

RELC 5559: Freedom: Theological and Philosophical Perspectives
Paul Dafydd Jones, University of Virginia

Introduction

This interdisciplinary course considers the motif of freedom in conversation with landmark texts of Christian theology, western philosophy, and critical theory. It tackles three main issues, roughly in order: (a) God's governance of history; (b) the nature of human agency (sin as limitation, grace as liberation, etc.); and (c) modern and late modern analyses of social constraints on agency. A number of issues central to the Enhancing Life Project receive close and sustained attention: the degree to which the past, present, and future are "open" (or not); human attempts to distort life, to undermine relationality, and to arrest ethical, political, and spiritual progress; divine and/or human action that intends to enhance life and to animate ethical, political, and social progress; the nature of human agency in light of philosophical and theological proposals in the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries; and the connection of freedom and different social, political, and cultural projects.

The reading-load of the course is significant, and purposefully so: it's a class that hopes to expose graduate students and advanced undergraduates to the types of questions that are central to the Enhancing Life Project (albeit in a way that reflects my own interests in Christian thought, western philosophy of religion, and critical theory). While I've opted to foreground the category of "freedom," much of the language associated with the Enhancing Life Project will come into play: talk of "spiritual laws," an "opened future," "counter-worlds," and the like will be employed as heuristic devices to interrogate and connect different texts.

This course will be taught in Spring 2017. I'll likely offer an undergraduate iteration of it in coming years.

RELC 5559: Freedom: Theological and Philosophical Perspectives
Spring 2017 | Thursday, 2:30-4pm | Room TBA

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Office hours: Wednesday 1-2pm, Thursday 11am-12pm, and by appointment

Course Description

This seminar is primarily intended for graduate students, but open to advanced undergraduates with an academic background in the academic study of Christian thought and/or western philosophy of religion. It investigates diverse perspectives on freedom. We will consider three overlapping areas of concern: (a) sin, grace, and the “bound will”; (b) divine providence and human action; and (c) analyses of gender, sex, race, and class as they bear on the issues of “subjection” and “liberation,” broadly construed.

Class Requirements

- Attendance at all class meetings.
- Participation in all class meetings. Students must complete the assigned readings before each class and come prepared to engage in civil, scholarly discussion.
- Timely completion of all assignments:
 - (a) Weekly responses (~250 words) to the assigned readings, submitted via Collab by noon on each Monday that we meet (two “passes”).
 - (b) One abstract and outline of the final paper, complemented by a provisional bibliography, due by 5pm on March 28. To be submitted via email.
 - (c) One interpretative/research paper, due by 5pm on May 7. Hard copies in Professor Jones’s mailbox (Gibson S323).

Reading Materials

The following books are available for purchase at the U.Va. bookstore:

James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*
Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*
Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*
Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*
The Narrative of Sojourner Truth, ed. Nell Painter

Depending on copyright restrictions, other texts are available via Collab, or can be ordered/purchased at local bookstores, or can be purchased on-line.

Class preparation

This course involves a fair amount of reading, and you will need to organize your time sensibly. Engage the material in a focused way, concentrate on key passages, and come to class prepared to engage in scholarly discussion.

A useful way to get ready for class is built into the syllabus: you are required to post weekly responses to the reading on the Collab worksite (with two “passes”). These responses should be brief – 250-500 words is fine – and you may respond to others’ posts if you wish. The responses will not be a significant factor in your evaluation. Their purpose is to stimulate reflection prior to class discussion, to encourage the formulation of pertinent questions, and to enable students to develop interpretative judgments.

Final paper

For your final paper, you are encouraged to offer an interpretative analysis and evaluation of an author, text, or issue considered in class – although if you wish to be more ambitious, that is fine. To help you get started on this project, a provisional abstract of your paper should be submitted to me on March 23. In addition to sketching the direction your research will take, this abstract should identify some secondary sources that you intend to consult. I hurry to add that the abstract is nonbinding and irrelevant to your final grade. Evaluation is based primarily on class participation and your submitted final paper.

Office Hours

My office hours are on Wednesday from 1-2pm and Thursday from 11am-12pm. If you cannot make those times, we can set up an appointment to talk on another occasion.

Preferred editions of works not available via Collab, not on order at U.Va. bookstore, and available in multiple editions and formats:

- Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, ed. Henry Chadwick (OUP); *City of God*, ed. R. W. Dyson (CUP)
- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa* – available online. Some readable options:
<http://dhspriority.org/thomas/summa/>
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.toc.html>
<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>
- G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, ed. Leo Rauch (Hackett); *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood (CUP)
- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin (CUP)

Reading Schedule

- January 19 Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, books VIII and X
- Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* book 22
Recommended: Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, bk. 11.17, 21, 22-23; bk. 12.1-9, 17-18, 21-24, 26, 28; bk. 13.1-6, 13-15, 19; bk. 14.1-3, 6, 11-15, 27-28. Also Homilies 7 and 8 on 1 John **
- February 2 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars*, Qs 19-20, 22-23, and 103-104; *Prima Secundae Partis*, Qs 1-10 (skim Qs 1-9, spend time on Q 10), 49-54, 55-56, 61-63, and 109-114
- February 9 Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 62-108, 137-190, and 273-320
- Martin Luther, “The Freedom of the Christian,” in *Three Treatises*, 277-316 **
- February 16 Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 135-439
I know this is a hefty amount of text, but (a) it’s often repetitious and (b) utterly worth it.
- February 23 Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, 17-22 **
- Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*
- March 2 G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to The Philosophy of History*, 19-82
- G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Preface, Introduction (§§1-33); quickly skim section on “Morality” (§§105-141, paying attention to §§109, 135, and 140); read opening of the section on “Ethical Life” (§§143-157)
- March 9 NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK
- March 16 *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*
- March 23 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

- March 24 Karl Barth, "The Gift of Freedom: Foundation of Evangelical Ethics," in *The Humanity of God*, 69-96 **
- Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*
- March 30 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-drama*, vol. II: *The Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, 173-334
- April 6 James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*
- April 13 Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended," "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," and "What is Enlightenment?" in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 59-65, 281-301, and 302-319
- Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, 1-30 **
- Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 17-39 **
- April 20 Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*
- April 27 Final text selected according to student interests. Three options:
- Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay "On the Trinity"*
 - William Connolly, *A World of Becoming*
 - Thomas Jay Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence*
 - Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*

NB. ** indicates that text is available via Collab.