

POLS 213, Spring 2006

Asma Abbas

STAR-CROSSED LOVERS:

2-V, Hall College Centre

THE POLITICS & PHILOSOPHY OF MODERN FREEDOM

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Room 14, TR 10:30 am – 11:55 pm
appt.

Office hours: T, 3:30-5:30 pm; W, 2-3 pm; by

Both the American and the French revolutions of the eighteenth century cried “freedom!” in their respective languages, and ushered in at least a century-long struggle with the notion of freedom among political philosophers on the continent and beyond. It can be argued that those debates and systematisations have come to frame philosophical and political negotiations and conversations, hopes and frustrations, solidarities and rebellions, in the past century.

This course attempts to map this motley inheritance that provides the fabric for many contemporary confrontations with the concept, imperative, imaginary, or enactment, if you may, of “freedom” and “subjectivity.” Beginning with a noted German philosopher of the French revolution, Immanuel Kant, to whom is attributed the “invention” of the modern notion of autonomy as well as the inaugural of a certain legacy of German idealism, the course moves to thinkers who negotiate with Kant to install their own legacy. Notable among these is G.W.F Hegel, and an entire “troubled generation” of his followers and dissenters—the Young Hegelians—the practices, concerns, restlessnesses and skirmishes of whom seem uncannily similar to many of our own times. Key among these skirmishes is the debate between materialist and idealist notions of freedom—sometimes framed as a battle over the most historically and materially pertinent summoning of the Greeks to the rescue, sometimes as a lived struggle between the priority of politics and philosophy, among others.

The course closes with a peculiar Young Hegelian, Karl Marx, and a Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. Studying each philosopher's approach sequentially, the course traces the theme of freedom throughout different variations from the eighteenth century revolutions to nineteenth century ones, with special attention to how these thinkers navigate the idealism-materialism spectrum.

Unifying these thinkers in their diversity is, to quote a contemporary commentator, their insistence on “making [their work] a relevant player in the contemporary liberation drama.” This includes their focus on the relation between politics and philosophy, and their concern with what the role of the philosopher and thinker might, could and should, be in rethinking and actualising freedom as a value, and what this may entail.

COURSE GOALS

First, this course is aimed at providing a historical grounding for engaging in current debates on the meaning and practice of freedom.

Second, in focussing on the philosophical activity between the two French revolutions, it hopes to provide us with a way of talking about the relation between thought and action, theory and practice.

Third, while it focuses on a particular period in western history with its concomitant history of political thought (conventionally understood), the course is not invested in telling a neat story. Rather, it is an attempt at studying the evolution of political thought that leaves the storytelling to us, and is attentive to continuities and disjunctures, to products and remainders (and to waste as well!)

Fourth, it seeks to critically engage and assess the title's claim that the story of modern freedom and subjectivity involves star-crossings.... Who are the characters? Is another genre more appropriate? Is there even an identifiable plot?

In all this, the course assumes, on the part of its designer, that something in the chosen period is rather crucial as a bridge between different eras in world history, wherein many formative stories get told, which are worth investigating, if only to earn the privilege to subvert them, or to transcend them, or to challenge the said assumption—and to understand subversions and transcendences that have happened over the past century and a half, in and outside western philosophy.

TEXTS

Required

Stepelevich. *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology*

Marx, Karl. *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*

Kant, Immanuel. *The Basic Writings of Kant*

Findlay, J.N. *Hegel: The Essential Writings*

Bretall, Robert. *The Kierkegaard Anthology*

Bowie, Andrew. *Introduction to German Philosophy*

Required and suggested readings beyond the above-mentioned books have been placed on electronic reserve, and are detailed in the reading schedule that follows.

EXPECTATIONS & REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Preparation

- You are required to attend class having done the assigned reading for the day. Please bring the text to class. I realise, however, that some form of guidelines will be helpful, and I will post them on the course website a day in advance of the scheduled reading.
- Active class participation is not only required, it is expected. The point is not to have understood everything before coming to class—your treasure is the questions, difficulties and issues that arise from what is read, because they eventually determine what course the class will take—and, more importantly, the story about freedom we will collectively tell. So, try to have as many of those as possible when you come to class.
- I will follow the college attendance policy, very strictly. Two unexcused absences will earn you an official warning. Three unexcused absences shall result in suspension. You must not be absent on the days you are the scribe, for that will automatically get you an F on that part of the course requirements.
- Tardiness is disrespectful, really, and counts against you.

Written Work

There are two broad components of your written assignments for this course, roughly described as (mainly) creative, and (mainly) exegetical. (I know these categories are simplistic, but please work with me here!)

First, you will keep a journal throughout the semester to be handed in to me at the beginning of every week. The journal will contain your responses to, and reflections on the readings. But there is something you must keep in mind here. Imagine the journal as your notes for a play on freedom—you will be keeping a record of what kind of play you could be writing, as our work in class unfolds. You can do pretty much whatever you want here (work with other literary forms, perhaps.) The point is to explore possibilities of forms of interpretation. (Let the course goals guide you here, in the form of questions to be addressed.)

Second, there will be short exegetical papers (3-4 pages in length) on (1) Kant (2) Hegel (3) Young Hegelians (4) Marx (5) Kierkegaard (on topics suggested by me), followed by a final paper (12-15 pages long) which will combine your work in earlier papers and your journal. You and I will work together to design the final paper. You will present this paper at the conference organised by the class (see below).

