

Pol 398  
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### What is Political Freedom?

MLK in the Birmingham jail, Nazis in Skokie, a battered woman who stays with her batterer, undocumented farm workers in California, Black Lives Matter activists, employees of Carl's Jr's, residents of Washington, D.C., citizens of or Fijian caretaker in Saudi Arabia, voters and non-voters in the US in 2016: politically free?

What is political freedom? Is it a principle, a practice, an activity, a state, a means of governing? What, if anything, secures political freedom? What impedes it? Does it involve being left alone to do as one pleases? Does it require engaging in civic activities like voting or public deliberation? Is it an individual or collective activity? Must political freedom involve consent? Institutions of any particular sort? How does it relate to equality, free will, agency, and autonomy? No human being can survive, much less flourish, without others, so in what sense is anyone free? What schemes of social interdependence count as free? What do theories of social construction, and of normative and regulatory power, do to conventional notions of freedom? Can freedom be constraining? What is and what ought to be the relationship of political freedom to power, equality, stability and community?

This course investigates questions that are arguably the defining concern of theorists of modern (i.e. since the 15<sup>th</sup> century), Western political thought. We focus on canonical material from the last two centuries, contemporary scholarship, and the real world of politics. The course is organized thematically, but with an eye to the history – context and change over time -- of ideas. Our inquiry draws on a range of the methodological traditions or approaches that are housed in the contemporary discipline of political theory. The course is designed to help you to develop a comfortable but critical understanding of these approaches.

### **Course Requirements**

The requirements for this course are designed to promote serious scholarly engagement with texts, ideas and each other. There are few formal lectures. I identify key issues or questions with our texts, provide an on-going account of the flow of the course, readings and assignments, and essential background that may not come through in the readings. Many of class meetings will be co-facilitated by students (more below). As these are dense, multi-layered texts, often you will need to read them more than once. I have limited the amount of reading accordingly. Come to class prepared to discuss the reading critically, imaginatively and insightfully. Attendance, of course, is mandatory.

**Late work:** As a rule, I do not accept late assignments except in the case documented medical emergencies or personal crises (e.g. a death in the family). Please don't ask for extensions otherwise. Discipline can be useful. I hope to help you cultivate a certain amount of it.

More importantly, the writing assignments for this course are carefully sequenced and our classroom discussions will often center on students' written work. For this reason, late work is *especially* problematic. Please note that at key points in the semester, I ask you to turn in work in progress. *Neither I nor your classmates expect perfection in works in progress.* It is imperative that you turn in your work on time so that your peer reviewers and I will have time to read and respond to your work.

**Disability accommodation:** Students with disabilities requiring accommodation should be in touch with me and the director of disability support services (Theresa Lowrie, [disability-services@reed.edu](mailto:disability-services@reed.edu)) within the first two weeks of class in order to make arrangements for suitable accommodation.

**Communication:** I will use email (often via Moodle) to post important announcements about the course. Please be sure to check your Reed email at least once a day so that you will see these messages. You can reach me via email for all sorts of questions, but I also *strongly* encourage you to come talk with me during office hours to discuss your work in progress (if you can't make my posted office hours, just email me and suggest a few alternative times for an appointment). Doing political theory well is hard. If you find yourself frustrated or struggling, please don't despair, and *please* don't keep your struggles to yourself. A quick (or long) conversation can often be the best way out of a research quagmire, so please keep me informed of what you're up to. (You are also welcome to drop by if you have made a particularly exciting discovery or lit upon an especially interesting idea that you just have to share with someone.)

## ASSIGNMENTS

The course assignments are designed to promote serious scholarly engagement with texts, ideas and each other. In addition to facilitating productive in class-discussion, the assignments aim to help you develop your formal public speaking, research and writing skills.

### 1. *Reading and Class Participation*

Your first assignment is to **read** the materials with care. Many of our texts are dense, multi-layered texts. Often you may need to read them more than once. I have limited the length of assignments accordingly.

