

BC3063y Senior Seminar: Human Freedom and Human Capital, Spring 2004-2005
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Class: TBA; Office hours: TBA

Course Description

In this senior seminar we read a selection of essays (from the reading list below) that are broadly related to the following topics: Investment in human capital, human nature and human freedom, and the role of the worker in the modern workplace.

Here are some broad questions that I hope these readings will prompt us to critically address.

1. One set of questions relates directly to the concept of freedom. For example, what constitutes human freedom or what is the locus of human freedom? Is freedom about whether human beings as moral agents live up to some predetermined ideal in the Platonic sense? Or is it more about the nature of human activity as it relates to the creative pursuit of diverse human interests?
2. A second set of questions is to ask whether human freedom might in any way be related to the idea of human capital investments. For example, do we have to learn skills or cultivate our tastes, interests and desires to become free agents just like we learn skills to become lawyers and carpenters?
3. A third set of questions relates to whether freedom can be achieved within the context of the modern workplace. For example, is work necessarily alienating? Is it a mere means to other ends? Or is it possible to find freedom and meaning in our working lives?
4. The question "what is human nature?" underpins all these issues. What separates us from other species? Do we have a discernible and singular nature or should this question be rephrased to read "human natures"?

Course Requirements

1. A class presentation based on one of the readings
2. A short write-up of your presentation and discussion to be distributed to the entire class a week after the presentation
3. A substantial final term paper, to be written and revised over the second half of the semester
4. Short class presentation of your final paper during the last week of class

Suggested Reading List

1. Ariely, Dan, George Loewenstein, and Drazen Prelec (2001), "Coherent Arbitrariness: Stable Demand Curves without Stable Preferences."
2. Becker, Gary (1962), "Investment in Human Capital: A Theoretical Analysis," *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 70, Issue 5, Supplement (October 1962), pp. 9-49.
3. Becker, Gary (1993), "Nobel Lecture: The Economic Way of Looking at Behavior," Excerpt: IV. Human Capital, *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 101, Issue 3, (June 1993), pp. 392-395.
4. Berlin, Isaiah (1969), "Two Concepts of Liberty," *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford University Press, Paperback edition, 1988, pp.118-134.
5. Bowles, Samuel (1976), "The Production Process in a Competitive Economy: Walrasian, Neo-Hobbesian, and Marxian Models," *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 75, Issue 1, (March 1985), pp. 16-36, pp. 1203-1204.
6. Coase, Ronald, (1937), "The Nature of the Firm," *The Nature of the Firm: Origins, Evolution, and Development*, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp.18-33.
7. Dawkins, Richard, (1976), "Memes: the New Replicators," Chapter 11 of *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford University Press: 1989.
8. Freud, Sigmund, "Civilization and Its Discontents."
9. Geertz, Clifford, (1973), "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man," Chapter 2 of *Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, Inc., Publishers. 1973.
10. Landes, David (1986), "What Do Bosses Really Do?" *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. XLVI, No.3, (September 1986), pp. 585-623.
11. Lazear, Edward (1991), "Labor Economics and the Psychology of Organizations," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 5, No.2 (Spring 1991), pp. 89-110.
12. Marglin, Stephen, (1974), "What Do Bosses Do? The Origins and Functions of Hierarchy in Capitalist Production," *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (Summer 1974), pp.60-112.
13. Nietzsche, Frederick, "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life."
14. Pencavel, John (2002). *Worker Participation: Lessons From the Worker Co-ops of the Pacific Northwest*. Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 2002.
15. Schultz, Theodore (1962), "Reflections on Investment in Man," *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 70, No. 5, Supplement (October 1962), pp. 1-8.
16. Schultz, Theodore (1961), "Investment in Human Capital," *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 51, No.1, (March 1961), pp. 1-17.
17. Schultz, Theodore (1961), "Investment in Human Capital," *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 51, Issue 5, (December 1961), pp. 1035-1039.
18. Sen, Amartya (1988), "Freedom of Choice: Concept and Content," *European Economic Review*, Vol. 32, 1988, pp. 269-294.
19. Shapiro, Carl and Joseph E. Stiglitz (1984), "Equilibrium Unemployment as a Worker Discipline Device," *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 74, No.3, (June 1984), pp.433-444.
20. Taylor, Charles, (1979), "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty," *The Idea of Freedom*, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 175-193.
21. Tucker, Robert C., (1978), "Marx on the History of His Opinions," *The Marx-Engles Reader*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1978, pp. 3-6.
22. Tucker, Robert C., (1978), "Estranged Labour," *The Marx-Engles Reader*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1978, pp.70-81.
23. Tucker, Robert C., (1978), "Chapter VI. The Buying and Selling of Labour-Power," *The Marx-Engles Reader*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1978, pp.336-343.
24. Tucker, Robert C., (1978), "Capital, Volume Three: On The Realm of Necessity and the Realm of Freedom," *The Marx-Engles Reader*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1978, pp. 439-442.