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PSC 550.01: Political Theory Seminar - Negative & Positive Freedom

Ramona Grey

University of Montana, Missoula

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"The world freedom is incompletely descriptive. To understand what freedom means, we must know what it is — freedom from or freedom for." Maurice Cranston.

Course Description:
Classical and contemporary political philosophers often speak of freedom, (some even make a distinction between liberty and freedom.) But what exactly does freedom mean? There is considerable debate among theorists, and especially among the writers we will examine this semester over whether freedom or "liberty" should be treated as an end (good for its own sake) or a means (to other human ends or values.) This seminar we will examine both forms of freedom, considering how the embrace of negative or positive freedom can influence a thinker's position on what properly belongs to the public verses the private sphere, the relationship between society's good and the individual's interests, as well as what he/she believes are the sources of oppression and its remedy.

Course Objectives: after successfully completing the course work, the student should be able to:

1. Distinguish between negative and positive freedom, and recognize how this analytical framework influences contemporary political discourse.

2. Develop concise, analytic essays on the assigned readings in contemporary theory. Specifically with regards to an analytic perspective, the student will consider their own position with respect to different approaches to studying political theory (i.e. what consequences follow when one emphasizes text over context when studying political theory.)

3. Evaluate a political theory in terms of its analytic, empirical, and normative strengths and/or weaknesses.

Course Grading:
PS 534 will be taught as a seminar. Short essays (6-7 per student) will be assigned and critiqued in class (60% of course grade.) Class participation (15% of course grade) will evaluated according to each student's contribution to discussions on reading assignments. In addition, students will be expected to assess the merits and weaknesses of their colleague's essays. (To give us time to prepare questions, copies of your essay must be distributed the Friday before you are scheduled to orally present it.) Late essays will not be accepted. The final (25% of course grade) will be a take-home essay examination.
Required Tests:

Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*; selections from *The Constitution of Liberty* (on reserve)
T.H. Green, "Liberal Legislation & Freedom of Contract" (handout)
Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy*
Krutch, *The Modern Temper*
Leo Strauss, *Natural Right & History*
Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*
Arendt, *The Human Condition*
Berlin, *Essays on Liberty*
Selected readings on Arendt, post-modern feminism (on reserve)

Schedule:

January 24th
Introduction to the Course: Negative v. Positive Freedom

January 31st
Liberalism & The Two Concepts of Liberty
Read: Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*;
Essays (*due 1/28 by 5pm): What form of liberty, positive or negative, does Hayek embrace and why? What are the problems, if any, do you find in Hayek's conception of liberty?

Recommended Readings:

Macfarlane, "On Two Concepts of Liberty, *Political Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 Fall 1966
Cranston, M. *Freedom*

February 7th
Theories of Liberty & Public Policy/Law
Read: Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (on reserve)
*Colorado v. Connelly* (1986)
Essays (due 2/4 by 5pm): What role(s) for the state would Hayek's theory of freedom support? Why?

Essays: How do the opinions in *Colorado v. Connelly* (1986) illustrate the tensions between negative and positive freedom? How would you have ruled in the case, and why?
February 14th  

**Positive Freedom**

**Read:** T.H. Green, "Liberal Legislation," (handout);

**Essays (due 2/11 by 5 pm):** The right to property should not be confused with the right to unlimited property. So how, given the argument of Green, might we prevent the one from turning into the other without relinquishing a commitment to liberty?

**Essays (due 2/11):** "What T.H. Green understood, Hayek did not; namely, personal liberty is dependent upon legal rights and social obligations." Discuss

**Recommended Readings:**
- Bevir, M. "Welfarism, Socialism, and Religion...," *The Review of Politics*, Fall 1993
- Etzioni, A. *Rights & the Common Good*
- Simhony, A. "What T.H. Green a Utilitarian?," *Utilitas*, May 1995


February 21  

No Class- President's Day

February 28th  

**The Public Philosophy & Liberty**

**Read:** Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy*

**Essays (due 2/25 by 5pm):** Clearly, for Lippmann the "public interest" and "the people's will" are not the same. Why not? What problems does this distinction pose for democratic theory?

**Essays (due 2/25):** To cure our ailing democracy, Lippmann recommends that we repair the rupture in "the continuity of the traditions of civility." What does he mean by "traditions of civility?" Would his political prescription take us forward, backward? Is this good or bad?
Recommended Readings:
John Diggins, "From Pragmatisim to Natural Law; Walter Lippmann's Quest for the Foundations of Legitimacy," Political Theory, vol. 19, Nov. 1991
W. Lippmann, A Preface to Politics (1914)
Public Opinion (1922); A Preface to Morals (1929)

March 6th

Freedom, Individualism, & "the Modern Temper"
Read: Krutch The Modern Temper
Essays (due 3/3): What does Krutch's account of modern art, modern science and modern knowledge suggest about human dignity? Does it make sense to speak of individual "freedom" and "rights" in the modern world?