#### a) *Class Discussion*

Come to class prepared to discuss the reading critically, imaginatively and insightfully.

**Active participation** is essential. If speaking in class is a challenge for you, please let me know. We can work together to address the matter.

**Attendance**, of course, is mandatory. If you miss more than three classes, you run the risk of failing the course.

#### b) *Class Discussion Prompter (CDP): questions and notes*

Each of you will play a special role in directing class discussion twice during the semester. (We will sign up for these days in the second class meeting; you must complete one of these days before spring break.) **You will post 2-3 discussion questions to the course Moodle by 5p the day before class.** In class, you will re-introduce and elaborate on your questions to help direct our inquiry. While I do not require you to meet with me to discuss the materials beforehand, I encourage you to do so.

You and I will co-facilitate the discussion in class. I very much hope that your interests and insights drive the discussion. **To prepare, please write up a paragraph or two (no more!) of notes on each of the following topics. Turn these notes into me by noon the day before class.** I will respond with feedback as quickly as I can. (I may not get back to you by 5p, but don't wait to post your questions to the Moodle.)

- What is the central argument advanced by each of the texts under consideration? [i.e. i. the main question or puzzle; ii. the means (approach or method and material) the author uses to investigate or “answer” the question; iii. their answer; iv. key concepts; ] If you're having trouble understanding the text(s), I encourage you to talk to your peers and/or me about the material.
- How does consideration of one or more of the readings previously completed for this course inform your understanding of the material presently under consideration? Do any of the essays previously read complement, supplement, contradict, and/or challenge the texts now being discussed?
- What criticisms might be directed against the readings at hand? (Obviously, you may use your answer to the second question as a way of working into the third.) Here I want you to consider the limitations, unspoken assumptions, contradictions, etc. you find in the readings.

## 2. *Papers*

### a) *Class Discussion Prompter paper (1250-1500 words)*

**By noon one week following one of your two CDP days,** submit a critical analysis of some aspect of the material you covered. While you may reference other assigned readings, this paper should be rather narrowly focused on the thinker(s) you engaged. The primary goal is to deepen your understanding of one or two thinkers. I find that a particularly solid grasp of one thinker often enhances understanding of others. I encourage you to discuss your paper topics with me and/or with your partner during the week between presentation and submission.

### b) *Application Analysis (1250-1500 words)*

For this assignment, you use the theories/ists to analyze a particular case/issue area *or* the case/issue area to reflect critically upon a theory/theorist. In light of the theoretical material, what do we understand about political freedom in the case? What new view of freedom or *un*freedom is revealed? What questions or concerns does the theoretical material raise? What

“solutions” does it suggest? Alternatively, you may use the case to critically analyze the theories. What strengths or limitations or unstated assumptions of a particular theory does the case expose? In light of the case, how might we strengthen or challenge the theory? Which ever angle you choose (and you should choose one or the other) be sure to define terms and include a clear, succinct description of the key theoretical perspectives, concepts or claims you utilize. These will serve as the basis for class discussion. The material for this essay will come from the syllabus. In addition, you should find 2-3 outside sources – anything from scholarly works to popular press – to incorporate into the analysis.

**A solid draft of the assignment is due** to the Student Assignments section of the course Moodle as a Word doc or PDF twenty-four hours before the day on which we will discuss the topic in class. **The final version – revised per the discussion and feedback in class -- is due** to me, via email at noon the Saturday following the class discussion.

**When you are not turning in a formal essay** on application days, you are expected to read your peers’ drafts, prepare feedback to deliver in class and to formulate your own carefully considered analysis of the case.

**NOTE: you must serve as CDP at least once and turn in either the CDP paper or the Application Analysis BEFORE spring break.**

c) *Final paper (3,000-3,500 words)*

Your final paper will address some aspect of the question, “What is political freedom?” The paper should synthesize materials and ideas we explore over the semester. Your take on the question should be broad enough to enable you to make reference to a significant portion of the materials cover, but narrow enough to avoid being vacuous. Please *do not* engage the same readings you engaged for your discussion prompter paper.

