

Multidisciplinary Colloquium: Freedom

Course code: HUM670/HUM470

Term and year: Fall 2025

Day and time: Thursday 15:00-17:45

Instructor: Jiří Kašný, Jakub Jirsa, Gerald Power, Jakub Drábik, Ondřej Pilný (course coordinator)

Instructor contact: email via NEO

Consultation hours: consultations with individual instructors (in person or online) arranged by email in advance.

Credits US/ECTS	3 US/6 ECTS	Level	MA/BA
Length	14 weeks	Pre-requisite	
Contact hours	42 hours	Course type	Required

1. Course Description

Focused on the topic of freedom, the course explores multidisciplinary approaches to the practices of research, analysis and writing. It consists of three modules covering the areas of philosophy, history, and literature and theatre studies. In its opening part, it engages with fundamental ideas about freedom in philosophy from Ancient Greece to the present day. Building up on these concepts, the history module engages with ideas of liberty in early modern Europe, the French revolution as a foundational moment in the modern discourse on freedom, and finally the rise of the twentieth-century ideologies of fascism and communism that sought to eliminate individual freedom for the sake of a collective vision. The third module develops the discussions by examining the engagement of contemporary drama and theatre with freedom, exploring the legacies of restrictive social norms, colonialist attitudes as well as totalitarian regimes, ultimately zooming in on the role of the arts in the shaping of society. The course bridges academic knowledge and research practice from principal areas of the humanities, enabling students to become integrative thinkers, connecting information, drawing on a range of knowledge and skills, and communicating their insights effectively. It culminates in the preparation of a final colloquium, at which students will present standard-length conference papers developed under the mentorship of individual instructors with expertise in the area of the student's interest.

2. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- (A) critically interpret and analyze specific theories and methods in each of the three areas
- (B) apply theories and methods to actual research questions across disciplines
- (C) understand the synergistic nature of a multidisciplinary approach
- (D) integrate diverse historical, philosophical, social, and cultural knowledge

- (E) understand that intellectual, personal, and social challenges can be complex, requiring a breadth of knowledge and skills for their resolution
- (F) work in groups having multidisciplinary perspectives and make use of others' knowledge and skills
- (G) compose and present a substantial academic paper

3. Reading Material

Required Materials

Attridge, Derek. *The Singularity of Literature* (2004). London and New York: Routledge, 2017.

Berlin, Isaiah, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' (any edition, available online).

Churchill, Caryl. *Cloud Nine*. In: Worthen, W.B., ed. *The Harcourt Brace Anthology of Drama*. 3rd edn. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt, 2000. 1182-1205.

Crouch, Tim. *My Arm*. In: *Plays One*. London: Oberon, 2011. 21-47.

Crouch, Tim and Andy Smith. *what happens to the hope at the end of the evening*. In: Crouch, Tim, *Adler & Gibb*. London: Oberon, 2014. 89ff (paginated as 1-63).

Godwin, William. *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). London: Penguin, 2015. Book III, chapters 4 and 5.

Havel, Václav. 'Letter to Dr Husák'. Václav Havel Library online.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan* (any edition, online and in Library).

Iltis, Seda. "'A Process of Transformation": Tim Crouch on *My Arm*', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 21:4 (2011): 394-404.

Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Orwell, George. *The Prevention of Literature* (1946), available online: <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/the-prevention-of-literature/>.

Rebellato, Dan. 'what happens to the hope at the end of the evening', 15 July 2013, <http://www.danrebellato.co.uk/spilledink/2013/7/15/what-happens-to-the-hope-at-the-end-of-the-evening>.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract* (any edition).

Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* (any translation).

Stoppard, Tom. *Professional Foul*. In: Stoppard, Tom. *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour and Professional Foul*. London: Faber, 1978.

Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Recommended Materials

Scruton, Roger. *Kant*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Miller, David (ed.). *The Liberty Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Pelczynski, Zbigniew A. and Gray, John (eds.). *Conceptions of Liberty in Political Philosophy*, London: Athlone Press, 1984.

Goldstone, Jack, ed. *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative and Historical Studies*. 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Wentworth, 2008.

Griffin, Roger. *Fascism (Key Concepts in Political Theory)*. Cambridge: Polity, 2018.

