

Joshua Kissel

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Education

2014-Present Northwestern University Department of Philosophy.

M.A (2016).

Ph.D. (Expected Summer 2021)

2009-2013 University of Wisconsin-Madison.

B.A. Philosophy (with Honors) and History

Certificates in Environmental Studies and in European Studies

Honors Thesis: “On the Duty to Befriend Norman Bates; Egalitarianism,
Consequentialism, and Friendship”

Areas of Specialization

Social and Political Philosophy, Ethics, Applied Ethics

Areas of Competence

Animal and Environmental Ethics, Feminist Philosophy, History of Modern Political Philosophy
(including Marx and Analytic Marxism), Philosophy of Education

Brief Dissertation Abstract

“Realizing Social Freedom: Exit, Democracy, and an Egalitarian Ethos”

I defend a novel account of *social freedom*, where this is understood as the robust absence of socially remediable constraints. On this view, one is free to the extent that one is not subject to a constraint or inability that could be alleviated by another agent. I then show how social freedom can be effectively realized via a set of three social ideals: strong exit opportunities, democracy in collective institutions, and egalitarian informal norms. These ideals help us—whether as individuals or collectives—chart a path toward a more widespread realization of freedom.

Committee: Kyla Ebels-Duggan (chair), Cristina Lafont, Laura Valentini (LMU), Stephen White

Publications

- 2021 “Why Adequacy Isn’t Enough; Educational Justice, Positional Goods, and Class Power” (February 25) in the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* [[Link](#)]
- 2017 “Effective Altruism and Anti-Capitalism: An Attempt at Reconciliation” in the "Effective Altruism" issue of *Essays in Philosophy*. Volume 18, Issue 1, Article 5. Pgs., 68-90 [[Link](#)]

Prizes and Awards

- 2019 International Conference Travel Grant – The Graduate School of Northwestern University, to present at the XVIII Congreso Interamericano de Filosofía in Bogotá, Colombia. \$1300
- 2019 Domestic Conference Travel Grant – Northwestern University Philosophy, to present at the Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Society Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana. \$300
- 2019 Graduate Research Grant – The Graduate School of Northwestern University, to defray costs of studying in London while visiting the London School of Economics. \$3000
- 2018 Domestic Conference Travel Grant – Northwestern University Philosophy, to present at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Philosophy Graduate Conference. \$200
- 2017 International Conference Travel Grant – The Graduate School of Northwestern University, to present at 3rd Annual Conference of the Centre for the Study of Global Ethics at the University of Birmingham. \$1300
- 2016 Scholarship Award for Effective Altruism Global Conference at University of California – Berkeley (Awarded as Chicago Chapter Organizer), \$400 waiver
- 2016 Domestic Conference Travel Grant – Northwestern University Philosophy, to attend Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress (RoME), University of Colorado-Boulder. \$225
- 2013 Bradley Freedom Prize Recipient (2nd Place): “In Defense of a Highly Progressive Incentive Securing Tax for the Wealthy” awarded by the Wisconsin Center for the Study of Liberal Democracy, \$1500

Visiting Affiliations

2019 Visitor at London School of Economics, Centre for Philosophy of Natural and Social Science, Lent and Summer Terms

Presentations and Conference Activities *notes the presentation or attendance was refereed