At a minimum, the paper should demonstrate that you understand the logic of the syllabus, i.e. the organization (from the content and significance of negative and positive views of liberty, to questions about the relationship among political freedom, material conditions of global capitalism and the social construction of power) and, of course, the content. It should show that you can employ the more abstract concepts we encounter (e.g., negative and positive liberty, republican freedom, coercion, domination, and repression, autonomy, independence and agency, etc.). And, finally, it should show that you are able to formulate specific examples to illustrate your understanding of these more general concepts. Ideally, the paper demonstrates a creative, insightful, and disciplined engagement with the themes and materials of the course.

To foster a successful writing process, I have broken this assignment into three steps.

1. *Precis (4/2 at 5p, via email)*

In less than one page, identify the puzzle (about the world or theory) or question you want to investigate or address. Why is this an interesting question? What are general issues you are trying to get at in addressing it? How – with which political theoretical approach or “method” and examining what material (literature, policy, discourse, etc) – do you plan to

investigate this question? Why this approach? Why this material? What do you expect to find or conclude?

2. *Draft (4/23 at 5p, via email)*

Ideally, this is a full but rough draft of your final paper. At very least, it should be eight pages, though not necessarily the first eight, of your paper. The aim is to produce a substantial piece of writing and get some feedback on it before you draft the entire paper. You may want to include revised elements from your précis.

Please email the draft – with editorial directions -- to me and your writing peers by **5p on Sunday, April 23**. Read and prepare feedback for your partners, to be delivered in class when they present their work in class (April 24 or April 26).

3. *Class Presentation (April 24 or 26)*

**In class on either April 24 or 26**, you will present the major questions, argument and evidence of your work-in-progress in a well-organized and rehearsed presentation. Your peers and I will give you constructive feedback. In addition to providing you with the important opportunity to hone your public speaking skills, this assignment is aimed at helping you sharpen your analysis. I expect you to incorporate feedback offered and encourage you to discuss it with me after class. As always, I encourage you to discuss your presentation with me beforehand. Do you hate public speaking? Great. Think of this as an opportunity to work on this necessary skill and please, please use me as a resource to help you succeed.

4. *Final Draft*

Please email me your final, brilliant draft on Sunday, May 7 **at noon**.

### **Books and Readings**

The books ordered for this course are listed below. Please obtain the edition/translation listed.

- Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago, 1998.  
Friedman, Milton. *Capitalism and Freedom*, University of Chicago, 2002.  
Hirschmann, Nancy J., *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom*, PUP, 2003.  
Locke, John. *Second Treatise on Government*, Hackett, 1980.  
Locke, John. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Hackett, 1983.  
Mill, John Stuart. *Mill*, Norton, 1996.  
Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels, *Marx-Engels Reader*, Norton, 1978.  
Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vintage Books, 1990.  
Pettit, Philip, *A Theory of Freedom*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

Unless otherwise noted, all other readings are accessible through the linked syllabus on the class Moodle.

## Syllabus

### **Part I: Why Political Freedom and How We'll Study It**

#### Week One

- 1/23 Introduction: What is political freedom?  
King, Jr., ML, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and annotation  
[http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/resources/article/annotated\\_letter\\_from\\_birmingham/](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/resources/article/annotated_letter_from_birmingham/)  
Hirschmann, Nancy. *The Subject of Liberty*, pp. 1-3.  
Berlin, Isaiah. "Two Concepts of Liberty"
- 1/25 (Provisional) Conceptual Framework for Our Study  
Berlin, Isaiah. "Two Concepts of Liberty"

### **Part II: Political Freedom as Negative Liberty**

#### Week Two

- 1/30 Natural Rights and Limited Government  
Locke, John. *Second Treatise*, chapters I-V, VII, VIII.95-99, 119-122, IX
- 2/1 Locke, continued  
----. *Letter Concerning Toleration*

#### Week Three

- 2/6 The Utility of Negative Freedom  
Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*, chapters I-III
- 2/7 **Talk: Michelle Alexander, "The New Jim Crow"**
- 2/8 Mill, continued  
*On Liberty*, chapters IV-V

#### Week Four

- 2/13 Application I: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness  
Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, selection.

