

## Week 3: Freedom

*Metaphysical freedom*: freedom from the laws of nature. Elisabeth and Descartes both took the mind to be free in this sense.

For those philosophers who believe the mind is free, one constraint on its freedom comes from social conditions. Gabrielle Suchon, we will see next week, held the human mind to be naturally free but in the case of women (at least) constrained by their role in society.

Simone de Beauvoir also assumes metaphysical freedom in virtue of our being able to project ourselves into our own future. She too sees the conditions under which we live to be a central source of limitation on our freedom.

The other philosophers we are looking at will be emphasising practical freedom.

*Practical freedom*: the freedom we have to choose our actions so that they are aligned with our wishes. Both Émilie Du Châtelet and Mary Wollstonecraft recognise that we limit ourselves by internalizing social norms that give us roles to play in society. In this way we may not realise what it is we want for ourselves, since we have embraced an identity we have been conditioned to think is all we can be.

Du Châtelet advocates freeing oneself from constraining norms through a form of *audaciousness*. We will look at this idea, a subtle rebellion against norms, when we read her treatise "On Happiness". Wollstonecraft believes we need both education and exposure to the public world in order to become adults rather than overgrown children. An adult is a person who lives a fully mature, self-determining life, rather than the life of a person protected by and dependent upon others. For Wollstonecraft, the conditions of the world itself provide us with the necessary kind of freedom for our flourishing.

Hannah Arendt argues for both metaphysical freedom along the lines of Elisabeth, Descartes and Beauvoir, and practical freedom, with practical freedom arising from the *skill* of thinking well in specific situations.

For Arendt, our freedom consists in both our natural capacity to reason, free from the roles we play and the demands of our culture, and in our capacity to exchange ideas with others in public forums that give us access to ideas that challenge our own. She also advocates challenging ourselves internally, to keep the freedom of thought alive. We can become dogmatic in our own self-formed opinions as well as blindly accepting opinions from others if we do not reflect on what we think.

Arendt also argues that each individual is to be respected as “an end in herself”. This comes directly from Kant, for whom all rational creatures are to be respected as free and therefore must not be controlled by others, or treated solely as a means to the ends of others. This idea echoes Descartes’s account of our moral understanding of others as all equal to ourselves generating compassion for those who do not have access to choice in their lives.

For Suchon, there is a third kind of freedom that might be called the *freedom arising from being respected*. This is the freedom we gain through being respected for what we contribute to the world. Without such respect we are limited through external and internal barriers in our pursuit of a flourishing life.

#### WEEK 4 MATERIALS

“Gabrielle Suchon’s Vision of the Good Life” by Rachel Paine (overview of some key parts of her philosophy)

Selection from Suchon’s treatise “On The Celibate Life Freely Chosen”

Dangerous Women Project for some background to her place in philosophy.