

Freedoms in a Complex World

CERS-2001

Starr King School for the Ministry – Graduate Theological Union

Fall Semester 2019

Instructor Information

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Appointments upon contact via email.

Meeting Dates and Times

Tuesdays, 9:40am – 12.30pm

Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/6347991496>

Course Description

The course discusses the inadequacy of Western classical interpretations of freedom. First, it presents interpretations of freedom such as: freedom to be a moral human being; freedom of choosing the authentic self; freedom as fight for the change of the shared world and community. Second, the course investigates how these Western classical interpretations of freedom must be reconsidered in light of multiple perspectives and contemporary challenges, such as: the problem of injustice in freedom as existential choice, as analyzed by Black Existentialism; the compatibility of Christian mythology within the globalized world; the clash between law and freedom in the urgent issue of migration in the US southern borders and the Mediterranean Sea.

Learning Objectives

During this course, students will:

- Read and analyze works and ideas of first and second literature always with a critical look, and pass such works and ideas under the scrutiny of their unbiased reason.
- Integrate and enrich the topics of the course with their perspectives, points of view, opinions, and experiences, in order to make everybody's learning experience more meaningful.

- Contribute actively to the discussion of the topics presented in each class, by confronting their experience of (the different kinds of) freedom with the philosophical and theological analysis and generalization of these freedoms.
- Propose their solution to current political and social situations that challenge the
- Reinforce the attitude of never being afraid to challenge authors and ideas, even the most respected ones, when the arguments supporting them seem unconvincing. Always question a statement before assuming it. *Sapere aude!*

Learning Outcomes

After successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- Synthesize different philosophical and theological approaches to the issue of freedom, and connect classical references and authors to each approach.
- Autonomously reflect on, and question, the adequacy of well-established ideas of freedom in light of the challenges of contemporary world.
- Realize a double approach: interpreting reality in light of some general ideas, and vice-versa modifying general ideas in light of specific realities.
- Reconstruct the historical steps that led to the formulation of ideas of freedom, and to their overcoming.

Course Assignments

The evaluation is: 25 % attendance; 25 % discussion; 50 % final essay.

Concerning the final essay, students will be asked to write a short (max 6 pages) reflective essay on the topics of the course and send it to the instructor via Moodle by the 31st of December 2019. The last day of course the instructor will present an innovative method for the redaction of the essay: the method of the dissertation, typical of the French Academic system. The method of dissertation engages the students' creativity and it encourages them to present their own original opinion on the topic. Moreover, this method is very effective in helping the students to organize their thoughts in a cogent way; as such, it is very helpful for the redaction of scientific papers. Students are invited, but not compelled, to use this method. The choice of the method will not influence in any way the grade.

Grading

Threshold of attendance positive evaluation is 70 % of classes.

Positive evaluation of discussions consists in the fact that each student should autonomously intervene and ask a question to the whole classroom on course's topics at least once.

The final essay is evaluated in terms of originality, clarity of the argumentation, and pertinence with the assigned topic. The essay must be submitted through Moodle.

Students can request letter grades. If a student is taking a course for a grade, they must notify the instructor.

Required Text

Angela Y. Davis. *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*. Haymarket Books, 2016. ISBN: 978-1608465644. Price: 15.15 \$

Richard T. Hughes. *Myths America Lives By: White Supremacy and the Stories That Give Us Meaning*. University of Illinois Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-0252083754. Price: 14.65 \$

Linwood G. Vereen, et al. "Black Existentialism: Extending the Discourse on Meaning and Existence." *The Journal of Humanist Counselling* 56/1 (2017): 72-84. On-line publication.

Videos on YouTube and other on-line platforms will be defined according to students' interests.

Course Schedule

Class 1, September 10th: Introduction to the topics of the course. Discussion on the uses and abuses of freedom terminology in contemporary political scenario.

Class 2, September 17th: The first classical concept of freedom: freedom as lack of impediments to the motion. Different interpretations of what "motion" is: physical motion, normative motion. Discussion on the idea of jail as punishment with annihilation of freedom.

Class 3, September 24th: The second classical concept of freedom: freedom as realization of the law. Distinction between realization of the moral law and realization of a societal norm. Discussions with students on the differences between constitution, law, norm, rule, conduct, and the freedom related to these concepts.

Class 4, October 1st: The third classical concept of freedom: freedom as self-education, or as self-choice of one's own vocation. Presentation of the aesthetic, literary aspect of this concept of

freedom. Discussion with the students on the concept of existential choice, also with reference to life examples.

Class 5, October 8th: Reconsideration of the first concept of freedom: changes of the lexicon of myth in contemporary American Christian spirituality. The modification of theology in order to challenge white supremacy and its destructive mythologies.

Class 6, October 15th: Data (videos, readings) on support of the limitation of the first concept of freedom. Discussions with the students on these data, and on possible modifications of the first concept of freedom.

Class 7, October 29th: Reconsideration of the second concept of freedom: the clash between what must be done and what should be done in the current humanitarian emergency of migration, in both US and Europe. Analysis of social, political, economic, and spiritual challenges related to migration and the refugee status.

Class 8, November 5th: Data (videos, readings) on support of the limitation of the second concept of freedom. Discussions with the students on these data, and on possible modifications of the second concept of freedom.

Class 9, November 12th: Reconsideration of the third concept of freedom: the injustice in the accessibility to workplaces for sexual, racial, and gender reasons. Study of some of the voices of Black Existentialism.

Class 10, November 19th: Data (videos, readings) on support of the limitation of the third concept of freedom. Discussions with the students on these data, and on possible modifications of the third concept of freedom.

Class 11, November 26th: Discussion with the students on their experiences and ideas on the current modification of individual's process of self-formation and self-discernment, and the struggle to find recognition and acknowledgment for this process.

Class 12, December 2nd: Final discussion with the students on the unclear aspects of the course.

Class 13, December 10th: Presentation and discussion of the modalities of evaluation.

Suggested Readings

Agnes Heller. *An Ethics of Personality*. Blackwell, 1995. ISBN: 978-0631198918. Price: 49.10 \$
Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason, Analytic, Chapter 1*. Any online English translation.
Friederich Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Any online English translation.

Thomas Mann. „Freud and the Future“. The English translation of the final (and most significant) excerpt can be downloaded from Jstor.