

UNIVERSITY IN ONE DAY

WHY FREEDOM MATTERS

**West London Free School
6 September 2017**



Topic Guide

9.00 – 9.20am

Introduction: Why university matters and why freedom matters

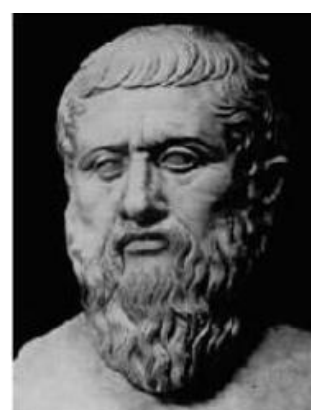
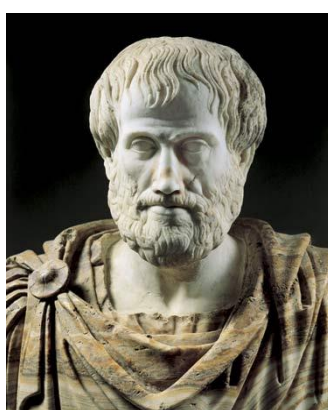
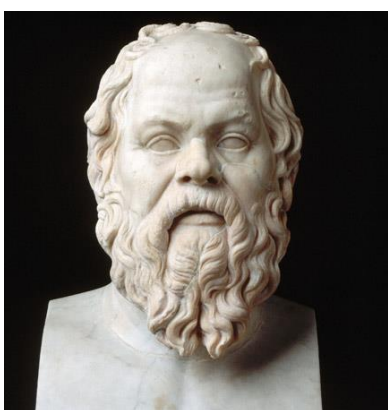
Claire Fox

9.20 – 10.15am

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle: the Classical roots of freedom

Professor Frank Furedi

Lecture followed by Q&A



Freedom, and its consequences for society and the individual, is a core concept of modern political philosophy. Its origin can be traced back to Ancient Greece, specifically the vital works of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Despite the difficulties of providing an accurate picture of Socrates' life and thought (the so-called 'Socratic Problem'), his legacy provides a basis for the works of Plato and Aristotle.

Plato's outlook questions previous knowledge and considers the role of the individual within society, while Aristotle argues in *Politics: a treatise on government* that humans are naturally political, and as such should be free to live how they wish. Historically, the Athenian mode of government has been viewed as an example of one of the first democracies, with its majoritarian and direct form of decision making, yet both Plato and Aristotle noted that it was still flawed.

This session examines the classic concepts of freedom to ask: What does it mean to be free? What is the relationship between freedom and democracy? Finally, is the legacy of these key thinkers still relevant today?

Readings and media:

Ancient Greece's legacy for liberty: personal freedom in Athens

Roderick T. Long

Did the Ancient Greeks believe in freedom?

Richard M. Ebeling

A Culture of Freedom: Ancient Greece and the origins of Europe

Barbara Graziosi

Listen: Quest for Freedom: a conversation with Quentin Skinner

Ideas Roadshow

The Cave and the Light: Plato Versus Aristotle, and the struggle for the soul of Western civilization

Arthur Herman (Google Books- Introduction only)

10.15 – 10.30

Socrates and the Socratic method: what it is and how to use it

Marc Sidwell

Short lecture



One of the most familiar names in Western philosophy, Socrates is primarily depicted through Plato's dialogues. These dialogues act as an example of the principle 'question everything' that is imperative to the Socratic method. To reach the answer, Socrates would break down problems into successive questions, pursuing the dialectical method of enquiry. Eventually, those ideas that contain contradictions are eliminated and better, more consistent ideas prevail.

By questioning the premises that assertions stand on, the Socratic method provides insight into commonly held beliefs that are not often subject to scrutiny. The Socratic method is the best form of inquiry as it is inherently democratic. Everyone can engage with the Socratic method to expose and engage with the underlying complexities in commonly held beliefs, encouraging people to think for themselves. Indeed, in today's era of 'fake news', the idea of questioning everything may provide the insight and scrutiny that we need in order to avoid passively accepting generalisations and mistruths. Some argue, however, that this constant questioning leads to an unhealthy skepticism and a deep uncertainty about life.

Should the Socratic method therefore be a commonly used method of inquiry? Or would this constant questioning threaten our happiness and fulfilment? Is it possible to use the Socratic method to reach the truth or this too open to questioning?