Recommended Readings:
Cowley, Exile's Return, 1959
Diggins, Up From Communism: Conservative Odyssey In American Intellectual History, 1975
Frankel, The Case for Modern Man, 1955
Perry, "The Modern Distemper," Saturday Review of Literature, June 1929
Kateb, Utopia & Its Enemies, 1963

March 13th

Negative Freedom v. Classical Political Philosophy
Read: Strauss, Natural Right & History
Essays (due 3/10 by 5pm): Critically examine what Strauss means by "natural right." In what sense, can we say its a positive right?

Essays (due 3/10 by 5pm): Jeffery Hart lists one variety of conservative thought as "Natural law conservatism," which deduces principles of behavior from the fact of 'human' nature as distinct from other kinds of nature, and on that account resists moral change based on fashion, historical accident, or false analogies between human nature and other kinds. Conservatism of this kind, he thinks, "is found in Aristotle, Aquinas, Burke,
and today in Leo Strauss (italics added.) In light of your reading, discuss this statement.

Essays: How does Strauss extricate himself from the commonplace notion that we are all historical beings? Is the idea of the tradition of political thought based on history?

Recommended Readings:
Alen Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind
John Diggins, The Promise of Pragmatism, 1994
C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letter
Niebuhr, Children of Light/Children of Darkness
Oakeshott, Religion, Politics, and the Moral Life
John Gunnell, Political Theory, Tradition & Interpretation
Q. Skinner, The Foundations of Modern Political Thought
"Strauss, Philosophy, and Politics," (Symposium) Political Theory, August 1987
J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment
Herbert Storing (ed.) Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics
A. MacIntyre, After Virtue
Ernest Fortin, "Gadamer on Strauss," Interpretation, Jan. 1984
Gadamer, Truth and Method

March 20-27 Spring Break

March 27rd

Freedom & Critical Theory
Read: Fromm, Escape From Freedom
Essays (due 3/17): "What is good or bad for man is not a metaphysical question, but an empirical one that can be answered on the basis of an analysis of man's nature and the effect which certain conditions have on him." (266 -Escape From Freedom) What difficulties are involved in making an "empirical" view of human nature the basis of a political theory?

Essays: Fromm, in common with other writers on the left, has a concept of alienation. What is it? Has the concept of alienation become outdated, too blunt for an analytical tool?

Recommended Readings:
Birnback, Neo-Freudian Social Philosophy, 1961
Bartlett & Schodall, "Fromm, Marx, and the Concept of Alienation, Science and Society, Summer 1963
Fromm, Man For Himself
Anatomy of Human Destructiveness
Tucker, *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea*
Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*
Schaar, *Escape From Authority: The Perspectives of Erich Fromm*, 1961
Wells, *The Failure of Psychoanalysis: From Freud to Fromm*, 1963

April 3rd

*Fromm's Humanist Vision of Freedom*

**Read:** Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*

**Essays (due 3/31 by 5pm):** Does it make sense to you to distinguish between interests and real interests? Would you join with Fromm is establishing a rational political system? (Or is the separation of interests from real interests elitist, and therefore unacceptable? Explain.)

**Essays:** "Freud's relativist position...assumes that psychology can help us to understand (what's behind) value judgments but cannot help in establishing the validity of value judgments themselves." In observing as much, Fromm seems to have put his finger on our modern predicament. What problems does this "modern relativism" pose for the social critic (including Fromm) who wishes to defend positive freedom?

**Recommended Reading:**
Briggs, "From Slaves to Robots," *New Statesman and Nation*, 23 June 1956
Ellul, *The Political Illusion*
The Technological Society
Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*

April 10th

*Freedom, The Public and The Private*

**Read:** Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 1-175

**Essays (due 4/7 by 5 pm):** Arendt is critical of marxism, yet how does her indictment of modern society parallel Fromm's? Is her diagnosis of modern alienation prone to the same analytic &/or empirical weaknesses?
April 24th  
**Post-Modern Feminism & End of Political Philosophy?**  

Essays (due 4/21): How might a "post-modern" feminist critique Arendt? What, if anything, would they find useful in Arendt's analysis?

Essays: Can feminist political theory avoid assuming "a privileged epistemological perspective" or a generalizable "female" freedom in society? Explain. If not, what are the consequences?

**Recommended Readings:**
Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*
Ann Bookmann & Sandra Morgan, *Women & the Politics of Empowerment*
Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*
Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism*
Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*
Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*
Susan Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*

May 1st  
**Negative & Positive Liberty Conclusions**  
Read: Berlin, "Introduction" and "Two Concepts of Liberty"  
Essays (due 4/28): "Berlin's defense of negative liberty leads him into the position of defending the status quo." Comment

Essays: "Absolute negative liberty, like absolute positive liberty, ends up destroying that which it prizes most—liberty."

**Recommended Readings:**
Kristjansson, K. "What Is Wrong with Positive Liberty?," *Social Theory and Practice*, Fall 1992

May 8th  
Final due by 5 p.m.