

Freedom in 19th C European Social and Political Philosophy

(Taught in Summer 2019)

I. Content Overview

This is a reading-intensive course focused on a particular period in the history of social and political philosophy. It also focuses on a particular school of thought, Hegelianism, and the reactions to it. Hegelianism arose in central Europe during and after the philosophical movement known as German Idealism, in the work of G. W. F. Hegel and responses to it. German Idealism was a complex movement that made contributions to many areas of philosophy, but arguably its most important contributions were to moral, social, and political philosophy—in particular, in its singular focus on the topic of human freedom.

Following Immanuel Kant, German Idealist philosophers aimed to investigate how it is that human beings, or *subjects*, are different from mere things, or *objects*. Their answers involved describing a variety of ways in which human beings have a capacity for freedom or self-determination that mere things do not.

This course begins by focusing on Hegel's reflections on what makes a society rational and free; that is, what makes a society capable of fulfilling the deepest needs of human beings. Hegel began with a series of questions about the relationship between the individual and society. For example, if the human being's nature is to be free and self-determining, how can they be reconciled to a society of other free beings? Does society limit this freedom, or is it actually the source of this freedom? Hegel answered that the form of modern society guaranteed and realized human freedom.

In the 1830s and 40s, after Hegel's death, reformers and revolutionaries failed to win greater political equality and democracy in Europe. His optimism about the current form of modern society began to seem unwarranted. A series of post-Hegelian philosophers influenced by many of his ideas about human freedom applied his ideals to actual society and found it seriously lacking. We will focus on Karl Marx, who developed the most detailed analysis of the social and economic arrangements of modern society, and argued that these arrangements actually prevented human freedom from being realized. He named these arrangements capitalism, and the social and political critique he developed of capitalism became a central part of politics in the 20th century and beyond.

Hegelianism, Marxism, and the ideas they generated remain alive today in their influence on traditions of social justice, politics of liberation, socialism and communism, feminism, anti-colonialism, and anti-racism. This course will focus on their early historical trajectory, with particular attention to its treatment of human freedom—disputes over its character, the extent to which it depends on existing within particular social institutions—and the aptness of the actual social relations of the modern world for promoting human freedom.

II. Format Overview & Learning Objectives

Please note that although this class does not have prerequisites, it is not strongly recommended as a first philosophy class on account of the difficulty of some of the texts we will focus on, and will not serve as an introduction to doing academic work in philosophy.

This course takes the format typical to those given in philosophy departments, which means that we will focus on reading selected texts very carefully in order to examine 1) the particular claims and viewpoints presented within each excerpt of text we read, and 2) the arguments given in support of these viewpoints. You may find that compared to some courses given in other disciplines, we cover somewhat less an amount of reading; however, we will read the texts we do more closely and carefully than sometimes happens in the courses for other disciplines.

We may read somewhat less but what we do read is often extremely dense and difficult—especially because it comes from a very different historical and philosophical context than our own. You will need to read each text more than once in order to begin to understand it. If you do, you will find that these texts are immensely rich and rewarding, revealing new things to you each time you look at them. You will not understand everything said—even those of us who study these texts for years do not understand everything, and I have many questions about these texts I hope we can explore together. If you attempt to chew on this dense material, you will find that the philosophical activity itself *is* the chewing and the difficulty—the activity of philosophy is having new questions and ideas raised for you that you can't immediately make sense of. In this case, you might find it especially puzzling and rewarding given the topics focused on by the philosophers in this course include modern society and our place in it.

It is crucial that you read each text *before* class, and you will also find it helpful to reread the texts after class in order to incorporate new understandings we develop during the class. When you read, you should write notes in the margins or on a separate document, trying to write down what you think the key ideas and arguments are, as well as what terms or arguments you don't understand. The focus is to get a sense of how the philosophers we read make the case for the viewpoints—not to merely get a summary of some of their key ideas, but rather to enter into their argumentative stance and see *why* they make their claims that they do.

