

THEORIES OF FREEDOM

Elective course for the following degrees: Philosophy / Political Sciences and Philosophy

Academic year 2024/2025

Second Semester

Thursdays and Fridays 13:00-15:00

Instructors: Emma A. Ingala Gómez, Gavin Rae (Department of Logic and Theoretical Philosophy)

Office hours: By appointment at eaingala@ucm.es

Course Description

Freedom is one of the most recurrent philosophical concepts and at the same time one of the vaguest, most protean, and difficult to apprehend and define. Intertwined with a bundle of issues/topics such as agency, responsibility, power, autonomy, or resistance —to name but a few—, it is often invoked as a core metaphysical, ontological, ethical, political, and aesthetic notion. In this course we will explore three understandings of freedom that take as their point of depart (1) the individual; (2) the community; and (3) the processes of subjectivation through which subjects are produced as free or subjected individuals. These different approaches will allow us to gain a better and nuanced understanding of what it means to be free, on the possibility or impossibility of being free, on whether everybody wants to be free, or if rather the primary desire is for servitude, subordination, and subservience. The guiding contention of this course is that —following Wendy Brown (1995: 6)— despite its ubiquity, freedom is not a philosophical absolute but a relational, historical, and contextual practice.

Classes will be conducted under the form of reading seminars. The instructor will introduce each of the discussed texts and topics, and subsequently special emphasis will be given to group discussions and critical and collaborative thinking. Students are required to complete the assigned readings beforehand and come prepared with questions and contributions regarding each week's texts. The required readings and materials will be available at the course's Virtual Campus.

Contents

- 1. *Individuals, Autonomous Persons, Free (Wo)Men***
 - 1.1. Freedom, independence, and autonomy (Isaiah Berlin)
 - 1.2. We are condemned to be free (Jean-Paul Sartre)
 - 1.3. Freedom in situation (Simone de Beauvoir)
- 2. *Community, Plurality, Non-Sovereignty, and Freedom*** (Hannah Arendt)
- 3. *De-centering the Subject: Subjections, Subjectivations, Subaltern Subjectivities and Freedom***
 - 3.1. The dark side of subjectivity: not wanting to be free, necessity, and not knowing what we want (Étienne de la Boétie, Baruch Spinoza, Sigmund Freud)
 - 3.2. On subjection: Power, discipline, governmentality (Michel Foucault I)
 - 3.3. On subjectivation: The care of the self (Michel Foucault II)
 - 3.4. Power, norms, and performativity (Judith Butler)
 - 3.5. Age, race, class, sex, and religion: What subject of freedom? (Audre Lorde, Saba Mahmood)

3.6. Matter, bodies, and freedom (Elizabeth Grosz, Catherine Malabou)

Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to changes due to unforeseen circumstances. Any changes will be announced via the Virtual Campus.

Week 1 (12/09 & 13/09): **Introduction and course overview.**

-Recommended reading: Brown, Wendy (1995), 'Introduction: Freedom and the Plastic Cage', in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 3-29.

Week 2 (19/09 & 20/09): **Freedom, independence, and autonomy.**

-Berlin, Isaiah (2002 [1958]), 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 166-217.

Week 3 (26/09 & 27/09): **We are condemned to be free.**

-Sartre, Jean-Paul (1978 [1943]), 'Being and Doing: Freedom' [excerpt], in *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, New York: Pocket Books, pp. 433-489.

Week 4 (03/10 & 04/10): **Freedom in situation.**

-de Beauvoir, Simone (2011 [1949]), 'Introduction', 'The Independent Woman', and 'Conclusion', in *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, London: Vintage Books, pp. 3-17 [23-39 of the pdf], pp. 737-768 [813-847 of the pdf], and pp. 769-784 [848-863 of the pdf].

-de Beauvoir, Simone (1965 [1960]), *The Prime of Life*, trans. Peter Green, Middlesex: Penguin, pp. 14-16 and 434.

