Freedom

Seminar Leader: Katalin Makkai
Location: Seminar Room 2
Times: Wednesday 9:00 – 10:30
                   Friday 13:30 – 15:00
Email: k.makkai@berlin.bard.edu

Course description

Notions of “freedom” lies at the heart of much thinking about the life well lived and its interpersonal, social, ethical and political conditions. In theory as in practice we regularly speak of such forms of freedom as the freedom of speech, freedom of action, and freedom of expression. Whether or not a person does something of her own free will makes a difference to how we think of her conduct. In this first Ethics and Politics concentration seminar, we explore a range of conceptions of freedom from the ancients to the moderns. We begin with the notion of “self-rule” in Plato and Aristotle. Turning to the modern period, we read Locke and Rousseau, juxtaposing the predominantly “negative” conception of freedom emphasized in Locke (freedom from interference) with the more “positive” conception articulated in Rousseau in terms of a kind of substantive self-relation that is inseparable from certain relations with others. We examine Kant’s emphasis on individual autonomy as freedom of the will (and as articulated in terms of a commitment to morality that involves my not being determined by my natural, desiring self), paying attention to its sources in Rousseau’s thought. We compare Mill’s articulation of freedom in terms of my desires and impulses being my own and expressing my character: freedom as involving self-expression and the development of individual identity. The course closes with Nietzsche’s and Beauvoir’s critiques and radicalizations of modern conceptions of autonomy. We center on the ways in which these authors draw attention to the historical and pernicious character of supposedly atemporal characterizations of ideals of freedom.

Requirements and grading

25% Seminar participation
20% First essay: 1500-2100 words (~4-6 pp.), due 23:59 Friday October 25
20% Second essay: 1500-2100 words (~4-6 pp.), due 23:59 Friday November 22
35% Third essay: 2100-2800 words (~6-8 pp.), due 23:59 Friday December 20

Attendance at all classes is essential. Seminar participation involves productive contribution to class discussion, grounded in a close and complete reading of the text assigned for each class.
Bard College Berlin’s policy regarding late papers (reproduced from the Student Handbook):

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

**Weekly schedule**

1. **W Sept. 4**  
   Plato, *Meno*  
   **F Sept. 6**  
   Plato, *Meno* (continued)  
2. **W Sept. 11**  
   **F Sept. 13**  
   Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 3.1-5, 6.1-3, 6.5, 6.8-9  
3. **W Sept. 18**  
   **F Sept. 20**  
   Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 6.13, 7.1-10 (continued)  
4. **W Sept. 25**  
   Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chs. 1-4, 6 (§§ 52-65), 7 (§§ 84-94)  
   **F Sept. 27**  
   Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chs. 8 (§§ 95-100, 113-122), 9, 11, 15  
5. **W Oct. 2**  
   Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Preface, Exordium, and Part One including Note XV (p. 218)  
   **F Oct. 4**  
   Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Part Two  
   *[Fall break]*  
6. **W Oct. 16**  
   writing class (prep for first essay)  
   **F Oct. 18**  
   Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Introductory Note and Bk. 1  
7. **W Oct. 23**  
   Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, Bk. 2  
   **F Oct. 25**  
   Rousseau, *On the Social Contract*, selections TBA from Bks. 3 and 4  
   **First essay due**  
8. **W Oct. 30**  
   Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Preface and Section I  
   **F Nov. 1**  
   Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section II
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td>W Nov. 6</td>
<td>Kant, <em>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</em>, Section II (continued)</td>
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<td>W Nov. 13</td>
<td>Mill, <em>On Liberty</em>, Chs. 3-4</td>
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<td>F Nov. 15</td>
<td>writing class (prep for second essay)</td>
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<td><strong>Second essay due</strong></td>
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<td>W Nov. 27</td>
<td>Nietzsche, <em>On the Genealogy of Morals</em>, Preface and First Essay</td>
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<td>F Nov. 29</td>
<td>Nietzsche, <em>On the Genealogy of Morals</em>, Second Essay</td>
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<td>F Dec. 6</td>
<td>Beauvoir, <em>The Second Sex</em>, Vol. II Pt. One Ch. 1</td>
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<td>W Dec. 18</td>
<td>Completion Week</td>
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<tr>
<td>F Dec. 20</td>
<td>Completion Week</td>
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<td><strong>Third essay due</strong></td>
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