Readings and media:

The Socratic method as an approach to learning and its benefits

Faith Lam

Philosophical teaching will get students thinking for themselves again

John Taylor

There are limitations to the Socratic method

Robert D Dinerstein

Socrates: A Man For Our Times

Bettany Hughes

Listen: Socrates

In Our Time, BBC (audio)

10.30 – 10.40 BREAK

10.40 – 11.20am

Luther and religious conscience

Professor Alan Hudson

Lecture followed by Q&A



By nailing his 95 Theses to the door of the All Saints' Church in Wittenburg, the monk Martin Luther sparked a change that had profound repercussions for the way Europe engaged with religion and religious conscience. In his stark criticism of the Catholic Church, Luther set the precedent that individuals have every right to challenge and defy orthodoxy.

The Reformation that he established began with the idea that the believer is 'subject to none'. While Luther believed that God laid the foundations for challenging the status quo, empowering those who had never had the freedom to defy or question religious authorities led to many unforeseen changes. A new space was opened for the individual to choose rather than to be compelled, to hold themselves to account based on their own knowledge

rather than to be directed what to think. Luther is one of the founders of freedom of religious conscience – refusing to bow to convention and conformism. His break away from accepted doctrine has allowed for the great freedom that has now flourished into a plurality of religious convictions being held within one society.

However, some argue that this individual religious freedom undermines the unity of religion and has led to splits and conflicts. Has Luther's split from orthodoxy led to greater religious freedom of conscience or has this challenge led to conflict and fragmentation?

Readings and media:

The invention of individual freedom

Frank Furedi

The Protestant Reformation and freedom of conscience

Bruno Gonçalves Rosi

On the freedom of a Christian

Martin Luther

Luther's challenge to the conscience of the West

Joseph Laconte

Martin Luther: Rebel in an age of upheaval

Heinz Schilling

11.20am– 11.40am BREAK



11.40am – 12.40pm

The Enlightenment conception of freedom of speech

Four short lectures

The French philosopher Montesquieu famously defined the Enlightenment as ‘man’s emergence from his self-imposed nonage’, highlighting the intrinsic link between the Enlightenment movement and modern political modes of thought and freedom. Studied and debated by great historians, philosophers, politicians, authors and even scientists alike, it would be limiting to consider the Enlightenment as a single movement, but rather as a symbol for the beginnings of modernity: the ‘Age of Reason’.

The Enlightenment is associated with the birth of liberalism, a form of ideology that dominates Western democracy today and places an emphasis on the importance of freedom. John Locke was a key promoter of freedom and his denouncement of tyranny provided inspiration for the American and French Revolutions, two major historical events that show the triumph of the people over the ruling elite. This led to Voltaire describing him as the ‘man of the greatest wisdom’. Furthermore, Mill’s seminal *On Liberty* can be viewed as a promotion of utilitarianism and individual liberty.

These short lectures aim to interrogate the legacy of the Enlightenment. Whilst there is little doubt about its revolutionary nature, should its legacy be regarded as a celebration of freedom today or is it marked as an example of the continuing dominance of European male intellectuals? In the twenty-first century, do the Enlightenment ideals of freedom of speech still exist in practice?

John Milton

Dr Shirley Dent

The profound words of John Milton's poetry have solidified his position as not only a literary genius, but as an early modern political thinker. In an age where censorship remains an issue, Milton sets out the case for letting 'Truth and Falsehood grapple'. Although he is arguably most famous for his epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, Milton's legacy extends further due to his later conscience-driven polemics. This is exemplified by his pamphlet *Areopagitica*, which explores the evils of censorship and underpins many of the freedoms we enjoy now. But do these limits still exist today?

John Stuart Mill

Dr James Panton

Few texts have sustained such extensive reference and quotation as JS Mill's classic, *On Liberty*. Mill's famous 'Harm Principle' still provides the ground on which numerous debates around civil liberties, lifestyle choices and the external limits of freedom are fought. Yet it is imperative to understand the aims and context of *On Liberty* if Mill's arguments around press liberty and the Harm Principle are to be properly understood – as the endless argumentation about what 'harm' means shows.

Mill's inspiring defence of personal autonomy and his attention to women's issues of freedom in the *Subjection of Women* marks him out as a prominent Enlightenment thinker. However, are his ideas at odds with contemporary political rhetoric?

