

## Syllabus

Issues in Contemporary Philosophy 480 — Time, Causality and Agency

Lecturer: Sidney Felder, e-mail: sf30@panix.com

Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, Spring 2019, Tue & Thurs 4:30-5:50

Office Hours: By Appointment

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 3-4: The Open Future and The Fixed Past

Richard Taylor	Fatalism
Michael Dummett	Bringing About the Past
Hans Reichenbach	Intervention ( <i>The Direction of Time</i> , ch.II, section 6)

Week 5: The Anisotropy of Processes in Time

Hans Reichenbach	<i>The Direction of Time</i> (ch. III, Section 13)
David Albert	<i>Time and Chance</i> (ch.4)

Weeks 6-10: Causal, Probabilistic and Counterfactual Dependence

Bertrand Russell	On the Notion of Cause
D. K. Lewis	Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow
David Albert	<i>Time and Chance</i> (ch.6)
Sidney Felder	The Concept of Intervention in <i>Time and Chance</i>
A. Gibbard and W. Harper	Counterfactuals and Two Kinds of Expected Utility (Sections 1-6, 10-12)

Weeks 10-14: Deliberation and Prediction

Henri Bergson	Real Duration and Prediction ( <i>Time and Free Will</i> , ch. III)
Carl Ginet	Can the Will be Caused?
Alvin Goldman	Determinism and Predictability ( <i>A Theory of Action</i> , ch. 6)
David Wiggins	Freedom, Knowledge, Belief and Causality
Haim Gaifman	Self-reference and the Acyclicity of Rational Choice

A grasp of certain basic 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.

## Time, Causality and Agency

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.

Current Academic Integrity Policy: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Student “Wellness” Services: Just In Case Web App: <http://codu.co/cee05e> (mental health information and resources)

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS): (848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick / [rhscaps.rutgers.edu](http://rhscaps.rutgers.edu)

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA) (848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, N.B. / [vpva.rutgers.edu/](http://vpva.rutgers.edu/) (confidential crisis intervention, counseling, and advocacy)

Disability Services (848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Livingston Campus / <https://ods.rutgers.edu>

Scarlet Listeners (732) 247-5555 / <http://www.scarletlisteners.com/> (Free and Confidential peer counseling and referral hotline)