

## Syllabus

Issues in Contemporary Philosophy 480 — Time, Causality and Agency

Lecturer: Sidney Felder, e-mail: sfelder@rci.rutgers.edu

Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, Spring 2014, Tue & Thurs

This course explores the situation of the agent in time, specifically the character and explanation of the various temporal asymmetries connected with the agent's relationship as knower and actor to past and future events.

Among the questions we will examine are the following: Does time flow? What do we mean when we say that the past is fixed and the future is not? Is causation intrinsically directed from past to future? What distinguishes the character of our knowledge of the future from the character of our knowledge of the past? How are we to understand an agent's capacity to initiate events in a universe in which all events and processes without exception are supposed describable in physical terms and governed by physical laws? How are the schemes of probabilistic, counterfactual, and causal dependency related? What relationship between actions and desired outcomes justifies the performance of the former for the sake of the latter? Are there fundamental logical limits in our capacity to predict the conclusions obtained in our own or in others' deliberations?

Weeks 1-3: Introduction; The Flow of Time

J. McTaggart The Unreality of Time

D. C. Williams The Myth of Passage

Tim Maudlin Remarks on the Passage of Time

Kurt Gödel A Remark about the Relationship between Relativity Theory and Idealistic Philosophy

Weeks 3-5: The Open Future and The Fixed Past

Richard Taylor Fatalism

Bertrand Russell On the Notion of Cause

Michael Dummett Bringing About the Past

Hans Reichenbach Intervention (*The Direction of Time*, ch.II, section 6)

Weeks 5 and 6: The anisotropy of processes in time

Hans Reichenbach *The Direction of Time* (ch. III, Section 13)

Weeks 6-8: Causal, Probabilistic and Counterfactual Dependence

D. K. Lewis Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow

David Albert *Time and Chance*

Weeks 9-11: The Decision Problem and Causality

Allan Gibbard and William Harper Counterfactuals and Two Kinds of Expected Utility

Paul Horwich Decision (*Asymmetries in Time*, ch. 11)

Weeks 11-14: Deliberation and Prediction

Henri Bergson Real Duration and Prediction (*Time and Free Will*, ch. III)

Carl Ginet Can the Will be Caused?

David Wiggins Freedom, Knowledge, Belief and Causality

Frederic Schick Self-Knowledge, Uncertainty and Choice

Alvin Goldman Determinism and Predictability (*A Theory of Action*, ch. 6)

Haim Gaifman Self-reference and the Acyclicity of Rational Choice

## Time, Causality and Agency

A grasp of certain elements of logic, probability theory, physics, and decision theory is necessary for mastering the issues explored in this course. Although no substantial prior knowledge of these areas is assumed, a serious willingness to engage with some technical material is essential.

Note: The university has directed that all syllabi make note of the existence of The Rutgers Self-Reporting Absence Website (<https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra>), as well as of the request that it be utilized by students to indicate the date(s) and reason for their absence from class.