Voltaire

Dr Vanessa Pupavac

Writing plays, poetry, novels and essays, François-Marie Arouet – usually known by his pen name, Voltaire - was a prolific writer who used his texts to advocate for religious tolerance, freedom of speech and civil liberties. He championed Enlightenment ideas such as reason over superstition, placing himself in opposition to the tyranny of religious dogma and censorship. For Voltaire, freedom of expression was imperative.

He was also a staunch opponent of slavery, noting in *Candide* that the brutality meted out to slaves was ‘the price at which you eat sugar in Europe’. Voltaire’s fierce loyalty to his principles made him unpopular with the authorities, which led to imprisonment and exile to England. He never, however, sacrificed his beliefs and he remains an important figure today. His influence is felt in the works of Thomas Paine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft. He also laid significant importance on science and empirical evidence, directly contradicting the superstition of the powerful Church.

Does Voltaire’s belief in free speech hold up today? How would he respond to today’s society?

John Locke

Hywel Jones

Locke is one of England’s greatest political thinkers, and the influence of his ideas reaches across the world. He argues that human beings are naturally equal and free. Political power comes from the people, and is entrusted to the government on the condition that the government protects them. He is also a radical: if the government breaks the trust that the people have placed in it, then the people have the right of violent revolution – this is the concept of the ‘social contract’. He is a complicated figure, who can appeal to both the left and the right. He can be read as a libertarian, who declares that the sole purpose of government is to protect property, but he also has strong things to say about our duties to others and formulated some of the earliest conceptions of religious tolerance.

What then is the basis for Locke’s political philosophy? How is the social contract established? How is Locke’s influence still evident today?

Reading and media:

Listen: The Enlightenment in Britain (BBC 4)

In Our Time, BBC Radio 4 (audio)

Listen: Writing the Enlightenment: reflections on work in progress

University of Oxford, Professor Ritchie Robertson (audio)

The Enlightenment and why it still matters*Kenan Malik***After the Paris Attacks: It's Time for a New Enlightenment***Pankaj Mishra, Guardian***Watch: Obama defends freedom of speech at the UN***Barack Obama, 2011*

12.40 – 1.30pm

Guided seminars on religious freedom and free speech

small groups led by University in One Day lecturers.

 1.30pm – 2.15pm LUNCH

2.15pm-3.30pm

Plenary debate: Brexit, Sovereignty and Freedom

Speakers include: Toby Young, Professor Simon Hix, Ella Whelan

Chair: Claire Fox



After the referendum, Nigel Farage claimed that Britain had established its 'Independence Day', finally liberated from the power of unelected Eurocrats. Much of the Brexit debate centred around national sovereignty, what it means to govern your own nation. However, with the unelected House of Lords and the influence of globalisation, among other factors, the question of how much

power has been concentrated back in the hands of the British people has been raised – and at what cost?

For many, the Brexit vote was a vote for freedom, self-determination and self-rule, but others level charges against it for igniting regressive, nationalistic and isolationist sentiments that can only be damaging in an increasingly connected world. Nevertheless, those who championed the ‘Leave’ campaign saw the EU as a limit to the freedom of Britain to develop and invest as she saw fit. With greater national sovereignty, the British government can respond directly to the wishes of the populace without interference from supranational bodies.

This session will explore ideas of national sovereignty and how important this principle is in the debates about Brexit. Is the concept of national sovereignty outdated or is it the only way to ensure a free, truly democratic society? Is the UK more democratic outside of the EU or do we have to revise our political system too? How, moving forward, will Britain benefit from its new freedom?

Readings and media:

Watch: Britain after Brexit

BBC Question Time

Listen: Triggering Article 50: Brexit Podcast

The Guardian

Brexit means Brexit: Independence! Sovereignty! Freedom! Recession!

Jonathan Lynn, Guardian

European Referendum: what will decide the vote?

Institute of Ideas Debate

Does the EU impact on UK sovereignty?

Joshua Rozenberg, BBC

Brexit, the Referendum and the UK Parliament: Some Questions about Sovereignty

Sionaidh Douglas-Scott, UK Constitutional Law Association

Key words:

Censorship: The suppression or prohibition of any parts of books, films, news, etc, that are considered obscene, politically unacceptable or a threat to security.

Direct democracy: A form of democracy in which people decide (eg, vote on, form consensus on) policy initiatives directly, reflected in the Ancient Athenian system.