Marshall, Peter. *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992

4. Teaching methodology

The philosophy sessions in this course explore evolving ideas of liberty through key moments in Ancient philosophy, Kantian ethics, and modern conceptions of authenticity. Our teaching methodology combines close textual reading with philosophical analysis, encouraging students to interpret primary sources in their historical and intellectual contexts while developing their own critical perspectives. In class, we will unpack central arguments and engage in discussion-based inquiry, fostering a space where students question and compare diverse notions of liberty—from questions concerning self-governance and Kant’s moral autonomy to existentialist calls for authentic living. Through written assignments and collaborative dialogue, students will learn to navigate complex philosophical terrain with clarity and rigor.

The history sessions are structured primarily as interactive seminars designed to encourage student participation and deepen their understanding of the topics. Each session begins with the instructor giving a brief introduction to the relevant era or issues, followed by a Q&A segment based on the week’s assigned readings. To support this, instructors will post a set of questions on NEO related to that week’s materials. In the closing debate, students will use their knowledge gained from their attendance at the history sessions and readings to articulate and defend positions on the relationship between liberty and revolution.

The literature and theatre sessions will combine introductory discussions, the instructor’s outline of the historical, cultural and political background of individual works, and directed close reading of selected passages. The closing debate will summarize the observations from the discussions of the plays covered in this section of the course, and will proceed to a broader consideration of literature, theatre and the arts as forms of cultural intervention in politics and society. A set of questions will be posted on NEO to guide the debate.

The instructors are committed to creating a welcoming environment that promotes open exchange of student views. To get the most from the course, it is essential that students come well-prepared, having completed the readings and ready to take part in discussion.

5. Course Schedule

Date	Class Agenda
4 Sep	Area: Philosophy/History/Literature and Theatre Instructor: Course instructors Topic: Introduction to the Multidisciplinary Colloquium Description: Presentation of the content, method, and the requirements of the Colloquium course and discussion

	<p>Reading: Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty'</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: -</p>
11 Sep	<p>Area: Philosophy</p> <p>Instructor: Jiří Kašný and Jakub Jirsa</p> <p>Topic: Freedom and Destiny/Necessity</p> <p>Description: Philosophical analysis of <i>Oedipus the King</i> by Sophocles. Oedipus, believing in his free will, attempts to escape the prophecy that he will kill his father and marry his mother, yet his very actions lead him to fulfill it. This paradox highlights the ancient Greek concept of fate (<i>moira</i>), suggesting that human efforts to alter destiny are ultimately futile. However, the play also raises the question of moral responsibility—if Oedipus is bound by fate, can he truly be blamed for his sins? Sophocles presents a world where fate is inescapable, yet human suffering arises from ignorance and hubris, creating a tragic conflict between divine determinism and the illusion of free will.</p> <p>Reading: Sophocles, <i>Oedipus the King</i></p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Presentation of the possible topics for a philosophy essay.</p>
18 Sep	<p>Area: Philosophy</p> <p>Instructor: Jiří Kašný and Jakub Jirsa</p> <p>Topic: Freedom and Autonomy</p> <p>Description: Critical discussion of Kant's understanding of practical reason. In this session, we will explore the concepts of enlightenment, transcendental synthesis, categorical imperative, and social contract theory to examine the enhancement of autonomy and freedom in modern and post-modern society.</p> <p>Reading: Immanuel Kant, <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> (extracts); Roger Scruton, <i>Kant</i> (extracts)</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: -</p>
25 Sep	<p>Area: Philosophy</p> <p>Instructor: Jiří Kašný and Jakub Jirsa</p> <p>Topic: Freedom and Authenticity Today</p> <p>Description: Critical inquiry with Emmanuel Levinas and Charles Taylor. In this session, we will explore the sources of authenticity in Western tradition and, then, discuss the post-modern understanding of freedom: "Each of us has an original way of being human." (Taylor)</p> <p>Reading: Charles Taylor, <i>The Ethics of Authenticity</i> (extracts)</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Discussion of the draft of the philosophy essay.</p>
2 Oct	<p>Area: Philosophy</p> <p>Instructor: Jiří Kašný and Jakub Jirsa</p> <p>Topic: Summary of Philosophical Discussions about Freedom</p> <p>Description: Philosophical discussion about freedom in the class community of inquiry. Each student will present a summary of their home essay and open a discussion on their ideas and findings. The general focus of the discussion will be on different notions of freedom and liberty and their possible conflicts (the issue of value pluralism).</p> <p>Reading: -</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Philosophy essay due.</p>

