

Varieties of Freedom*

Mondays 11:20am – 1:50pm

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We are not free to cease being free.

Being and Nothingness
— JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose.

“Me and Bobby McGee”
— JANIS JOPLIN

1 Motivation and overview

It should not be surprising that humans, as individually self-aware members of an ultrasocial species, are deeply conflicted by the concept of freedom. Being free means different things to different people; moreover, people often disagree about how much freedom can, or should, be had by their conspecifics, or even by themselves. In this advanced seminar, we shall discuss some of the questions that arise with regard to freedom, sampling from a range of disciplines, including philosophy, evolution and psychology, history and geography, anthropology, politics, and education.

*Version 2, August 29, 2021.

2 Notes for participants

This section contains essential information for participants: format description, inclusion statement,¹ ground rules for discussion, and credit requirements.

2.1 Format

2.1.1 The prerequisites

At least one course in a social science (psychology, sociology, anthropology), or permission of instructor.

2.2 Diversity, inclusion, and ground rules for discussion

Unlike in a large-enrollment lecture-based course, in which some students may choose, and succeed, to remain virtually anonymous, in a small-class seminar setting you are required to speak in front of the class (when presenting) and are expected to contribute to the discussion on other occasions. Because *your* informed opinion on every aspect of the material is unique and valuable, I shall strive to facilitate the conversation so as to make all voices heard. In this, I'll be counting on your help, and on the help of your classmates.

Even matters of “consensus” are not always easy to talk about, as the rare dissenters who dare voice their opposition know full well; how then should we approach potentially controversial topics? With care and compassion, diligence, openness, and daring: care for our shared humanity; diligence with regard to the relevant knowledge and findings; openness to informed dissent; and daring to venture into uncharted territory, as befits good education.

If at any point during the semester (no matter whether in class or after hours) you feel that you need to talk about any of these things, please let me know immediately — doing so will be my top priority.

2.3 Credit and grading

There are three components to getting credit for this course:

1. Attend and contribute to the discussion during the **weekly meetings**. During the **closing discussion** at the last meeting of the semester (December 6), offer brief (5 min or so) remarks summing up your impressions and lessons from the semester.
2. By noon on the Monday for which readings have been assigned, post on the Canvas discussion board **questions** on the material (at least 10 questions should be submitted by the end of the semester). Be prepared to raise these questions in class.
3. By Labor Day (September 6, no class), **choose** the dates of your **two presentations**.

A typical presentation should include

- a brief introduction to the topic and an overview of the background to the paper(s) and the relevant methodology;

¹The remarks in section 2.2, which are specific to this course, are intended to supplement the official Cornell statement on diversity and inclusion, which covers dimensions such as gender, race, socio-economic background, etc., and which can be found here: <http://diversity.cornell.edu/>.

- the findings, as illustrated by the plots or (in the absence of graphics) by a concise verbal description;
- a critique of the approach;
- a summary of the conclusions and their significance for the seminar’s themes.
- a description of your plan for the final project based on the chosen paper(s).

The presenting teams should meet with the instructor ahead of their presentations, to address any questions and coordinate the details.

Final grade components (for reference only; no numerical assessment of anything will be made in this seminar):—

Weekly questions	30%
Participation in the discussions:	10%
Presentations:	60%

3 Weekly topics and readings

- **(August 30) OVERVIEW. PRELIMINARIES.**

1. Frankfurt, H. G. (1971). Freedom of the will and the concept of a person. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68(1), 5–20.
2. Edelman, S. (2008). *Computing the mind: how the mind really works*. Oxford University Press, New York, NY, section 10.1: Selfhood and Freedom.
3. Bidney, D. (1963). The varieties of human freedom. In D. Bidney, editor, *The Concept of Freedom in Anthropology*, Studies in General Anthropology, 1, pages 11–34. De Gruyter Mouton, The Hague.

- (September 6) [Labor Day — no class]

- **(September 13) PHILOSOPHY I.**

1. Berlin, I. (1969). Two concepts of liberty. In *Four Essays on Liberty*, pages 121–154, 169–172. Clarendon Press, Oxford, UK.
2. [OPTIONAL] McBride, W. L. (1990). “Two Concepts of Liberty” thirty years later: A Sartre-inspired critique. *Social Theory and Practice*, 16(3), 297–322.
3. Wu, G. (2006). On the idea of freedom and its rejection in Chinese thought and institutions. *Asian Philosophy*, 16(3), 219–235.
4. Li, C. (2014). The Confucian conception of freedom. *Philosophy East and West*, 64(4), 902–919. Special issue: Tenth East-West philosophers’ conference, “Value and Values: Economics and Justice in an Age of Global Interdependence”.

- **(September 20) PHILOSOPHY II.**

1. Táíwò, O. (2016). Against African communalism. *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, XXIV(1), 81–100.

2. Kayange, G. M. (2020). Capitalism and freedom in African communitarianism. In *Capitalism and Freedom in African Political Philosophy*, chapter 3, pages 45–72. Springer, Cham, Switzerland.

- **(September 27) PHILOSOPHY III.**

1. Read, H. (1940). *The Philosophy of Anarchism*. Freedom Press, London, UK. Available online at <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/herbert-read-the-philosophy-of-anarchism.pdf>.
2. Wolff, R. P. (1970). *In Defense of Anarchism*. Harper and Row, New York, NY. Available online at <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/robert-paul-wolff-in-defense-of-anarchism.pdf>.
3. [OPTIONAL] Grumley, J. (1998). Revolting liberties: Revolution and freedom in Arendt and Foucault. *The European Legacy*, 3(1), 53–71.