Freedom: The power or right to act, speak or think as one wants. Absence of subjection to foreign domination or despotic government. The state of not being imprisoned or enslaved.

Liberalism: A political doctrine that takes protecting and enhancing the freedom of the individual to be the central problem of politics. Liberals typically believe that government is necessary to protect individuals from being harmed by others; but they also recognize that government itself can pose a threat to liberty. As the revolutionary Thomas Paine expressed it in *Common Sense* (1776), government is, at best, 'a necessary evil'.

Metaphysics: The branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of existence, being and the world. Arguably, metaphysics is the foundation of philosophy: Aristotle calls it 'first philosophy', and says it is the subject that deals with 'first causes and the principles of things'.

Orthodoxy: Authorized or generally accepted theory, doctrine or practice.

Philosophes: A writer or thinker sympathetic to, associated with, or sharing the rationalist philosophies and values of the French Enlightenment. Also attributive or as adjective now ahistorical.

Sovereignty: Supreme power or authority (eg British Parliament) or the authority of a state to govern itself or another state (national sovereignty).

The Enlightenment: A European intellectual movement of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emphasising reason and individualism rather than tradition. It was heavily influenced by seventeenth-century philosophers and scientists such as Descartes, Locke and Newton, and its prominent figures included Kant, Goethe, Voltaire, Rousseau and Adam Smith.

The Reformation: The sixteenth-century movement for the reform of abuses in the Roman Church ending in the establishment of the Reformed and Protestant Churches.

Socratic method: The method of instruction by question and answer used by Socrates in order to elicit from his pupil's truths he considered to be implicitly known by all rational beings.

Socratic Problem: A term used in historical scholarship concerning the difficulties in reconstructing a historical and philosophical image of Socrates due to the nature of the existing sources on his life and a lack of primary sources

Confirmed speakers include:

Dr Shirley Dent

associate fellow and former communications director, Institute of Ideas; commentator on arts and literature at *Guardian Arts Unlimited*, *The Times Literary Supplement*; editor, *The Grey Zone*.

Alastair Donald

associate director of the Institute of Ideas; co-founder of Living Freedom, the IoI's residential school for 18- to 25-year-olds; co-editor, *The Lure of the City: from slums to suburbs* (2011).

Claire Fox

director of the Institute of Ideas; panelist, BBC Radio 4's *Moral Maze*; author of *I Find That Offensive!* (2016) and *No Strings Attached! Why arts funding should say no to instrumentalism* (2007).

Professor Frank Furedi

sociologist and social commentator; associate, Centre for Parenting Culture Studies, University of Kent, Canterbury; his most recent publication is *Populism and the European Culture Wars: The Conflict of Values Between Hungary and the EU* (2017) but he has written many books, including *Power of Reading: From Socrates to Twitter* (2015), which outlines the case for a liberal humanist conception of a culture of reading.

Professor Simon Hix

Harold Laski Professor of Political Science, London School of Economics and Political Science; fellow of the British Academy; main areas of research and teaching are comparative democratic institutions, especially voting in parliaments and electoral system design, and politics, elections and decision-making in European Union politics.

Professor Alan Hudson

director of programmes in leadership and public policy, University of Oxford; professor at China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong.

Hywel Jones

headteacher at the West London Free School; passionate about a knowledge-rich education for all pupils.

Dr James Panton

head of politics and housemaster, Magdalen College School, Oxford; associate lecturer in Philosophy, Open University; founding member of the pressure group the Manifesto Club.

Dr Vanessa Pupavac

senior lecturer, School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham; author, *Language Rights: from free speech to linguistic governance*; researcher, Shakespeare and world politics.

Marc Sidwell

former executive editor for *City A.M.*; co-editor of *The School of Freedom; A Liberal Education Reader from Plato to the Present Day* (2009); author of *The Case Against Brexit: Why Britain Must Remain in the European Union: The Ultimate Guide* (2017); independent writer, editor and publisher.

Ella Whelan

assistant editor, *spiked*; author of *What Women Want: Fun, Freedom and an End to Feminism* (September 2017); regular TV and radio commentator, notably on feminism and free speech.

Toby Young

co-founder of the West London Free School; associate editor, *Spectator*; visiting fellow, University of Buckingham; Fulbright Commissioner; author of several books, including *What Every Parent Needs to Know*.

Topic Guide written by Eleanor Brady and Sophie Gregory