By the end of the course students will:

1. Have an introductory understanding of how questions in social and political philosophy developed in the 19th century from German Idealism into Marxism and other radical critiques of society
2. Have a working familiarity with key concepts in Hegelian, post-Hegelian, and Marxist philosophy such that they could read 20th century and contemporary writings of critical theory and philosophy influenced by these traditions
3. Have gained significant practice reading and interpreting difficult historical texts

III. **Assignments and Grading**

Reading Response Questions: Students will have to submit reading response questions by 1pm on the day of each class. Please email the responses directly to me in .docx format. Late submissions will not be accepted. These reading responses will consist of several short questions about the text for that day to be answered by the student. The completion of these, *not* their correctness, will count towards the grade of the class, as shown in the breakdown below.

Attendance and Participation: Students will be expected to attend every class, because given the 6-week, nearly daily nature of the course, it would be very easy to fall behind. More than 5 unexcused absences will result in automatic failure of the class.

Papers: There will be two papers, each 1500-1700 words. I will set prompts for the papers, or if you want to modify or propose a different topic, you must meet with me to discuss and create an appropriate prompt. The first paper is due Sunday, June 16 at 11:59pm, and the second paper is due Sunday, June 30 at 11:59pm. The papers will be submitted through NYU Classes.

Final Exam: There will be an electronic final exam consisting of long answer questions due Friday, July 7 by 11:59pm. It will be take-home and open book, but I will ask you to time yourself.

Grade Breakdown: I'll calculate all grades using a 4.0 scale. The final grade will be:

20% Reading Responses

20% Attendance and Participation

20% Paper 1

20% Paper 2

20% Final Exam

IV. **Course Policies**

Accommodations for students with disabilities: Academic accommodations are available to any students with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should register with NYU's Henry and Lucy Moses Center for students with Disabilities, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, New York NY 10003-6675. Tel. 212-998-4980. Web site www.nyu.edu/csd

Laptops & Cellphones: Use of cellphones is not permitted during class. If you need to use a laptop for a legitimate learning related purpose or for purposes of disability accommodation, talk to me after class or send me an email. Unless you have received explicit approval, use of laptops is not permitted. Even if you receive approval for use of a laptop, please disconnect from the internet during class time.

V. **Readings and Texts**

Required Texts: Students are required to acquire two texts for this course. It's important that you acquire the same edition/translation:

1. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Ed. Allen Wood. Cambridge Press.

2. *The Marx-Engels Reader* (Second Edition). Ed. Robert C. Tucker. Norton.

All other texts will be posted in PDF form on the NYU Classes site for the course.

Optional, Background and Secondary Texts: The following are some recommendations of reading that will provide either helpful background for the material in this course, or analysis of some of it.

Primary texts:

1. Rousseau, *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*
2. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
3. J. G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*

Secondary texts:

4. Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*
5. Frederick Neuhouser, "Hegel's Social Philosophy" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* (available online through NYU Library)
6. Frederick Neuhouser, *Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory*
7. Frederick Neuhouser, "Freedom, Dependence, and the General Will," *The Philosophical Review* (102) 1993.
8. Allen Wood, "Hegel's Political Philosophy" in *Blackwell Companion to Hegel* (available online through NYU Library)
9. Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*
10. Allen Wood, *Karl Marx*
11. Lectures on Marxism, Raymond Geuss, University of Cambridge (Youtube: <https://youtu.be/tFW6EjxP2K8>)
12. Lectures on Marxist social science, Erik Olin Wright, University of Wisconsin, Madison (<https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/sociology621-2011.htm>)
13. Lectures on Nietzsche, Raymond Geuss, University of Cambridge (Youtube: https://youtu.be/2fTnEB_r_6Q)

VI. Office Hours

I will hold regular office hours from 2-3 on Wednesdays, or by appointment.

VII. Schedule

Below is a schedule for the course describing what we will cover each day and week. The required reading that is listed below a day must be read **before** that day's class, to be discussed in class on that date.

Please always bring the relevant texts to class as we will read from them in class.

