

YSS3339 Theories of Freedom

Spring 2022

Prof. Koh Tsin Yen

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RC1-02-06B (Saga, 2nd 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): 30%

Second paper (~3000 words): 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, when we talk about freedom? What is it we value, when we talk about freedom? One possible answer to both questions: individual autonomy. This unit begins with two different historically influential accounts of individual autonomy, and goes on to more contemporary but also influential accounts of liberty, autonomy, and the relationship between the individual and the state.

Week 1: Antecedents and exemplars: Mill

Mon 10 Jan: Introductory session; start reading J. S. Mill, “Subjection of Women”

Thurs 13 Jan: Mill, “Subjection of Women”

Arthur Ripstein on Mill: harm principle vs sovereignty

Week 2: Antecedents and exemplars: Kant

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

Thurs 20 Jan: *Groundwork*

Week 3: Autonomy and authority

Mon 24 Jan: Joseph Raz, from *The Morality of Freedom*

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"

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. Perhaps individual freedom is not about one's freedom *from* state power, but one's freedom *within* their political community. Or perhaps these theories place too much credence on a depiction of the autonomous individual as free from all bonds. Perhaps free choice is not the only source of value; perhaps our bonds, our traditions and our communities are sources of value too.

Week 5: Freedom and politics

Mon 7 Feb: Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?"

Thurs 10 Feb: Quentin Skinner, "A Third Concept of Liberty"

Week 6: Freedom and politics (continued)

Mon 14 Feb: Philip Pettit, *Republicanism*, chs. 2-3

Thurs 17 Feb: office hours

1st paper due Sat 19 Feb

Week 7: Break

Week 8: Freedom and work

Mon 28 Feb: Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government*

Thurs 3 Mar: Nancy Folbre on care economics

Week 9: Identity and community

Mon 7 Mar: Charles Taylor, "What is Wrong with Negative Liberty"
Charles Taylor, "Multiculturalism and the 'Politics of Recognition'"

Thurs 10 Mar: Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies that Bind*, ch. 1, ch. 6

Week 10: Identity and community (continued)

Mon 14 Mar: Will Kymlicka, "Justice and Minority Rights"

Thurs 17 Mar: Susan Moller Okin, "Feminism and Multiculturalism: Some Tensions"
Kwame Anthony Appiah, *the Lies That Bind*, 90-98

Unit 3: Structures and subjects

The state is not the only source of constraints on freedom. When thinking about unfreedoms, perhaps we should think about structures of domination and oppression, about social and cultural norms as well as formal political and economic institutions. These structures might not only constrain our identity and agency; they might *constitute* it: they might affect how we think of ourselves. What might freedom from domination and oppression look like?

Week 11: Re-thinking the social contract

Mon 21 Mar: Carole Pateman on the sexual contract

Thurs 24 Mar: Charles Mills, "The Domination Contract"
Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"

Week 12: The social construction of freedom

Mon 28 Mar: bell hooks, *Feminist Theory*, chs. 2-3

Thurs 31 Mar: Nancy Hirschmann, "Towards a Feminist Theory of Freedom"
Nancy Hirschmann, "Disabling Barriers, Enabling Freedom"

Week 13: Structural injustice and responsibility

Mon 4 Apr: Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, chs. 1-2

Thurs 7 Apr: Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, chs. 4

Week 14: Plural freedoms

Mon 11 Apr: Sharon Krause, "Plural Freedoms"

Thurs 14 Apr: Review

2nd paper due on Mon 25 Apr