Week 5 (10/10 & 11/10): **Community, plurality, non-sovereignty, and freedom.**

-Arendt, Hannah (1961), 'What is Freedom?', in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, New York: The Viking Press, pp. 143-171.

Week 6 (17/10 & 18/10): **The dark side of subjectivity: not wanting to be free, necessity, and not knowing what we want.**

-de la Boétie, Étienne (2008 [1577]), *The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*, trans. Harry Kurz, Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, pp. 39-80.

-Selection of texts by Baruch Spinoza (*Ethics and Political Treatise*).

-Selection of texts by Sigmund Freud.

Week 7 (24/10 & 25/10): **On subjection: power, discipline, governmentality.**

-Foucault, Michel (1978 [1976]), 'Method', in *The History of Sexuality vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Pantheon Books, pp. 92-102.

-Foucault, Michel (1977 [1975]), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage Books, pp. 136-138, p. 170, pp. 215-228.

-Foucault, Michel (2007), 'What is Critique?', in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), pp. 41-51 and 75-76.

-Foucault, Michel (1982), 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 777-795.

Week 8 (31/10): Revision week.

Week 9 (07/11 & 08/11): **On subjectivation: The care of the self.**

-Foucault, Michel (1997 [1982]), 'Technologies of the Self', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984 (volume 1)*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et. al., New York: The New Press, pp. 224-228.

-Foucault, Michel (1997 [1984]), 'The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984 (volume 1)*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et. al., New York: The New Press, pp. 281-301.

-Foucault, Michel (1997 [1981]), 'Sexuality and Solitude', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984 (volume 1)*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et. al., New York: The New Press, pp. 175-184.

-Foucault, Michel (1997 [1982]), 'The Hermeneutics of the Subject', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984 (volume 1)*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et. al., New York: The New Press, pp. 93-106.

Week 10 (14/11 & 15/11): **Power, norms, and performativity.**

-Butler, Judith (1997), 'Introduction', in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 1-30.

-Butler, Judith (2009), 'Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics', *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana*, vol. 4, n. 3, pp. i-xiii.

-Butler, Judith (2002), 'Bodies and Power, Revisited', *Radical Philosophy*, n. 114, pp. 13-19.

-Butler, Judith (2020), 'Nonviolence, Grievability, and the Critique of Individualism', in *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind*, New York: Verso, pp. 27-65.

Week 11 (21/11 & 22/11): **Age, race, class, sex, and religion: What subject of freedom?**

-Lorde, Audre (1984 [1980]), 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference', in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, pp. 114-123.

-Mahmood, Saba (2005), 'The Subject of Freedom', in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 1-39.

-Mahmood, Saba (2012), 'Religious Freedom, the Minority Question, and Geopolitics in the Middle East', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 54, n. 2, pp. 418-446.

Week 12 (28/11 & 29/11): Student Presentations.

Week 13 (05/12): **Matter, bodies, and freedom.**

-Grosz, Elizabeth (2010), 'Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom', in Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (eds.), *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, pp. 139-157.

-Malabou, Catherine (2008 [2004]), 'Introduction: Plasticity and Flexibility—For a Consciousness of the Brain' and 'Plasticity's Field of Action', in *What Should We Do*

with Our Brain?, trans. Sebastian Rand, New York: Fordham University Press, pp. 1-31.

Week 14 (12/12 & 13/12): Revision week and assessment.

Evaluation

The mode of assessment is through:

1. An ***in-class presentation*** of 15 minutes on week 12 on one of the topics, concepts, problems or arguments (broadly understood) examined in class. Detailed instructions and guidelines will be provided. ***25% of the final grade.***
2. An in-class ***final exam*** consisting of two parts: (A) a block of ***short questions*** (30% of the grade) and (B) an ***essay*** developing a coherent and detailed argument on a topic that will be provided on week 10 (70% of the grade). ***75% of the final grade.***

Active (and professional) participation in class discussions will be positively evaluated.