- **(October 4) EVOLUTION AND PSYCHOLOGY.**

1. Westcott, M. R. (1982). Quantitative and qualitative aspects of experienced freedom. *The Journal of Mind and Behavior*, 3(2), 99–126.
2. Gowdy, J. and Krall, L. (2016). The economic origins of ultrasociality. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 39, e92.
3. [OPTIONAL] Schwartz, B. (2000). Self-determination: the tyranny of freedom. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 79–88.
4. [OPTIONAL] Lau, S. and Walter, S. (2020). The representation of freedom in decisions: Good outcomes or real choice? *Philosophical Psychology*, 33(4), 592–623.
5. [OPTIONAL] Brymer, E. and Schweitzer, R. (2013). The search for freedom in extreme sports: A phenomenological exploration. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 14, 865–873.

- (October 11) [Fall break — no class]

- **(October 18) HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY.**

1. Conway, L. G., Bongard, K., Plaut, V., Gornick, L. J., Dodds, D. P., Giresi, T., Tweed, R. G., Repke, M. A., and Houck, S. C. (2017). Ecological origins of freedom: pathogens, heat stress, and frontier topography predict more vertical but less horizontal governmental restriction. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 43(10), 1378–1398.
2. Glymph, T. (2016). “Invisible disabilities”: Black women in war and in freedom. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 160(3), 237–246.
3. [OPTIONAL] Scott, J. C. (2009). *The Art of Not Being Governed*. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
4. [OPTIONAL] de Dijn, A. (2020). *Freedom: An Unruly History*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
5. [OPTIONAL] Ferretti, F. (2017). Evolution and revolution: Anarchist geographies, modernity and poststructuralism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 35(5), 893–912.

• **(October 25) ANTHROPOLOGY I.**

1. Lee, D. (1963). Freedom and social constraint. In D. Bidney, editor, *The Concept of Freedom in Anthropology*, Studies in General Anthropology, 1, pages 61–73. De Gruyter Mouton, The Hague.
2. Lino e Silva, M. and Wardle, H. (2017). Introduction: Testing freedom. In M. Lino e Silva and H. Wardle, editors, *Freedom in Practice: Governance, Autonomy, and Liberty in the Everyday*, Routledge Studies in Anthropology, pages 1–33. Routledge, London and New York.
3. [OPTIONAL] Lino e Silva, M. (2012). *Metafreedom : the carnivalesque of freedom in a Brazilian favela*. Ph.D. thesis, Department of Social Anthropology, School of Philosophy, Anthropology and Film Studies, University of St Andrews.
4. [OPTIONAL] Westcott, M. R. (1994). Freedom and civilization: When more is less. *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie Canadienne*, 35(2), 159–166.

• **(November 1) ANTHROPOLOGY II.**

1. Bonilla-Silva, E. (2019). “Racists,” “class anxieties,” hegemonic racism, and democracy in Trump’s America. *Social Currents*, 6, 14–31.
2. Edelman, M. (2021). Hollowed out heartland, USA: How capital sacrificed communities and paved the way for authoritarian populism. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 82, 505–517.

• **(November 8) ANTHROPOLOGY III.**

1. Oyeshile, O. A. (2007). Resolving the tension between corporate existence and the individual’s freedom in African communal society: the Yoruba example. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 30(4), 278–300.
2. Kanu, I. A. (2017). Igwebuiké as a hermeneutic of personal autonomy in African ontology. *Journal of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy (JATREP)*, 1(2), 11–19.

• **(November 15) POLITICS I.**

1. [OPTIONAL] Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. (2010). Towards a new manifesto? *New Left Review*, 65, 33–61. Translated by Rodney Livingstone.
2. Horkheimer, M. (1966). On the concept of freedom. *Diogenes*, 14(53), 73–81. Translated by Victor A. Velen.
3. Graeber, D. and Wengrow, D. (2018). How to change the course of human history (at least, the part that’s already happened). Eurozine. Available online at <https://www.eurozine.com/change-course-human-history/>.

• **(November 22) POLITICS II.**

1. Reichert, W. O. (1969). Anarchism, freedom, and power. *Ethics*, 79(2), 139–149.
2. Ci, J. (1999). Justice, freedom, and the moral bounds of capitalism. *Social Theory and Practice*, 25(3), 409–438.

• **(November 29)** EDUCATION.

1. Howard, T. C. (2016). Why Black lives (and minds) matter: race, freedom schools & the quest for educational equity. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 85(2), 101–113. The 36th Annual Charles H. Thompson Lecture.
2. Becker, A. (2015). The (im)possibilities of teaching–learning freedom. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 29(5), 70–84.
3. Suissa, J. (2001). Anarchism, utopias and philosophy of education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 35(4), 627–646.

• **(December 6)** CLOSING GENERAL DISCUSSION.

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References

- Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. (2010). Towards a new manifesto? *New Left Review*, 65, 33–61. Translated by Rodney Livingstone.
- Becker, A. (2015). The (im)possibilities of teaching–learning freedom. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 29(5), 70–84.
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