

PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION

Phil. 58000, T, 6:30-9:20 pm; 1248 BRNG

Office Hours: T, 2:00pm-3:00pm, 7121 BRNG and by appointment

Email: harrisl@purdue.edu

WHAT IS LIBERATION? The goal of the seminar is to engage in contemporary debates regarding competing conceptions of liberation and the agency of social kinds, e.g., the working class, the poor, victims of racism, women and the subaltern.

The seminar will probe the following questions: What is 'oppression' such that 'liberation' counts as its relief? Is the conflict between defining oppression in terms of a particular context and defining it in universal terms resolvable? Is considering social kinds, e.g., the working class, the poor, victims of racism, women, the subaltern, etc., agents of universal human liberation warranted?

The first half of the course will review major theories of liberation, particularly, Marxist, critical theory, existentialist, pragmatist and neo-radicals. The second half of the course will focus on the conception of universal human liberation and the ethics of insurrection. Each week will have a guest author representing a competing school of thought.

Students will be required to focus on one author and consider what that author means by liberation and the social kinds they consider invested with agency (epistemic, moral or ontological). The seminar will benefit by visits from some of the authors we will study by way of SKYPE, OOLOO or other interactive media. Students located at universities other than Purdue will be connected to the classroom through *Webex*. Live real-time interactive communication will allow all students to participate and communicate through any computer with a webcam. Each class will also be recorded and available for viewing.

"To think of power as pure limit set on freedom leads to the notion that freedom consists in merely lifting this prohibition: a 'way out'. But these notions are dangerous in the context of the workings of modern power, which does not work by 'starving' desire but prospers on creating, inducing and multiplying and through ramification of desire." "This type of discourse", according to Foucault, is a dangerous and "a formidable tool of control and power. As always, it uses what people say, feel and hope for. It exploits their temptation to believe that to be happy, it is enough to cross the threshold of discourse and remove a few prohibitions. But in fact it ends up dispersing movements of revolt and liberation" M. Foucault, HS 1979.

Readings:

Lectures will focus on authors below; "Secondary" texts are useful background sources but not required.

Classical Conceptions

- K. Marx, F. Engels, Communist Manifesto; K. Marx, German Ideology
- Lecture theme: What is a defensible concept of liberation within Marx?

Secondary

- G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit
- Edward W. Blyden, Islam, Christianity and the Negro Race
- J.G. Herder (Schmidt, James (ed.), *What is Enlightenment?*)
- Emma Goldman, Anarchism and Other Essays
- Allen Wood, Karl Marx (guest: will be in class to present and defend his view)

Critical Theory

- Angela Davis, Are Prisons Obsolete?

- Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punishment (in-class, Dan Smith, Chris Penfield)
- Lecture theme: Are the concepts of 'oppression' in critical theory (correlatively, liberation), antiquated?
-
- *Secondary*
- Theodore W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment
- Enrique Dussel, Philosophy of Liberation (interview)

Existentialist

- J. P. Sartre, Nausea
- Lewis Gordon, Black Existentialism (interview)
- Lecture theme: What is a defensible concept of liberation within existentialism?
-
- *Secondary*
- Franz Fanon Wretched of the Earth

Pragmatist

- Alain Locke, The Philosophy of Alain
- Lecture theme: Is a concept of liberation tied to culture a 'Western' delusion?
-
- *Secondary*
- John Dewey, Liberalism and Social Action
- Jane Addams, Democracy and Social Ethics

New radicals/Post-post colonial

- Linda Alcott, Visible Identities (interview)
- Eduardo Mendieta, et. al., Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity, and the Americas (interview)
- Lecture theme: Do new authors provide a concept of liberation that has appeal in a way lack in a materialist, critical theory, existentialist or pragmatist account?
-
- *Secondary*
- Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation
- Sanya Osha, Postethno-philosophy (interview)
- M. Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"; A Critique of Postcolonial Reason
- Mohan Dutta, Voices of Resistance (interview)
- Slavoj Žižek, The Reality of the Virtual
- Ofelia Schutte, Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin America
- Steve Biko, I Write What I Like
- Neva Weldton, L. Wolf, Global Uprising
- Ann Cudd, Analyzing Oppression (interview)

Universal Human Liberation

- Martin J. Matušík, Specters of Liberation (interview)
- Ashis Nandy, Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias
- Leonard Harris, Ethics of Insurrection, Transactions
- Lecture theme: What is a defensible concept of liberation?
-
- *Secondary*
- Universal Human Liberation (Harris):
- Harriet Washington, Medical Apartheid

- Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy, 49:1(2013)
- Walker: Naturalism and Liberation," Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy, 49:1(2013)93-111.
- "Telos and Tradition: Making the Future, Brides to Future Traditions," Philosophia Africana, 16:2(Winter 2014)59-71.
- "Universal Human Liberation and Community: Pixley Kalsaka Seme and Alain L. Locke," Claude Sumner, Samuel W. Yohannes, eds., Perspectives in African Philosophy: An Anthology on 'Problematics of an African Philosophy: Twenty Years After 1976-1996', Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Printing Press, 2002, pp. 150-159.
- "Universal Human Liberation: Community and Multiculturalism," Cynthia Willett, ed., Theorizing Multiculturalism, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Company, 1998, pp. 449-457.
- "The Horror of Tradition or How to Burn Babylon and Build Benin While Reading A Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note," Republished: John P. Pittman, ed., African-American Perspectives and Philosophical Traditions, New York: Routledge, 1997, pp. 94-119.
-
- Insurrection
- "Tolerance, réconciliation et groupes," Guerre et Réconciliation, Journée de la Philosophie à Unesco, 2003, pp. 59-94.
- "Insurrectionist Ethics: Advocacy, Moral Psychology, and Pragmatism," John Howie, ed., Ethical Issues for a New Millennium: The Wayne Leys Memorial Lectures, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002, pp. 192-210.
- "Honor and Insurrection," Bill E. Lawson, ed., Frederick Douglass, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Company, 1999, pp. 227-242.
-
- Race:
- "Philosophy of Philosophy: Race, Nation and Religion," Graduate Journal of Philosophy, 35:1-2(2014)1-12.
- "Memorial of Mandela or the Mystic Cords of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela's (Madiba's) Shadow," Black Diaspora Review, 4:2(2014)77-81.
- "Community: What Type of Entity and What Type of Moral Commitment?" Robert Birt, ed., The Quest for Community and Identity, New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001, pp. 243-255.
- "What, Then, Is Racism?" Leonard Harris, ed., Racism, New York: Humanity Press, 1999, pp. 437-451.
- "The Concept of Racism: An Essentially Contested Concept?" Centennial Review, XLII: 2 (Spring 1998) pp. 217-232.
-
- (Historically important authors)
- David Walker
- Lydia Maria Childs
- H. D. Thoreau
- Maria W. Stewart

PAPER TOPICS

What is liberation? (existing conditions; conceivable conditions?)

What is oppression?

Defend, or critique, a naturalist account of oppression.

Is the conflict between the universal and particular resolvable?

What is it to philosophize from the standpoint of the periphery, oppressed, poor, subaltern or exteriority?

That is, what is it to do a "Philosophy Born of Struggle"?

KEY CONCEPTS FOR THE COURSE

Agency: objective patterned agency, vitalism

Ontology: historical teleology of kinds (class, race, gender, etc.) vs existential hope

Revolution: insurrection, protest

Naturalist account: oppression, exploitation, subjugation, degradation, absolute and relative misery

Liberation (via humanist) accounts – oppression as denial of rights and liberties

Universal human liberation (via universality/conception of kind)

Social conditions: hegemony, heterogeneity, aggregation, fragmentation

Epistemology: representational realism, anti-realism, constructivism

Interest: material interest vs. identity vs epistemic

Course Requirements:

Students are expected to attend class, have read the assignments, participate in class discussions, research relevant topics, and complete exams and assignments on time. Students are required to complete:

- one book review (40 points)
- one argumentative paper (50 points)
- class attendance is worth (10 (ten) points. Four (4) unexcused absences, five (5) points deducted; six (6) unexcused absences, ten (10) points deducted (refer to [University Regulations](#) for additional information). *Fifteen minutes after class starts no student will be allowed to sign-in to establish attendance.*

Focus will be on authors especially associated with controversial issues regarding the nature of liberation

The course is intended to strengthen argumentative ability, critical reasoning skills and techniques of logical and philosophical reasoning.

Department Requirements

Department of Philosophy Students: this course is used for the Value Theory requirement. Any other area requirement must be approved in advance by the professor.

American Studies Students: the area for application should be approved in advance, e.g., African American Studies or Philosophy.

Grades:

Final grades will be based on a one hundred (100) point system, reflecting the total number of points received for the exam, book reviews, final paper and attendance: 90-100, A; 80-89, B; 70-79, C; 60-69, D; 59- and below, F.

Cheating/Plagiarism: Violation of the university's cheating /plagiarism policy will result in a grade of "F" for the course (refer to [University Regulations](#) for additional information).

Argumentative essay papers will be an important feature of the course.

Emergency:

In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances.

Schedule of Assignments: