a special defense (e.g. insanity) is established, the law assumes that the defendant acted freely and is responsible for what he or she did. But is this belief justified? The rise of modern science has put increasing pressure on this traditional conception of persons. Many scientists now believe that everything we do can (at least in principle) be given a causal explanation that traces back to factors outside our control. The philosophical problem of free will and determinism is the problem of understanding how, *if at all*, we can reconcile what science tells us about our place in nature with our belief that we are, in some sense, free and responsible. This course will provide an introduction to this philosophical problem. The goal of the course is to teach students the analytical skills required to read and critically evaluate the readings and thereby attain greater understanding of the problem and its practical implications.

**BOOKS** (campus bookstore):

1. George Orwell, *1984* (Orwell)
2. Susan Schneider, ed. *Science Fiction and Philosophy: From Time Travel to Superintelligence* (Schneider)
3. Clarence Darrow, *Attorney for the Damned* (Darrow)

3. Oliver Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars* (Sacks)

**OTHER MATERIALS:** available on Blackboard site for this class (BB)

**OUTLINE OF READINGS:**

We will read all or most of the following, in approximately this order.

**Weeks 1–2 Introduction**

Jan. 9 Introduction to the topic, goals of course, class format and methodology, Free Will "Quiz"

Jan. 11 Sider, “Free Will and Determinism” (BB)

Jan. 16 Huemer, “Free Will and Determinism in the World of *Minority Report*” (Schneider)

Jan. 18 Vihvelin, “Introduction to the Problem of Free Will and Determinism” (BB)

**Weeks 3-6 A Novel about the Control of Human Thought and Behavior; An Introduction to Language, Truth, Logic, and Belief**

Jan. 23 Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” (BB)

Jan. 25 Orwell, Book 1 and Appendix (“The Principles of Newspeak”)

Jan. 30 Vihvelin, “Some Notes on Truth and Logic” (BB)

Vihvelin, “Deductive Arguments: Validity and Soundness” (BB)

Feb. 1 Orwell, Book 2

Feb. 6 Orwell, Book 3 (to the end of section II -“You know what is in room 101”)

Feb. 8 Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility”

Vihvelin, “Belief, Truth, Knowledge, and Language” (BB)

Feb. 13 MIDTERM

Feb. 15 Orwell Book 3 (from section III to end)

TOPICS FOR PAPER #1

**Week 7 Do You Know what you Think you Know? (**How do you know that you are in a classroom with other students, that you are sitting in a chair, that you have a body? How do you know that you are not a brain in a vat?)

Feb. 20 Pollock, “Brain in a Vat” (Schneider)

Bostrom, “Are You in a Computer Simulation?” (Schneider)

Feb. 22 Chalmers, “*The Matrix* as Metaphysics” (Schneider)

**Weeks 8-9 Who are we? What are we? Could a machine be conscious? Could a machine be a person, with free will?**

Feb. 27 Asimov, “Robot Dreams” (Schneider)

Clark, “A Brain Speaks” (Schneider)

PAPER #1 DUE

March 1 Dennett, “Consciousness in Human and Robot Minds” (Schneider)

March 6 Olson, “Personal Identity” (Schneider)

March 8 Anderson, “Asimov’s ‘Three Laws of Robotics’ and Machine Metaethics” (Schneider)

TOPICS FOR PAPER #2

SPRING BREAK

**Week 10 If Everything We Do is Ultimately Caused by what’s Been Done to us, how can we ever be Morally Responsible for anything? Are Blame and Punishment always Unfair?**

March 20 Darrow, “The Crime of Compulsion”

March 22 Darrow, “The Crime of Compulsion”, continued

Huemer, “…the World of *Minority Report*” (again)

Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility” (again)

**Weeks 11-12 Knowing what Will Happen: Would Time Travel Make us Unfree?**

March 27 Goldman, “The Book of Life: A Thought Experiment” (Schneider)

Sider, “Time” (Schneider)

March 29 Deutsch & Lockwood, “The Quantum Physics of Time Travel” (Schneider)

Apr. 3 Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel” (Schneider)

PAPER # 2 DUE

**Weeks 12-15 How Free Are We? A Little Philosophy and Some Case Studies of**

**Pathologies and Disabilities by Neurologist Oliver Sacks**

Apr. 5 Albritton, "Freedom of Will and Freedom of Action" (BB)

Apr. 10 Sacks, “A Surgeon’s Life” (BB)

TOPICS FOR PAPER #3

Apr. 12 Sacks, “An Anthropologist on Mars" (Sacks)

Apr. 17 Sacks, “An Anthropologist on Mars”, continued

April 19 Sacks, “The Lost Mariner” (BB)

Apr. 24 Sacks, “The Last Hippie” (BB)

Free Will “quiz”

Apr. 26 Last class, discussion of Free Will “quiz”, concluding remarks

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

You are required to read the assigned readings, preferably more than once, to attend all classes, and to do at least one class presentation. There is a midterm (but no final exam). You are required to write three papers, 6-7 pages long, on assigned topics.

**EVALUATION AND DATES:**

midterm 20% (Feb. 13, in class) paper #1 20% (due March 1, in class)

paper #2 20% (due April 3, in class)

paper #3 20% (due May 9, by email)

presentations/class participation 20% (all semester)

**POLICIES:**

The paper topics will be distributed at least two weeks before the paper is due. We will spend part of a class discussing topics and paper-writing techniques. Rewrites will not be permitted except in unusual circumstances, but I will provide help with drafts, if requested at least two days before the paper is due. I will accept late papers but unless you have a very good excuse the grade will be dropped one notch (e.g. from an A to an A-) for each day that the paper is late. It is your responsibility to save all returned papers until you get your official grade for the course.

If you require academic accommodations based on a disability please inform me (as well as Disability Services and Programs) as early in the semester as possible, so that I can make whatever arrangements are necessary.

Universities policies concerning “incompletes” will be strictly observed. You may not receive a grade of “IN” unless you are very ill or face a genuine emergency.

**STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC CONDUCT AND USC SUPPORT SYSTEMS:**

**Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

**Academic Conduct:**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable.  See additional information in *SCampus*and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

**Support Systems:**

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. [engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org_&d=DwMFAg&c=clK7kQUTWtAVEOVIgvi0NU5BOUHhpN0H8p7CSfnc_gI&r=CkL4kY0no88QZj2uCDFOI7xhjLQ9O4YZiOIPGjQSQJ8&m=FN8fbuOqtif1bWvrKTHrycKDSgd_snFubXhYrp7Dz58&s=yigxVd9JJfatu9uXYx0qpj6LhjknPiz6tnBwI27pj4U&e=)

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/)

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu/)

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu/)

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/)

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu/)

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/)

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [diversity.usc.edu](https://diversity.usc.edu/)

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

*USC Department of Public Safety  – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.*

Provides overall safety to USC community. [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu/)