Presentations

- 2021 “The Egalitarian Ethos: How an Informal Norm Can Help Realize Freedom”
Northwestern University Ethics and Politics (NUMAP), January 26
- 2021 “Socialist Effective Altruism: Egalitarianism and Effective Altruism under Capitalism and Beyond”
16th conference of the International Society for Utilitarian Studies at University of Illinois in Chicago, July 29-31* [Rescheduled to 2021, suspended in 2021 due to Covid-19]
- 2020 “Getting Free (From the State of Nature): Kantian Republicanism and Informal Norms”
Northwestern University Ethics and Politics (NUMAP), April 17
- 2020 “When Adequacy Isn’t; Educational Justice, Positional Goods, and Class Power”
Concordia University Graduate Philosophy Conference, Montréal, Canada, March 13-14* [Suspended due to Covid-19]
- 2019 “Freedom Beyond the Rule of Law: Realizing Freedom with (Informal) Egalitarian Norms”
XVIII Congreso Interamericano de Filosofía, The University of Los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia, October 15-18*
- 2019 “When Adequacy Isn’t; Educational Justice, Positional Goods, and Class Power”
1st Bucharest Conference in Analytical Political Theory, Bucharest, Romania, June 13-15*
- 2019 “When Adequacy Isn’t; Educational Justice, Positional Goods, and Class Power”
Panel: “Education: Ideals, Evidence, and Implementation” at the Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Society Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA. March 28-30*
- 2019 “Freedom and the Social Ideal of Voice”
Dissertation Research Seminar, Northwestern University, January 7

- 2018 “Robust Freedom of Exit as a Social Ideal of a Freer Society”
Northwestern University Ethics and Politics (NUMAP), October 8
- 2018 “Responsibility for Unfreedom,”
Fifth Conference of the Brazilian Society of Analytical Philosophy, Salvador,
Bahia, Brazil, September 10-14*
- 2018 “Justification and Freedom as the Robust Absence of Socially Remediable
Constraints”
Dissertation Research Seminar, Northwestern University, April 23
- 2018 “Adequacy, Positional Goods, and Social Change, A Critique of Anderson”
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Philosophy Graduate Conference,
April 20-21*
- 2018 “Adequacy, Positional Goods, and Social Change, A Critique of Anderson”
Northwestern University, Graduate Works in Progress (GWIP), April 16
- 2018 “Freedom as Effective Power”
Northwestern University Ethics and Politics (NUMAP), March 16
- 2017 “A Defense of Anti-Capitalist Effective Altruism”
3rd Annual Conference of the Centre for the Study of Global Ethics, University of
Birmingham, June 1-2*
- 2017 “Domination, Subordination, and Being (Objectionably) Under the Power of
Others”
Dissertation Research Seminar, Northwestern University, March 16
- 2016 “Rule Over None: Balloting by Lottery rather than Vote”
Northwestern University, Graduate Works in Progress (GWIP). November 14

Comments

- 2018 Blain Neufeld, “Public Reason, Ideal Theory, and Political Autonomy” at the
Northwestern Practical Philosophy Workshop, April 6
- 2018 Claire Finkelstein, “Contracts Under Coercion: Should one Keep an Agreement
with a Robber?” at the Central APA, Chicago, Illinois

2016 Kirun Sankarran, “Neo-Republicanism Needs a Criterion of Reasonableness” at the Northwestern Society for the Theory of Ethics and Politics (NUSTEP)

2016 Christopher M. Rice, “The Objective List Theory of Animal Well-Being” at the Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress (RoME), University of Colorado-Boulder

Chaired

2020 Central APA, Chicago, Illinois
Session 1: Christian Barry, “Environmental Offsets”
Session 2: ‘Marxism and Ecology’ featuring Phil Gasper “Dialectics of Nature: Engels and Ecology” and Tyler Zimmer, “Marxism, Technological Progress, and the Threat of Climate Change.”

2016 Judith Lichtenberg, “Effective Altruism: A Critique” at the Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress (RoME), University of Colorado-Boulder

Workshops

2018 “Ethics Across the Curriculum” at Georgetown University’s Institute for the Study of Markets and Ethics, October 12-14*

Teaching

2021 Teaching Resource Coordinator for the NU Philosophy Graduate Students

2019-2020 Coach, Ethics Bowl at Sullivan High School with NU’s Minorities and Philosophy Chapter

2017-2018 Graduate of the Teaching Certificate Program at Northwestern University’s Searle Center for Advancing Learning and Teaching

Instructor of Record at Northwestern University

2021 Environmental Ethics, Summer Term

2020 Introduction to Political Philosophy, Summer Term

2019 Introduction to Philosophy, Summer Term

Graduate Teaching Assistantships

Responsibilities including leading weekly discussion sections, holding office hours, offering feedback and grading student work, and functioning as the main point of contact for students.

