

POLI 4090
THEORIES OF FREEDOM
Professor Dustin Howes
Tuesday and Thursday 1:30-2:50pm
116 Stubbs

Office Hours in 133 Stubbs
Noon-1:15pm on Tuesday and
Thursday or by appointment
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Clockwise from the upper left: Heritage Foundation map of economic freedom; Franklin Delano Roosevelt memorial; Norman Rockwell poster; protestor in Iran.

This class explores various meanings of freedom in works of political philosophy, film, and music.

The first theme we explore is **free thinking**. We ask what it means to think freely and whether such thinking is destructive or creative. Historically, slaves, women, the poor, subjects, and the colonized have been prevented from reading and writing or had little access to education while masters, certain men and rulers were well-schooled. Struggles for freedom go hand in hand with educating oneself. How does free thinking, free speech and education relate to power? What sort of thinking facilitates liberation? Can certain kinds of thinking facilitate repression, slavery, and tyranny?

Second, we will explore the character of the will. For some, having a **free will** requires training and self-control and for others it means I am free to do what I desire in a given moment. For those who believe freedom requires self-control, withdrawal from society and politics is often understood as a precondition for freedom. For others, the free will makes political freedom possible, even if it carries the potential for both good and evil. We explore the extent to which our lives are determined by nature, fate, or God, and ask what the role of the free will in politics is and ought to be.

In the last section of the course we ask what it means to be **politically free** and, in particular, how political freedom relates to sovereignty and ruling. Freedom and ruling seem to be mutually exclusive in that ruling over another limits or constrains that person. Yet most advocates of democracy attempt to square being free with some kind of enforceable legal order. How can we be free and be ruled at the same time? Is it possible for us to *all* be free and *all* be sovereign?

Required Texts

Mahatma Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Cambridge University Press.
John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty*, Everyman Paperbacks.

All other readings are in PDF form on Moodle, as listed in the syllabus.
Print them out, read them, and bring them to class.

Course Assignments and Policies

Freedom Journal (%30)

The class requires purchase of a large notebook to record your thoughts about freedom, class notes and items related to or referencing freedom and liberty. During the semester, I will ask you to periodically free write about certain issues or in response to certain film clips both in and out of class.

In addition, the freedom journal is a place for you to collect and record any references to “freedom” and “liberty” that you hear in ordinary conversation, on television, on the web or read in a book or magazine. Anytime you encounter the term, record it in your journal and think about and write down what you think the word means in this context. If a group of people says they are “fighting for freedom” try to figure out exactly what it is they are trying to achieve. If an advertisement says a product will set you free, what exactly is it promising to do for you?

You will turn in your freedom journal at the end of the semester.

Three Papers

There are three required papers for the course, due on the dates indicated in the course schedule. You will answer a single question for each paper as follows:

Paper One (%20, 4 pages)

1. Are you a free thinker?

Paper Two (%20, 5 pages)

2. Are you free?

Paper Three (%30, 8-10 pages)

3. Are we free?

Each paper asks you to deal with a difficult question in a relatively short space. However, since the course is organized around the themes dealt with by the papers, you will have ample time to think through each question and your freedom journal should inform your papers.

In each paper, you must engage extensively with at least two readings from the course. That means you explain an important idea introduced in two of the readings and either use them to support your thesis or take issue with them.

For additional guidance and the grading criteria for the papers, see the Elements of a Good Paper attached to this syllabus.

Week One

January 16th Introduction to the Course

Part One: Free Thinking

Week Two

January 21st Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), 33-42, 119-128, 151-172

Frederick Douglass, "The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro."

January 23rd *MadMen* Season 2 (2008): Episode 8, "A Night to Remember"

Week Three

January 28th Hannah Arendt, "The answer of Socrates" in *The Life of the Mind* (1971), pp. 166-193.

excerpt from *Schindler's List* (1993)

January 30th "Confessions of a Drone Warrior" in *GQ*, October 23rd, 2013.

Memo by Stephen G. Bradbury to John A. Rizzo regarding "The Use of Certain Techniques in the Interrogation of High Value Detainees." pp. 1-20 [skim and bring to class]

Week Four

February 4th excerpts from *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008)

February 6th excerpts from *Bomb It!* (2007)

Week Five

February 11th John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859): "Introductory" and "The Liberty of Thought and Discussion," pp. 69-123.

February 13th excerpt from *Lenny* (1974)

PAPER ONE DUE: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14TH AT 5PM to Moodle.

Part Two: Free Willing

Week Six

- February 18th Augustine, *The City of God* (~410), Book V: Chapters 8-11, pp. 151-158.
- “Introduction,” “4. Categorical and Hypothetical Imperatives” and “10. Autonomy” in *Kant’s Moral Philosophy*. Entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* by Robert Johnson.
- Immanuel Kant, “Preliminary Concepts of the Metaphysics of Morals” in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), pp. 48—54.
- Immanuel Kant, “Man is Evil by Nature” in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), pp. 27-34.
- February 20th excerpts from *Into Great Silence* (2005) and *Freestyle* (2000)

Week Seven

- February 25th Hannah Arendt, “Duns Scotus and the primacy of the Will” in *Life of the Mind* (1971), pp.125-146
- excerpt from Episode 2 of *The National Parks: America’s Best Idea* (2009)
- February 27th *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (1948), by W. Montgomery Watt.
- Screening of *Self-Made Man* (2005)

Week Eight

- March 4th **[Mardi Gras]**
- March 6th “Buddhism and Freedom” and “The Idea of Freedom in Burma and the Political Thought of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi” in *Asian Freedoms* (1998), pp. 19-37; 187-203.