Presentations

Each student will prepare a presentation that consists of two parts. The **first** part will involve being a scribe for one week of class. You will produce a “transcript” or “minutes” of two class periods. This transcript (for lack of a better word) is a carefully edited summary/notes of the previous class session, but written in complete sentences. Transcripts will be no more than 2 single-spaced pages and will be photocopied by the student who wrote it and handed out to all students at the beginning of each class to be read aloud, and will serve as a cumulative record of the course. In addition to reviewing the material covered over the previous week, the transcripts should include announcements made in class, questions not addressed in class. A transcript is not supposed to merely reproduce what was said in class, but should organise the material thematically, making choices about importance and relevance and important connections. When presented to the class, we can make amendments to these minutes as required.

The **second** part of your presentation will introduce us to the new reading for the day, raising questions, making connections to previous material, and present something relevant about the intellectual genealogy of the thinker.

Conference

The class will put together a mini-conference on freedom. We will discuss this in detail. Participation in organising this is mandatory.

For course policies on Academic Honesty and Religious Holidays, please refer to the SRC Catalogue, pp. 31-33. For issues of learning skills, and subsequent accommodations, please get in touch with me, and also contact Rebecca Fiske (rebecca@simons-rock.edu).

A sketch of your grade composition

Participation, Presentations, Conference	25%
Written work	75%
Journal	15%
Papers	60%

CLASS SCHEDULE

* All readings marked with an asterisk are on electronic reserve. The rest are available at the Hart Bookstore. The instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus—you will be consulted for, and informed of, changes made.

Tuesday, 17 January	Introductions
	The French, the Germans and the Enlightenment
Thursday, 19 January	The Question of the Moral and the Political
	*Schneewind, J.B. "Themes in the History of Moral Philosophy"
	Bowie, Andrew. <i>Introduction to German Philosophy (IGP)</i> , pp. 1-12
KANT	
Tuesday, 24 January	Wood, Allen. "Introduction," in <i>Basic Writings of Kant (BWK)</i> , pp. viii-xxv
	Kant, Immanuel. "What is Enlightenment?" in <i>BWK</i> , pp. 133-142
Thursday, 26 January	Kant. <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , in <i>BWK</i> , pp. 145-163
Tuesday, 31 January	Kant. <i>Groundwork</i> , pp. 164-202
Thursday, 2 February	Kant. <i>Groundwork</i> , pp. 203-221
Tuesday, 7 February	Kant. "[...]Theory [...]and[...] Practice," in <i>BWK</i> , pp. 417-432
Thursday, 9 February	Bowie. <i>IGP</i> , pp. 13-40
	*Schneewind. "The Invention of Autonomy," pp. 483-507
First paper due by noon on Monday, 13 February	
FICHTE & SCHELLING	
Tuesday, 14 February	*Fichte, Johann Gottlieb. <i>Vocation of Man</i>
Thursday, 16 February	Fichte (contd).
	Bowie. "From Fichte to Early Schelling" in <i>IGP</i> , pp. 58-78
Tuesday, 21 February	NO CLASS—Winter Break
Thursday, 23 February	NO CLASS—Winter Break
HEGEL	
Tuesday, 28 February	Hegel, Georg W. F. <i>The Essential Writings (TEW)</i> . pp. 1-36
	Bowie. "Hegel," in <i>IGP</i> , pp. 79-92
Thursday, 2 March	Hegel. <i>TEW</i> , pp. 37-85

Tuesday, 7 March	Hegel. <i>TEW</i> , pp. 37-85 (contd.)
Thursday, 9 March	Hegel. <i>TEW</i> , pp. 253-313
Tuesday, 14 March	Hegel. <i>TEW</i> , pp. 253-313 (contd.)

Second paper due by noon on Friday, 17 March

THE YOUNG HEGELIANS

Thursday, 16 March	Stepelevich, Lawrence. "Introduction," in <i>The Young Hegelians (TYH)</i> , pp. 1-16
	Bowie. "From the Early Romantics to Feuerbach," in <i>IGP</i> , pp. 94-117
Tuesday, 21 March	Feuerbach, Ludwig. <i>TYH</i> , TBA .
Thursday, 23 March	Feuerbach. TBA
Tuesday, 28 March	NO CLASS—Spring Break
Thursday, 30 March	NO CLASS—Spring Break
Tuesday, 4 April	Ruge, Arnold. <i>TYH</i> . TBA
Thursday, 6 April	Stirner, Max. <i>TYH</i> . TBA

Third paper due by noon on Monday, 10 April

KARL MARX

Tuesday, 11 April	Marx, Karl. <i>Writings of the Young Marx...</i> (<i>WYM</i>), pp. 35-66
Thursday, 13 April	Marx. <i>WYM</i> , pp. 216-248
Tuesday, 18 April	Marx. <i>WYM</i> , pp. 249-264
Thursday, 20 April	Marx. <i>WYM</i> , pp. 265-282
Tuesday, 25 April	Marx. <i>WYM</i> , pp. 283-300, 314-337

Fourth paper due by noon on Friday, 28 April

KIERKEGAARD & CONCLUSION

Thursday, 27 April	*Kierkegaard. Soren. "Fear and Trembling"
Tuesday, 2 May	*Kierkegaard (contd.)
Thursday, 4 May	Readings TBA (Berlin, Christman, spectral nationality etc.)

Fifth Paper due by Thursday, 4 May

Wednesday, 10 May	FINAL PAPER DUE
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