Again, you will need to read each text more than once in order to begin to understand it. It is crucial that you read each text **before** class, and you will also find it helpful to reread the texts after class in order to incorporate new understandings we develop during the class. When you read, you should write notes in the margins or on a separate document, trying to write down what you think the key ideas and arguments are, as well as what terms or arguments you don't understand.

The further readings listed are not usually direct commentaries or secondary literature on the required reading for that day (when I do think it will help directly with the required reading, I've called it instead "optional reading"). Instead, the idea of the further readings is generally to give you an example of a piece of later writing that was influenced by the ideas in the required reading for that day, and that may shed light on different aspects of the ideas

Daniel Brinkerhoff Young

contained in it. Unfortunately, we normally won't have time to discuss these further readings much in class.

Part 1 – Rousseau and Hegel on freedom and the self

Class 1 – Rousseau on freedom

Required reading:

Rousseau, excerpts from *On the Social Contract* (1762) (Book I, all; Book IV, Ch. I-II)

Optional reading:

Raymond Geuss, "Freedom as an Ideal," from *Outside Ethics* (1995/2005)

Class 2 – Hegel on freedom in modern society

Required reading:

Hegel, excerpts from *Lectures on Philosophy of History* (1822) (pg. 12-14; 19-24; 40-49)

Optional reading:

Fichte, excerpts from *Foundations of Natural Right* (1797) (§§1-4)

Class 3 – Self-determination, relation of the self to others, mutual recognition

Required reading:

Hegel, 'Self-Consciousness' and 'Desire,' from *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) (§§173-186)

Optional reading:

Alexandre Kojève, "In Place of an Introduction," *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (1939) (pg. 3-15)

Class 4 – Unequal recognition, domination, and the self

Required reading:

The 'Master-Slave Dialectic,' from *Phenomenology of Spirit* (§§187-196)

Optional reading:

Alexandre Kojève, "In Place of an Introduction," *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (pg. 15-30)

Part 2 – Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*

Class 5 – The principles of a rational society and the freedom of rational subjects

Required reading:

Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (1820), Preface (pg. 9-23; focus especially on pg. 11-12 and 20-23) and Introduction (§§4-10; 23; 27-30; 33)

Class 6 – 'Abstract Right,' property, and 'Morality'

Required reading:

Philosophy of Right (§§34-49; 65-67; 71-72; 107)

Class 7 – Introduction to 'Ethical Life,' the rational social order, and 'the Family'

Required reading:

Philosophy of Right (§§142-155; 158-163; 169-170)

Further reading:

Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture" from *The Wretched of the Earth* (on the relationship between culture, politics, and freedom in anti-colonial struggle) (1961)

Daniel Brinkerhoff Young

Class 8 – ‘Civil Society,’ the market economy, and individual needs

Required reading:

Philosophy of Right (§§182-205; 230; 236-248; 253-256)

Further reading:

Axel Honneth, excerpts from *The Struggle for Recognition* (1992)

Part 3 – The Left-Hegelian revolt against Hegel

Class 9 – ‘The State,’ political sovereignty, and universal interests

Required reading:

Philosophy of Right (§§257-269; 273 main text; 276-278; 287; 297)

Further reading:

Charles Taylor, “Atomism” (1985)

Class 10 – Feuerbach’s philosophical revolution

Required reading:

Feuerbach, Introduction to *The Essence of Christianity* (1841)

Class 11 – Marx on civil society: alienation, work, and human nature

Required reading:

Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (pg. 66-84)

Further reading:

Frantz Fanon, “Concerning Violence” and Conclusion from *The Wretched of the Earth* (on colonialism and alienation; see especially pgs. 35-61, 83-95, and Conclusion) (1961)

Class 12 – Materialism: the relationship between social formations and human life

Required reading:

Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 (pg. 84-96)

Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (1845-46) (pg. 147-165)

Further reading:

Tommie Shelby, “Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory,” in *The Philosophical Forum*, Volume XXXIV, No. 2. (2003)

Shulamith Firestone, “The Dialectic of Sex,” from *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970)

Part 4 – Freedom after Hegel

Class 13 – Marx on the state and political freedom

Required reading:

