



CEU SUMMER UNIVERSITY

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Philosophy, Metaphysics, Ethics
ASPECTS OF RESPONSIBILITY

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DETAILED COURSE DESCRIPTION

We know that whatever responsibility is, it is something we care about deeply both in formal and informal contexts. Being answerable for what we do and what we are is crucial to our perception of ourselves as persons as well as to our interactions with others. The three main questions about moral responsibility that the course will seek to answer are the following:

- (i) Under what conditions can someone be said to be a morally responsible agent?
- (ii) Do human beings satisfy these conditions (i.e., are they morally responsible agents)?
- (iii) What are the normative implications of being a morally responsible agent?

The course will be divided into two parts. The first part will be devoted to the *metaphysics* of moral responsibility, and hence, it will be concerned with answering, or trying to answer, questions (i) and (ii). The second part of the course will concentrate on responsibility as an *ethical* concept, and it will therefore focus on question (iii).

While these questions address different dimensions of the concept of responsibility, we are aware that these dimensions are linked to one another in important and controversial ways. For example, some would argue that certain issues that arise in connection with question (iii) need to be answered before we can answer question (i). It is our intention to emphasize the interconnectedness of the answers to questions (i)-(iii). The interactive seminars in particular will be used to bring out conceptual connections among the topics discussed.

In the first half of the course—i.e., the metaphysical part—we will mostly concentrate on two subquestions of (i) and (ii); in particular, we will try to answer the following two questions:

- (i') Does moral responsibility require an indeterministic, libertarian sort of free will?
- (ii') Do human beings actually have an indeterministic, libertarian sort of free will?

In connection with question (i'), the central issue is whether moral responsibility is compatible with determinism, and we will look at the most important arguments on either side of this debate; most notably, we will study variants of the consequence argument for incompatibilism and the Frankfurt-case argument for compatibilism.

In connection with question (ii'), on the other hand, we will investigate two different issues. One issue we will explore is whether there are any good arguments for determinism or indeterminism. We will begin by taking this as

a question about *all* events, and then, if we find that there are no compelling arguments for universal determinism (i.e., the thesis that all events are causally necessitated by prior events), we will try to determine whether there are any good arguments for or against a narrower version of determinism, in particular, determinism about neural/mental events like decisions. In addition, we will explore whether there is any evidence for thinking that there are always nonconscious causes of our decisions and actions, so that our feeling of conscious will is an illusion. The second issue we will explore in connection with question (ii') is whether it is at all plausible to maintain that we humans possess a libertarian sort of free will, even granting that some of our decisions are causally undetermined. The worry here is that libertarianism requires not just that some of our decisions are undetermined, but also that the indeterminacy generates or increases free will. In other words, the indeterminacy has to increase the amount of appropriate non-randomness—or *agent-involving non-randomness*—in the given decision, where appropriate non-randomness requires, at the very least, that the decision be authored and controlled by the given agent. Given that libertarianism requires a variety of indeterminacy that generates or increases non-randomness, there is an obvious worry that one might have about the view. It seems *prima facie* that to introduce an undetermined event into a process is to introduce an element of *randomness*; thus, it's hard to see how doing this could increase *non-randomness*, and so, *prima facie*, it seems that even if we assume that there are indeterminacies in our decision-making processes, libertarianism could not be true, because these indeterminacies could not generate or increase non-randomness, or freedom.

We are going to examine the issue of whether libertarians can adequately respond to this worry. If they can't, then human beings do not have libertarian freedom. Thus, if we also find that moral responsibility requires libertarian freedom, we will be forced to conclude that we humans are not morally responsible for their actions. If, however, we can adequately defend libertarianism, or if we can argue that moral responsibility does not require libertarian freedom, then we will be able to maintain that humans *are* morally responsible for their actions. These are the questions that we will explore in the first part of the course.

In the second part of the course, we will explore a number of ethical issues related to the concept of responsibility. Moral responsibility has significant normative implications, both for the people who are held responsible and for those who hold them responsible. For example, punishment is usually thought appropriate only when dealing with people who are responsible for what they have done. In any case, whether or not someone is thought to be responsible will to a large extent determine how others behave towards and think of that person. In the second half of the course we are going to review different aspects of the relationship between ascriptions of responsibility and our moral assessments of people:

- *First*, there is clearly a strong correlation between our imputations of moral responsibility and some of our most basic emotions (e.g., anger, guilt, resentment, etc.). But how exactly are ascriptions of moral responsibility related to these emotional reactions and the accompanying behavioral patterns? And does holding someone responsible involve a judgment of that person or only some emotional response to her?
- *Second*, attributions of responsibility are often tied up with evaluations of character. A number of philosophers, e.g., David Hume, have argued that we blame people for their actions because wrongdoing reveals enduring negative character traits (e.g., cruelty). But is this view really tenable? If not, why do we blame (or praise) agents now for things they have done in the past? Further, are character traits themselves responsibly acquired? And if not, can people still be blamed (or praised) for having them?
- *Third*, if someone deserves to be blamed for an action, it is usually because the action was wrong. But can there be situations in which blame is justified even when the agent did not do anything wrong? That is to say, are there moral dilemmas in which even if you choose the best course of action available to you, people will be justified in blaming you for what you did? Can you sometimes be held morally responsible for the harm you have caused even in the absence of wrongdoing?
- *Fourth*, certain ways of treating or relating to people are often thought to presuppose that the people in question are responsible for their deeds. For instance, it is ordinarily thought that punishment is justifiable only if the person in question is responsible for her actions, and similar remarks can be made about various overt forms of censure, criticism, and, interestingly, forgiveness (it seems that you can only forgive someone who you think is responsible for doing wrong). To what extent do such ways of treating people really require that the people in question are responsible for their actions? Can these kinds of treatment sometimes be justified in the absence of responsibility?
- *Fifth*, can we speak of moral responsibility in connection with institutions (e.g., formal organizations)? This, it seems, would presuppose that institutions and not just individuals can be said to act. Does this assertion make sense?

In examining these questions, we will also introduce some of the main metaethical theories about how to understand the meanings of ascriptions of moral responsibility, including cognitivism, expressivism, and skepticism.

CERTIFICATE OF ATTENDANCE

SUN awards a certificate of attendance upon successful completion of the course. In order to gain this certificate, participants will be expected to attend and actively participate in all classes and complete assignments required by the course.

ACADEMIC CREDIT

The Aspects of Responsibility course offers 2 ECTS points, which may be accepted for credit transfer by the participants' home universities. Those who wish to obtain these credits should inquire about the possible transfer at their home institution prior to their enrollment. The Summer University Office will send a transcript to those who have fulfilled all the necessary course requirements and request one.

ELIGIBILITY

Target Group

The program encourages applications from graduate students, junior faculty and researchers at departments of philosophy, political science and legal theory. Undergraduates without a university degree will not be considered.

Pre-requisites

- Familiarity with Course Topics

Some familiarity with the topic is required, such as the completion of an undergraduate course on the relevant subjects or higher. The course will be of interest to a sizable target audience owing to its integrative and interdisciplinary structure. It will be most suitable for participants who have pursued or intend to pursue independent research on some aspect of the subject. Students and researchers interested in cognate areas of metaphysics, ethics, legal theory and political theory (e.g. theories of causation, rationality, agency, distributive justice, egalitarianism, criminal law, etc.) can also benefit from the course.

- Language requirement

The language of instruction is English; thus all applicants have to demonstrate a strong command of spoken and written English to be able to participate actively in discussions at seminars and workshops. (In some instances shortlisted applicants may be contacted for a telephone interview.)

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Application forms are encouraged to be submitted through the on-line registration system. In addition to the completed application form, the following supporting documents are requested to be sent by regular mail:

- *CV* (with a *list of publications if any*)
- *A Statement of Purpose*
In the Statement of Purpose please describe how the course is relevant to your teaching, research or professional work, and in what way you expect to benefit from it. You are advised to consult the detailed course description on the course web page so that the statement of purpose is in accordance with the main objectives of the course.
- *An English language article or research paper in progress*, which you would like to develop as the outcome of the course.
- *One Letter of Recommendation*

Optional documents:

- A copy of an *article in English*, which you have recently published
- A copy of any *English language certificate*
- A special cover letter, if a tuition waiver is applied for

Please note the following:

- Attachments should be sent to the CEU Summer University Office (mailing address: CEU Summer University Office, 1051 Budapest, Nádor u. 9., Hungary) **by regular mail postmarked no later than February 14 for scholarship applications or May 30 for fee-paying applications.** Applications will not be considered complete and will not be processed until all supporting materials have been received.
- Faxed or e-mailed attachments or recommendations will not be processed.
- If you apply to more than once course, a separate set of letters of recommendation and attachments (customized, if necessary, to the differing needs of the two courses) must be mailed for each course of your choice. **Please indicate your name and the course(s) you apply to on EACH attachment.**
- The Letter of Recommendation should be put in an envelope, sealed and signed by the referee across the seal. It can be sent directly to the Summer University Office either by the referee or can be included in your application package. Applications submitted after the deadlines will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Non-discrimination policy statement

Central European University does not discriminate on the basis of - including, but not limited to - race, color, national and ethnic origin, religion, gender or sexual orientation in administering its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.