9 Oct	<p>Area: History</p> <p>Instructor: Gerald Power</p> <p>Topic: Liberty Before the Age of Revolution</p> <p>Description: This introductory session surveys the multifaceted understandings of liberty in Europe from c.1500 to 1700. It shows how the cultures of the Renaissance and the Reformation threw up challenging and optimistic formulations of the human capacity to embrace liberty. It also shows that liberty could be tightly connected to status and gender and, moreover, it shows that there were powerful political, religious and social arguments <i>against</i> liberty. A special focus on England in the 1640s reveals the contested concepts of liberty in the pre-modern age.</p> <p>Reading: Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i>, Part 1, Chapters 13, 14, 17 (many editions freely available online and in the Library, also a version uploaded to the course page under 'Resources').</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: -</p>
16 Oct	<p>Area: History</p> <p>Instructor: Gerald Power and Jakub Drábik</p> <p>Topic: The French Revolution and the Birth of Modern Anarchism – Freedom and Its Limits</p> <p>Description: This session will explore the French Revolution as a foundational moment in the modern discourse on freedom. We will examine how revolutionary ideas of liberty, equality, and popular sovereignty challenged existing power structures and how the radical phase of the revolution (1792–1794) laid the groundwork for later anarchist thought. The discussion will address the influence of revolutionary events—such as the abolition of monarchy and direct democratic experiments—on the emergence of anarchism as an extreme form of freedom, rejecting all hierarchical authority.</p> <p>Reading: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract, Book 1, Chapter 8 (via the link or in Library); William Godwin, <i>Enquiry Concerning Political Justice</i> (1793), Book 3, Chapters 4 'Of Political Authority' and 5 'Of Legislation'</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: -</p>
23 Oct ONLINE	<p>Area: History</p> <p>Instructor: Jakub Drábik</p> <p>Topic: The 20th Century and the Destruction of Freedom – Fascism and Communism (ONLINE – pre-recorded session available in NEO)</p> <p>Description: This session will focus on how the 20th century saw the rise of two ideologies—fascism and communism—that, despite their differences, both sought to eliminate individual freedoms in pursuit of a collective vision. We will analyse how regimes like the ones in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union used state power, propaganda, and repression to suppress political opposition, control society, and redefine the meaning of freedom.</p> <p>Reading: George Orwell, The Prevention of Literature (1946), Václav Havel, 'Letter to Dr Husák'</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: -</p>
30 Oct	Midterm break
6 Nov	Area: History

(in Room L312)	<p>Instructor: Gerald Power and Jakub Drábik</p> <p>Topic: Closing Debate about Freedom in History</p> <p>Description: Having been divided into groups, students will use their knowledge gained from their attendance at the history sessions and readings to articulate and defend positions on the relationship between liberty and the state. Group A will argue in favour of the motion: 'We cannot enjoy liberty without a strong state'. Group B will argue against the motion.</p> <p>Reading: Previous readings and see suggestions under the Assignment Description below.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Debate.</p>
13 Nov	<p>Area: Literature and Theatre</p> <p>Instructor: Ondřej Pilný</p> <p>Topic: The Legacy of Restrictive Social Norms and Colonialism</p> <p>Description: A consideration of freedom vis-a-vis the legacy of patriarchy, Victorian morals and colonialism, as presented in the work of a celebrated contemporary British playwright premiered in 1979.</p> <p>Reading: Caryl Churchill, <i>Cloud Nine</i></p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: -</p>
20 Nov	<p>Area: Literature and Theatre</p> <p>Instructor: Ondřej Pilný</p> <p>Topic: Totalitarianism and Ethics</p> <p>Description: A consideration of freedom in the context of a totalitarian state, focused on a TV play that examines ethical principles vis-a-vis totalitarian oppression as well as the rules of a popular game by way of analogy. The discussion will incorporate the first major statement by Václav Havel as a political dissident which inspired Stoppard's play.</p> <p>Reading: Tom Stoppard, <i>Professional Foul</i>; Václav Havel, 'Letter to Dr Husák'</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Abstracts for literature/theatre essay due.</p>
27 Nov	<p>Area: Literature and Theatre</p> <p>Instructor: Ondřej Pilný</p> <p>Topic: Freedom, Authenticity and the Arts</p> <p>Description: A discussion of a recent experimental play focused on a seemingly absurd gesture of defiance in the context of present-day Europe. The unorthodox presentation of the subject by Crouch will lead us to discuss the role of the spectator in the theatre, as foregrounded in a later collaboration of the author with Andy Smith, as well as a general consideration of the status of art in relation to political change.</p> <p>Reading: Tim Crouch, <i>My Arm</i>; Tim Crouch and Andy Smith, <i>what happens to the hope at the end of the evening</i>; Seda Ilter, "'A Process of Transformation": Tim Crouch on <i>My Arm</i>'; Dan Rebellato, 'what happens to the hope at the end of the evening' (extract).</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: -</p>
4 Dec	<p>Area: Literature and Theatre</p> <p>Instructor: Ondřej Pilný</p> <p>Topic: Closing Debate about Freedom in Literature and Theatre</p>