### **Part III: Political Freedom as Positive Liberty: Republican and Democratic**

- 2/15 Neo-Classical Republican Freedom: Non-Domination  
Pettit, Phillip. *A Theory of Freedom*, Introduction, chapters 1 and 4

#### Week Five

- 2/20 Pettit, continued  
*A Theory of Freedom*, chapters 5 and 6  
 Hirschmann, 23-30.  
 Markell, Patchen, “The Insufficiency of Non-Domination” (e-reserves)
- 2/22 Pettit, continued  
*A Theory of Freedom*, chapters 7, Conclusion  
 Urbanati, Nadia, “Competing for Liberty: The Republican Critique of Democracy”  
 (on e-reserves)

Week Six

- 2/27 Republican or Democratic (?) Freedom  
 Arendt, Hannah, “What is Freedom?” *Between Past and Future*, (e-reserves)  
 Kateb, George, “Freedom and Worldliness in the Thought of Hannah Arendt” (e-reserves)
- 3/1 Arendt, continued  
 ----. *The Human Condition*, 1-16, 22-69.  
 Zerilli, Linda, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, 125-164, (e-reserves)

Week Seven

- 3/6 Arendt, continued  
 ----. *The Human Condition*, 175-199, 230-236.  
 Ranciere, Jacques, “Does Democracy Mean Something?” (e-reserves)  
<http://www.hannaharendtcenter.org/jacques-ranciere-and-hannah-arendt-on-democratic-politics-2/>  
 Brown, Wendy. *Undoing the Demos*, pp. 201-210 (e-reserves)
- 3/8 Application II: Black Lives Matter  
 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation*, “From #Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation” (e-reserves)  
<http://blacklivesmatter.com/>

**SPRING BREAK**

**March 12-18**

**Part IV: Political Freedom and Capitalism**

Week Eight

- 3/20 Freedom by Capitalism  
 Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, Introduction, Ch. 1-2.  
<http://www.manhattan-institute.org/>
- 3/22 Unfreedom by Capitalism

Marx, Karl, "On the Jewish Question"

Week Nine

- 3/27 Marx, continued  
-----, "Estranged Labor"  
-----, "On James Mill"
- 3/29 Freedom, Capitalism and Questions of Race, Class and Care  
Roberts, Dorothy, "Welfare Reform and Economic Freedom" (e-reserves)  
Reed, Adolf, "Marx, Race, and Neoliberalism," (e-reserves)
- 4/2    **Precis due at 5p, via email****

Week Ten

- 4/3    Application III: Care and Neoliberal (Global) Capitalism  
<http://prospect.org/article/nanny-chain>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkHq\\_XlzfO0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkHq_XlzfO0)

**Part V: Political Freedom of Non-Sovereign Agents**

- 4/5    Freedom and Social Construction  
Foucault, Michel. *History of Sexuality: Vol. I*, parts 1-3  
Gutting, Gary, "Introduction: Michel Foucault: A User's Manual," *Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, 1-27. (e-reserves)

Week Eleven

- 4/10    Foucault, continued  
*History of Sexuality: Vol I*, parts 4-5  
"Ethics of the Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom" (e-reserves)
- 4/12    Hirschmann, Nancy J., *The Subject of Liberty*, chapters 3 and 7

Week Twelve

- 4/17    **Speaker: Nancy Hirschmann, "Feminist Freedom"****
- 4/19    Zerilli, Linda. *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, introduction and conclusion

Week Thirteen

- 4/23    **Final Paper Drafts due at 5p, via email****
- 4/24    Student Presentations and Course Review
- 4/26    Student Presentations and Course Review