Week Nine

- March 11th “Merdeka: The Concept of Freedom in Indonesia” in *Asian Freedoms* (1998), pp. 140-160.
- excerpt from *Why has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?* (1989)
- March 13th Hannah Arendt, “What is Freedom?” in *Between Past and Future* (1954) pp. 143-171

PAPER TWO DUE: FRIDAY MARCH 14TH, AT 5:00PM.

Part Three: Political Freedom

Week Ten

March 18th

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 170-174, 249-254.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 22, 23, 36, 44, 51, 186, 198, 211, 227, 257, 259

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, 12, 17, 18, 27

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (1762), I:1-8, II:1-5.

March 20th

excerpts from “Episode 5: Wounded Knee” of *We Shall Remain* (2009)

Week Eleven

March 25th

Hannah Arendt, "The Abyss of Freedom and the Novus Ordo Seclorum", in *Life of the Mind* (1971), pp. 195-217.

March 27th

Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958), pp. 167-217.

Week Twelve

April 1st

Machiavelli, *The Discourses* (1517): I:4-5, I:16-18, I:46, I: 49, III:49

excerpts from *Gladiator* (2000)

April 3rd

Hobbes, “Of the Liberty of Subjects” in *Leviathan* (1668), Chapter XXI

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1714), paragraphs 4-8, 17, 22-24, 61-63

Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), Book XI, Chapters 1-5; Book XII, Chapters 1-4

excerpts from *Secret Ballot* (2001)

Week Thirteen

April 8th

Benjamin Constant, *Liberty of the Ancients and Moderns* (1819), pp. 309-328.

April 10th

Orlando Patterson, “A Woman’s Song: The Female Force and the Ideology of Freedom in Greek Tragedy and Society,” in *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (1991), pp. 106-132.

“My Sister’s Keeper” (2009) from the *New York Times*.

excerpt from *Not for Ourselves Alone* (1999)

Week Fourteen

[Spring Break]

Week Fifteen

April 22nd

John Stuart Mill: *On Liberty* (1859): “Of Individuality, as one of the Elements of Well-being,” “Of the Limits of Authority of Society over the Individual,” pp. 123-185.

April 24th

Barbara Ehrenreich, “Is it Now a Crime to Be Poor?” from *The New York Times*, August 8, 2009

excerpts from *The Colbert Report*: “Nailed ‘Em”

Week Sixteen

April 29th

Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, pp. 1-65.

excerpts from *Gandhi* (1982)

May 1st

Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, pp. 66-119.

excerpts from “Ain’t Scared of Your Jails” in *Eyes on the Prize* (1987)

Final Exam Time: Wednesday May 7th, 12:30pm—2:30pm.

FINAL PAPER DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF EXAMINATION PERIOD

Screening of *Occupation: Dreamland*, 78 min.

Elements of a Good Paper

1. Original and creative insights into the issue at hand and/or novel interpretation of the primary texts. The main purpose of writing a paper is for you to weigh in on a particular issue. Usually this will involve expanding upon the work of a thinker who you believe makes compelling arguments or by taking exception to an argument you think is implausible or not entirely accurate. This is also perhaps the most difficult element of a good paper because there is no formula for creativity. However, it is also the fun part: This is your chance to express and develop your views on some fundamental aspect of politics – take advantage of it!

Subpoint 1: If you mostly agree with an author, you will need to add something to their analysis. For instance, you might apply their insights to a historical or contemporary example or take up a counterargument they did not consider and help them account for it.

Subpoint 2: Almost any statement is technically “an argument.” However, a good thesis and a creative paper will usually involve a claim that people disagree about. For instance, while in some contexts the claim that “The grass is green” might make for a compelling thesis, in most it will not. Try to come up with an argument that you not only think *can* be made, but *needs* to be made.

2. Solid understanding and fair treatment of primary texts. Most of the questions I ask require that the views of a difficult thinker (or thinkers) are explained and explored effectively. This does not mean that you should agree with the authors we read or that the purpose of the paper is to regurgitate what the thinker says. However, it does require that you convey to me that you have a good understanding of the views of the thinker.

Subpoint: Supporting your assertions about a thinker will almost always require relying on evidence from the text. Offering quotations is always preferable to a citation without reference to a particular passage, particularly if you are making a claim about the thinker that is potentially controversial. A crucial part of offering a fair treatment of a thinker is to avoid taking quotes out of context. Page numbers are required for all citations. For texts outside of those assigned for the course, you will need to have a Works Cited page or footnotes with a full citation.

3. Coherent argument and presentation. This involves developing a clear thesis and thinking about how you can structure your paper to support that claim. Your argument will usually be stated early on in the paper and each part of your essay should be informed by your overall thesis and aims.

Subpoint: Good grammar is important to the extent that it affects the coherence of your argument. Make sure that your choice of words guides the reader effectively. For instance, be sure that you do not construct sentences that can be readily interpreted to mean two different things.

Grading Scale

A	papers contain all three of these elements
B	papers contain two of these three elements and attempt all three
C	papers contain one of these three elements and attempt all three
D and F	papers contain none of these three elements and attempt less than three.

Late papers receive a deduction of a full letter grade.