	<p>Description: Based on a summary of observations from the three literature and theatres sessions, the debate will proceed to examine the potential that verbal and performative arts have as forms of cultural intervention in politics and society, as well as their limits in this sense.</p> <p>Reading: Derek Attridge, <i>The Singularity of Literature</i>, Chapter 1 'Introductory', pp. 1-14; Chapter 2 'Creation and the Other', pp. 36-46.</p> <p>Questions to guide the class discussion:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does Attridge define "the singularity of literature"? 2. How does Attridge define "the other"? 3. What effect may literature (and art in general) have according to Attridge? <p>Assignments/deadlines: Literature/theatre essay due.</p>
11 Dec	<p>Area: Philosophy/History/Literature and Theatre</p> <p>Instructor: All instructors</p> <p>Topic: Concluding Remarks and Preparation of the Final Colloquium</p> <p>Description: A closing discussion followed by the preparation of the structure of the final colloquium, including the appointment of mentors for colloquium presentations</p> <p>Reading: -</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Colloquium presentation abstracts due.</p>
19 Feb 2026	<p>Area: Philosophy/History/Literature and Theatre</p> <p>Topic: Final Colloquium</p> <p>Description: Students present their work in the form of 20-minute conference papers in structured panels followed by discussion.</p>

6. Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

MA Students:

Assignment	Workload (hours)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Attendance and Participation	42	10%	A, B, C, D, E, F	1, 2, 3
Philosophy Essay	26	20%	A, B, E	1, 2
History Debate	26	20%	A, B, F	2
Literature/Theatre Essay	26	20%	A, B, D, E	1, 2
Colloquium Paper and Presentation	30	30%	A, B, C, D, G	1, 2, 3
TOTAL	150	100%		

*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

BA Students:

Assignment	Workload (hours)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Attendance and Class Participation	42	10%	A, B, C, D, E, F	1, 2, 3
Philosophy Essay	36	30%	A, B, E	1, 2
History Debate	36	30%	A, B, F	2
Literature/Theatre Essay	36	30%	A, B, D, E	1, 2
TOTAL	150	100%		

*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

7. Detailed description of the assignments

Assignment 1: Attendance and Class Participation

Students are required to do the assigned reading in advance of the class. They are expected to attend class regularly (see the AAU policy on attendance via section 8 below), be on time, and respect the rules and manners of the classroom that are customary at university level. Active participation in debates is a condition of attendance. In case a student is found not to have read the assigned text(s), the participation grade will be impacted. Students will be marked absent if they miss 25 percent or more of a class by arriving late or leaving early.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Critical thinking	30%
Close-reading skills	30%
Participation in debates	40%

Assignment 2: Philosophy Essay

The required length for the essay is **1000 – 1500 words for BA, 1500-2000 for MA**. Detailed instructions including the topics of the home essay will be distributed and discussed in classes two and three. The essay is **due in class five via NEO-Turnitin**. Assessed areas include content, resources, structure, argument, and the summary presentation.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Content (Does the text answer the question and/or explain the topic? Does it use the texts discussed? Quality of the summary)	30%
Structure (Clarity of the text, leading the reader towards the conclusion.)	20%
Sources (Quality, relevance and citation)	20%
Argumentation (Are the arguments valid? Consideration of counter-arguments and response to them.)	30%

Assignment 3: History Debate

This involves dividing the class into two groups to debate the proposition that '**We cannot enjoy liberty without a strong state**'. Group A will argue in favour of the motion and Group B against.