Marx, Part 1 of “On the Jewish Question” (1843) (pg. 26-46)

Further reading:

Carl Wittman, “A Gay Manifesto,” and Response from the Red Butterfly Collective (1970)

Class 14 – Freedom in one’s relation to oneself (or, another response to Hegel)

Required reading:

Kierkegaard, excerpts from *The Sickness Unto Death* (1848)

Class 15 – The class struggle, dynamics of capitalism, and collective freedom

Daniel Brinkerhoff Young

Required reading:

Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) (pg. 473-500)

Further reading:

Selma James, "Sex, Race, and Class" (1974) in *Sex, Race, and Class: The Perspective of Winning*

Class 16 – Beginning Marx's mature analysis of capitalism: commodities, value, money

Required reading:

Marx, *Capital, Vol. I* (1867) (pg. 302-336)

Further reading:

György Lukács, excerpts from "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" from *History and Class Consciousness* (1923)

Part 5 – Marx's mature analysis of capitalism

Class 17 – Labor-power as commodity, surplus-value, profit

Required reading:

Capital, Vol. I (pg. 336-361)

Optional reading:

G. A. Cohen, "The Labor Theory of Value and the Concept of Exploitation" (1979)

Class 18 – Struggle over the length of the working day

Required reading:

Capital, Vol. I (pg. 361-384)

Further reading:

Claudia Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!" (1949)

Class 19 – The division of labor, the factory, freedom and the workplace

Required reading:

Capital, Vol. I (pg. 384-419)

Further reading:

Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community" (on wageless work in the home) (1972)

Class 20 – Immiseration, surplus population, primitive accumulation

Required reading:

Capital, Vol. I (pg. 419-438)

Further reading:

Cedric J. Robinson, excerpts on racial capitalism from *Black Marxism* (1983)

Utsa Patnaik and Prabhat Patnaik, excerpts from *A Theory of Imperialism* (2017) with foreword by Akeel Bilgrami

Part 6 – The relationship between social history and freedom

Class 21 – Nietzsche on responsibility, debt, and contract

Required reading:

Nietzsche, Preface and Second Treatise of *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887) (pg. 1-7; 35-50, focus primarily on the Second Treatise text)

Further reading:

Daniel Brinkerhoff Young

Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1977)

Class 22 – The historical legacy of past social practices

Required reading:

Second Treatise of *On the Genealogy of Morality* (pg. 50-66)

Further reading:

Michel Foucault, excerpts from *Discipline and Punish* (1975)

VIII. Further Resources

Moses Center: Academic accommodations are available to any students with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should register with NYU's Henry and Lucy Moses Center for students with Disabilities, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, New York NY 10003-6675. Tel. 212-998-4980.

Website: www.nyu.edu/csd

University Learning Center: The University Learning Center's mission is to assist students in developing the knowledge base, skills, and strategies that will help them to become confident, independent, and active learners. Its various academic support services are intended to help students meet the challenge of NYU's rigorous academic standards.

Website: <https://www.nyu.edu/students/academic-services/university-learning-centers.html>

Writing Center: The Writing Center is a place where any NYU student can get help with his or her writing. It is a place where one-on-one teaching and learning occur, as students work closely with faculty and experienced peer tutors at every stage of the writing process and on any piece of. Website: <https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/ewp/writing-center.html>

Wellness Exchange: The Wellness Exchange is your greatest mental health resource at NYU. Call the 24-hour hotline at (212) 443-9999, chat via the Wellness Exchange app anytime, speak with a certified counselor about any day-to-day challenges or health concerns, including medical issues, stress, depression, sexual assault, anxiety, etc. No concern is too big or too small. Website: <https://www.nyu.edu/students/health-and-wellness/wellness-exchange.html>

NYU Immigrant Defense Initiative: The NYU Immigrant Defense Initiative (IDI) offers free and confidential legal services to NYU students and employees, and their immediate family members, on their immigration cases. Contact IDI at immigrant.defense@law.nyu.edu or (212) 998-6435.