Course description

Nearly all modern ideologies claim freedom as a central value, but there is little agreement on what freedom means and how we can be free. This course examines how the concept of freedom has been understood by different thinkers and ideologies in the modern era. We will study distinctions between different conceptions of freedom and ask what freedom requires from political, economic, and legal institutions. We will pay special attention to the relationship between freedom and democracy, rule of law, capitalism, and work, as well as examining critiques and reconfigurations of freedom by theorists of gender and race.

Assessment

Grades will be determined based on participation (30%) and a 15-page final paper (70%).

Participation and presentations

Active participation and engagement with the materials is expected from all students and forms part of the grade for the course. Each student will be expected to do two 15-minute presentations. The first will be a presentation on the week’s readings, to get the discussion started, the second will be a presentation of your proposed final paper topic on our last session. Presentations will not be graded directly but will be evaluated as part of your participation grade.

Course schedule

Week 1. Introduction


Week 2. Modern Conceptions of Freedom

Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan: Ch. 21
John Locke, *Second Treatise*: Chs. 4, 9

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*: Book I, Chs. 1, 6-8; Book III, Ch. 15

Benjamin Constant, “The Liberty of Ancients Compared with that of Moderns.”

**Week 3. Freedom of Speech and Its Limits**

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Ch.2

Jeremy Waldron, *The Harm in Hate Speech*, Ch. 4


**Week 4. Negative and Positive Freedom**


**Week 5. Republican Freedom and Democracy**


Week 6. Capitalism, Socialism, and Freedom


Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, Ch. 1

Lea Ypi, *Free*, selections

Week 7. Money, Work, and Freedom


Week 8. Feminism and Freedom

Nancy Hirschmann, *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom*, Ch. 3


Week 9. Race and Freedom


Angela Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, Ch. 5.

bell hooks, *Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, Ch. 10

Week 10. Student Presentations