2021 Introduction to Philosophy (Lead Teaching Assistant)—Sanford Goldberg

2020 Introduction to the Hebrew Bible—Barry Wimpfheimer (Religious Studies)

- 2020 Environmental Ethics—Chad Horne
- 2020 Ethical Problems and Public Issues—Chad Horne
- 2018 Gender, Politics, and Philosophy—Tyler Zimmer
- 2017 Critiques of Morality: Nietzsche and Williams – Mark Alznauer
- 2017 Gender, Politics, and Philosophy—Penelope Deutscher
- 2017 Ethical Problems and Public Issues—Mark Sheldon
- 2016 Environmental Ethics—Richard Kraut
- 2015 Introduction to Moral Philosophy—Stephen White

Grader

Responsibilities included offering feedback and assigning grades to student work. For ISEN courses it included serving as the primary communication for students regarding assignments, discussion board moderation, and regular contact with students via email and in office hours.

- 2021 The Philosophy of Punishment and Incarceration—Jennifer Lackey
This class includes students at Northwestern and in Northwestern’s Prison Education Program at Stateville Correctional Center
- 2021 Climate Change and Sustainability: Ethical Dimensions—Mark Thompson
(Institute for Sustainability and Energy)
- 2020 Ways of Knowing: Learning in the Postcolony—Sami Hermez & Torsten Menge
(Liberal Arts at Northwestern University – Qatar)
- 2020 Climate Change and Sustainability: Ethical Dimensions—Mark Thompson
(Institute for Sustainability and Energy)
- 2020 Business and Professional Ethics—John Laing
- 2019 Climate Change and Sustainability: Ethical Dimensions—Gretchen Ellefson
(Institute for Sustainability and Energy)

Service and Involvement

Departmental Service and Involvement

- 2018 Organizing Committee of Philm, Northwestern’s Philosophy and Film Group
- 2017-Present Northwestern University Morality and Politics workshop (NUMAP)
- 2017-2018 Department Representative for Philosophy to the Graduate Leadership and Advocacy Council, Northwestern University
- 2017-2018 Global Capitalism and Law Research Group
- 2016 Organizer; Sidgwick and Parfit Reading Group
- 2015-2016 Tea Time Coordinator for Northwestern Philosophy Graduate Student Association
- 2014-Present Paper Reviewer at The Northwestern Society for the Theory of Ethics and Politics (NUSTEP) Conference. Organizing Committee 2018
- 2014-Present Practical Philosophy Workshop. Co-Organizer 2017-2018

2014-2017 Animal Studies Reading Group
2014-2015 Marx's *Capital* Reading Group

University Service

2015-Present Graduate Participant in the "I'm First Campaign" to Mentor First Generation Students at Northwestern University.
2015-2017 Graduate Fellow at Jones Residential College

Other Service and Extracurricular Involvement

2016-2020 Member and Organizer with Northwestern University Graduate Workers
2014-Present Organizer; Effective Altruism Chicago

Courses (reverse chronologically by Category) A: Audit *: Graduate Seminar

Value Theory

1. The Future of Democracy – Cristina Lafont [A]*
2. Global (In)justice [Political Science] – Shmulik Nili [A]*
3. Habermas – Cristina Lafont [A]*
4. Scanlon's What We Owe to Each Other – Stephen White [A]*
5. Global Capitalism and Law [w/ Political Science] – Karen Alter and Cristina Lafont [A]*
6. Hegel and Honneth – Mark Alznauer [A]*
7. Inarticulacy and Reasonable Commitments – Kyla Ebels-Duggan*
8. Contemporary Egalitarianism [Political Science] – Chiara Cordelli at University of Chicago*
9. The Future of Democracy 2 – Cristina Lafont*
10. The Future of Democracy 1 – Cristina Lafont*
11. Marx and Marxism – Charles Mills*
12. The Practical Point of View – Stephen White*
13. Democratic Virtue – Anthony Laden at University of Illinois-Chicago*
14. Desires – Kyla Ebels-Duggan*
15. Impartiality and the Moral Point of View – Stephen White
16. Rawls and his Critics – Charles Mills*
17. The Ethics of Interaction – Stephen White*
18. Distributive Justice – Harry Brighouse at UW – Madison [A]*
19. Analytical Marxism [Sociology] – Erik Olin-Wright at UW – Madison *
20. Kant and Kantian Ethics – Claudia Card at UW – Madison *
21. Normative Ethical Theories – Robert Streiffer at UW – Madison *

History of Philosophy

1. Hegel and Marx on History – Mark Alznauer [A]*
2. Plato and Aristotle in the Islamic Tradition [w/ Political Science] – Makram Abbas [A]*
3. Plato's Ethics – Richard Kraut*
4. The Social Contract Tradition – Stephen White
5. Aristotle's Ethics – Richard Kraut*
6. Kant's Moral Theory – Kyla Ebels-Duggan
7. History of Utilitarianism – Martha Nussbaum at University of Chicago [A]*

Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Philosophy of Science

1. The Nature of Belief – Sanford Goldberg [A]*
2. Logic – Michael Glanzberg
3. Philosophy of Science – Matthew Kopec*
4. Classics in Analytic Philosophy 2 – Sanford Goldberg*
5. Classics in Analytic Philosophy 1 – Sanford Goldberg*

References

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Realizing Social Freedom: Exit, Democracy, and an Egalitarian Ethos

An imprisoned person, an enslaved person, and a starving person in a world with excess food all have something important in common: each is constrained. The prisoner is constrained from leaving their cell, the slave from escaping servitude or directing their own activities, and the hungry from accessing the food they need. However, this is not all they have in common. Unlike—say—the inability of a child to fly like a bird, these constraints stand in need of moral justification. It is not enough to merely *explain* the way in which the laws governing imprisonment, servitude, or property generate these constraints—the demand is to *justify* our social institutions or norms.

The term ‘social freedom’ can be used to distinguish these constraints that require moral justification from the wider class of mere incapacities. The problem is that the two most popular conceptions of social freedom, liberal and republican, struggle to understand at least one of these paradigmatic cases of unfreedom—imprisonment or slavery—as an unfreedom at all. In response, **I defend a conception of freedom as independence that understands freedom as the robust absence of socially remediable constraints.** This conception is justified by its satisfaction of two desiderata of a normatively salient concept. First, it

This account is justified by appeal to two claims; first, by picking out cases of unfreedom that call for justification this account fulfils the *functional-role* of a normatively salient concept. Secondly it is *actionable* because of its capacity to guide agents and institutions in their realization of freedom.

The Republican Problem

Republican accounts fail to regard someone justly imprisoned as unfree. These accounts adopt a moralized conception of freedom such that an individual counts as unfree only if they are constrained unjustifiably. The problem is not just that a prisoner is clearly unfree according to ordinary language. Instead, it is that in normative philosophy ‘freedom’ is a term that serves a ‘justificatory role’ by identifying that set of constraints that demand moral justification. By moralizing the concept of freedom republicans obscure the harm of unfreedom even when such unfreedom is ultimately justifiable—thus it undermines our theory’s ability produce right action.

The Liberal Problem

The problem for many liberal theorists is their struggle to recognize an enslaved person with an absentee or ‘benevolent’ master as unfree. Unfreedom on liberal conceptions consists only in present interference or constraint leaving liberals unable to register the fact that making decisions in light of the powers others have over us is itself the sort of constraint that calls for moral justification because these powers often limit what actions we even consider taking.

Robust and Non-Moralized Freedom

My account of social freedom recognizes that calls for justification are sensible only where we are constrained in ways that could in principle be alleviated by the acts or inactions of other agents. It is ‘social’ in this sense. Unlike liberal accounts it recognizes that the very contingency of a persons’ situation can itself be understood as a constraint—e.g., as when a worker does what

their boss would order without the order ever actually being issued. Unlike republican accounts, this account does this without obfuscating moralization.

Realizing Social Freedom – Three Social Ideals

On a robust and non-moralized conception of freedom there is no single ideally or perfectly free society. Nevertheless, in identifying those constraints that call for justification my account offers guidance in determining social ideals that can work in tandem to facilitate the widespread realization of freedom without depending on any perfectionist answer to these justificatory demands. I use this account of freedom to identify and defend three such ideals: exit, democratic voice, and an egalitarian ethos. My argument produces two insights for contemporary political theory. First, *contra* many right-libertarians and liberals, the value of freedom is enough to legitimate a robustly egalitarian political program. Secondly, *contra* republicans and other institutionalists, informal norms can effectively realize freedom—an especially valuable result in non-ideal circumstances like those where we find ourselves under increasingly authoritarian or unresponsive institutions.

Exit and Democracy – Chapters 2 and 3

Exit and policies like open borders or universal basic income secure our freedom by ensuring we can leave those situations we reject. Democracy—whether in the form of a vote in one’s polity or union representation in one’s place of work—limits the constraints we are under when taking part in the institutions that are central to the functioning of our collective world.

Egalitarian Informal Norms – Chapters 4 and 5

This project departs most from existing political theory in its support of informal norms as a means of realizing freedom. The tension is that while exit and democracy are readily institutionalizable through different sets of laws, contracts, and other structural arrangements, an egalitarian ethos only functionally mirrors formalized norms. Nevertheless, I show that, when widely enough endorsed, egalitarian norms can secure widespread freedom in the same way as the formal law in a way that should satisfy my republican (and Kantian) critics. This argument comes in two parts. In chapter 4 I demonstrate that informal norms can resolve the problems we face in the state of nature in way analogous to that of the formal norms such as the law. They can do this despite their informal—specifically non-mediated and non-hierarchical—structure. I supplement this argument in chapter 5 where I defend an egalitarian ethos as a particularly effective informal norm for realizing freedom by exploring the egalitarian and informal structure we sometimes experience in our families, friendships, or amongst lovers. Furthermore, I offer an argument that identifies the value of such informal norms *even when* we live in non-ideal circumstances characteristic of increasingly authoritarian or unresponsive institutions.

Knowledge and Action / Theory and Praxis

It is a good thing whenever we better understand a concept—especially one central to so much normative philosophy like social freedom. However, more significant for me is the recognition that effectively realizing widespread freedom depends on understanding this concept in the right way precisely because such an understanding allows us to identify the sorts of social ideals that can guide our actions and the policies of the institutions of which we are all part.

In Progress - (Draft Available by Request)

Democracy and Justification: Why Equality is Not Enough

While it is often assumed that democracy is the most legitimate form of government offering a compelling and stable justification of this belief is no easy task. Unfortunately, this is not merely a philosopher's puzzle. A justification is a practical necessity insofar as we want to motivate our complaints against anti-democratic demagogues at home or convince nondemocracies elsewhere to adopt democratic forms of government. A plausible move is to appeal to a single egalitarian value as the source of democracy's legitimacy. However, I show that such attempts to justify democracy fail insofar as they cannot adjudicate between democracy and other forms of symmetrical authority. I press the objection by showing that "Lottocratic Balloting Juries" are consistent with equality, and independently attractive for their epistemic benefits and protection against demagogues, mob rule, and other potential excesses of majority rule. However, they are not democratic.