Each group will nominate two speakers to represent them. Each of these speakers will deal with a separate perspective or facet of the overall argument. Discussion involving the whole class will also take place, giving space for questions and new ideas. A vote will complete the assignment (and students do NOT have to vote for the argument they were responsible for preparing and articulating).

The following format is adopted:

- 1) Speaker 1 from Group A: 10 minutes
- 2) Speaker 1 from Group B: 10 minutes
- 3) General discussion on the issues raised so far: 20 minutes
- 4) Speaker 2 from Group A: 10 minutes
- 5) Speaker 2 from Group B: 10 minutes
- 6) General discussion: 40-60 minutes
- 7) Vote and declaration

We recommend that students employ their philosophical insights gained in the first section of the course, as well as the readings assigned by the history instructors. In addition, practical examples of the state either enhancing or inhibiting liberty can be found in numerous academic history books and articles. For a starting point, we recommend consulting John Merriman, *Europe: A History of Modern Europe*, looking at e.g. the sections on the English civil war, the French and Russian Revolutions, Napoleonic France, the Prague Commune, Czechoslovakia and the Eastern Bloc under Communism (including the Velvet Revolution) and the 'guarantor state' of the post-1945 period. Of course, the use you make of these examples and others is up to you: possibly some episodes can support both sides of the debate.

AI Policy: The use of AI is permitted for brainstorming and other preliminary work, but reading from a script that looks AI-generated can lead to enquiries and possibly loss of points or failure of assignment for the entire group.

Assessment breakdown (Separate grades will be given to members of Groups A and B; nominated speakers receive the same grade as their fellow group members)

Assessed area	Percentage
Quality of argument (clarity and logic of argument, use of concrete examples)	40%
Rhetorical skills and persuasiveness (fluency of speech, content which anticipates counter-arguments)	40%
Logic of structure, working with time limits, relevance of material	20%

Assignment 4: Literature/Theatre Essay

The required length for the essay is **1000 – 1500 words for BA, 1500-2000 for MA**. The essay should avoid summarizing the plot of the play or detailing biographical information

about the author. Based on research in secondary sources, it should take into account the historical, political and aesthetic context of the work, as may be relevant. Students are given a free hand as regards the essay topic; however, the essay is expected to feature an engagement with the topic of freedom. Essay topics and/or essay drafts may be consulted with the instructor (the latter with reasonable advance notice). **The essay must be submitted as an MS Word, .odt or rtf. file in NEO (the submission deadline is 4 December 2025, midnight).** All secondary material must be properly referenced with accordance to the MLA or Chicago style. Sources that are not considered relevant for the purpose include websites of the gradesaver.com-type, personal websites, Wikipedia or similar online encyclopedias, fan sites or blogs. If in doubt as to whether a source is adequate, please contact the instructor. **The use of AI for this assignment is prohibited.**

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Independent research	25%
Critical thinking	25%
Judicious use of relevant secondary sources	25%
Academic writing skills	25%

Assignment 5 (MA students): Presentation at Final Colloquium

Following the completion of the taught sessions of the course, students will work with individual mentors (In the HUM695 Scholarly Writing and Research) on the development of standard-length (20 min) conference papers, which will be presented at the final colloquium. The final colloquium will take the form of a regular academic conference featuring conference panels in which the papers will be presented, followed by general discussion. The final colloquium will be open to all AAU faculty and students and the public.

The deadline for choosing a mentor and submitting a paper abstract is 11 December 2025, regular class time. The schedule of work on the paper and the form of consultations will be subject to individual arrangements made with the mentor. The grade for the assignment will be based on the quality of the paper and the presentation at the colloquium, as per the assessment breakdown below.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Independent research and judicious use of relevant secondary sources	25%
Critical thinking	25%
Academic writing skills	25%
Oral presentation skills	25%

8. General Requirements and School Policies

General Requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU's academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work.