

**Draft Syllabus**  
**YSS3339 Theories of Freedom**  
**Spring 2022**

**Prof. Koh Tsin Yen**

[tsinyen.koh@yale-nus.edu.sg](mailto:tsinyen.koh@yale-nus.edu.sg)

RC1-02-06B (Saga, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Faculty Office 8)

Thurs 3–5 pm (sign up on [Calendly](#))

**Mon & Thurs 1–2.30 pm**

**Location TBD**

## **Overview**

What is it we are talking about, when we talk about freedom? How might we think about freedom? This course surveys some contemporary responses to these questions. It begins with some (more or less) classic works on freedom and autonomy, and then considers challenges to these (more or less) liberal theories from republican, communitarian, feminist, and other perspectives.

This is a course on theorizing about political freedom, with texts drawn from political theory. It is not about many things to do with freedom: it will not, for example, consider the problem of free will. It is not a catalogue of freedoms and unfreedoms in the world today (except by way of example). It is not a study of the extent to which particular political institutions expand or undermine freedom (except by way of example). It will not give any definitive answers to the questions raised above. But it is an invitation to work through some questions about freedom together, and to test theories of freedom against your lived experience.

## **Assessment**

Participation and good citizenship: 20%

Presentation: 10%

First paper (~2500 words, due Fri 18 Feb): 30%

Second paper (~3000 words, due Mon 25 Apr): 40%

## **Participation and Good Citizenship**

Participation: Please come to class having done the readings, and prepared to engage actively and thoughtfully in discussion.

Class blog: The participation grade includes 8 short posts (say one paragraph long) on the class blog across 8 different weeks. Each post should offer a question or reflective comment on the text. Please make your posts by 12 noon the day of seminar, to give everyone some time to read them. I may call on you to discuss your post in seminar. Additional posts will count towards your participation grade.

Attendance: If you have to miss class, please let me know in advance where possible. Life happens; you may miss one class for your own reasons. Further absences without good reason (e.g. medical reasons, an AD note) will result in a lower participation grade.

Electronic devices: You may use your laptops and tablets for readings and notes, and *only* for readings and notes. No phones, please.

## **Academic Integrity Policy**

Students are expected to abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. That means that (a) students do their own work, (b) students do not interfere with the work of others, (c) students accurately and honestly represent the content of their work, and (d) students properly attribute work from others, including web-based sources and other students. There is a zero-tolerance policy for academic dishonesty; all cases will be referred to the Committee on Integrity and Discipline. Please come talk to me if you are unsure about the policy in any way.

## **Accessibility**

If you have any physical, psychiatric or learning conditions that may affect your performance in this course, please reach out to your Assistant Dean for advice and referral to further resources.

## **Course Schedule and Readings**

### **Unit 1: Individual liberty and autonomy**

What is it we are talking about, and what is it we value, when we talk about freedom? One possible answer to both questions: autonomy. But what does that mean? Are there different kinds of freedom? What is the relationship between the free and/or autonomous individual and the state?

Week 1: Antecedents and exemplars: Mill

Mon 10 Jan: Introductory session on J. S. Mill's "On Liberty"; start reading Mill, "Subjection of Women"

Thurs 13 Jan: Mill, "Subjection of Women"  
*Supplementary*: Arthur Ripstein, "Beyond the Harm Principle"

Week 2: Antecedents and exemplars: Kant

Mon 17 Jan: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Thurs 20 Jan: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

Week 3: Autonomy and authority

Mon 24 Jan: Joseph Raz, from *The Morality of Freedom*  
*Supplementary*: Joel Feinberg, "The Child's Right to an Open Future"

Thurs 27 Jan: Robert Paul Wolff, from *In Defense of Anarchism*

Week 4: Negative and positive liberty

Mon 31 Jan: No class (Chinese New Year Eve)

Thurs 3 Feb: Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” (in the *Liberty* reader)

## **Unit 2: The individual and the community**

One criticism of liberal theories of freedom is that it misconceives the relationship between the individual and their community. How should we think about the relationship between the individual and the state, and between the individual and their social or cultural or ethnic traditions and communities?

Week 5: Freedom and politics

Mon 7 Feb: Benjamin Constant, “The Liberty of Ancients Compared with that of Moderns”

Hannah Arendt, “Freedom and Politics” (in the *Liberty* reader)

Thurs 10 Feb: Quentin Skinner, “A Third Concept of Liberty” (in the *Liberty* reader)  
*Supplementary: Quentin Skinner, Liberty Before Liberalism*

Week 6: Freedom and politics (continued)

Mon 14 Feb: Philip Pettit, “The Republican Ideal of Freedom” (in the *Liberty* reader)

Thurs 17 Feb: Lea Ypi, “What’s Wrong with Colonialism”

**1<sup>st</sup> paper due Fri 18 Feb**

**Week 7: Break**

Week 8: Freedom and community

Mon 28 Feb: Alasdair MacIntyre, from *After Virtue*; or Taylor from *Sources of the Self?*

Thurs 3 Mar: Michael Sandel, “The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self”  
Charles Taylor, “What is Wrong with Negative Liberty” (in the *Liberty* reader)

Week 9: Freedom and community (continued)

Mon 7 Mar: Charles Taylor, “Multiculturalism and the ‘Politics of Recognition’”  
Will Kymlicka, “Freedom and Culture” from *Multicultural Citizenship*.

Thurs 10 Mar: Susan Moller Okin, “Feminism and Multiculturalism: Some Tensions”  
Martha Nussbaum on the capabilities approach

## **Unit 3: Structures and subjects**

A different way of thinking about the relationship between the individual and the state is to think about structures of domination and oppression, including in this category formal political institutions, the market, and social and cultural norms. Could these structures be constitutive not just of the relationship between the individual and the state, and between individuals, but also of individual subjectivity itself?

Week 10: Freedom and capitalism

Mon 14 Mar: Alex Gourevitch, “The Right to Strike”

Thurs 17 Mar: G. A. Cohen, “Capitalism, Freedom and the Proletariat” (in the *Liberty* reader); Tanner lectures on justificatory community

Week 11: Gender and race

Mon 21 Mar: Carole Pateman and Charles Mills, from *The Contract and Domination*  
Jeff Spinner-Halev, from *Enduring Injustice*

Thurs 24 Mar: Nancy Folbre on care work and patriarchy

Week 12: Power and identity

Mon 28 Mar: Foucault, “Power, Right, Truth”  
Foucault, from *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1

Thurs 31 Mar: Kwame Anthony Appiah, from *The Lies that Bind*

Week 13: Non-sovereign agency

Mon 4 Apr: Nancy Hirschmann, “Towards a Feminist Theory of Freedom”

Thurs 7 Apr: Sharon Krause, from *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*

Week 14: Wrap-up

Mon 11 Apr: Sharon Krause, “Plural Freedoms”

Thurs 14 Apr: Amia Srinivasan, “The Right to Sex”

**2<sup>nd</sup> paper due on Mon 25 Apr**