

# Joshua Kissel

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## *Employment*

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Instructor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

2021-Present Phillips Academy – Andover

## *Education*

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2014-2021 Northwestern University Department of Philosophy.  
Ph.D. (October 15, 2021)  
M.A (2016)

2009-2013 University of Wisconsin-Madison.  
B.A. Philosophy (with Honors) and History  
Certificates in Environmental Studies and in Europeans 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*

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“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), and the late Stephen White (1983-2021)

## *Publications*

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- 2021 Why Adequacy Isn't Enough: Educational Justice, Positional Goods and Class Power. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 55 (2):287-301. [\[Link\]](#)
- 2017 Effective Altruism and Anti-Capitalism: An Attempt at Reconciliation. *Essays in Philosophy* 18 (1):68-90 [\[Link\]](#)

## *Prizes and Awards*

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- 2021 Ernst Mach Grant – University of Salzburg, advised by Dr. Leonard Menges for a project on ‘Exploitation *as* Unfreedom.’ [Postponed, start date July 1, 2022, for up to 9 months.] €1150 (monthly)
- 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 (2<sup>nd</sup> 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

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*Visiting Affiliations*

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

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

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Presentations

- 2021 “Exploitation *as* Unfreedom”  
Panel: “New Directions in Exploitation and Exchange” at the Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Society Annual Meeting 2021, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA.  
Postponed to February 5, 2022\*
- 2021 “The Egalitarian Ethos: How an Informal Norm Can Help Realize Freedom”  
Northwestern University Morality and Politics (NUMAP), January 26
- 2021 “Socialist Effective Altruism: Egalitarianism and Effective Altruism under Capitalism and Beyond”  
16<sup>th</sup> 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 Morality 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”  
1<sup>st</sup> 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 Morality 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 Morality and Politics (NUMAP), March 16
- 2017 “A Defense of Anti-Capitalist Effective Altruism”  
3<sup>rd</sup> 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***

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#### Instructor at Phillips Academy – Andover

2021-22 Introduction to Ethics (7 iterations)  
2021-22 Bioethics (2 iterations)  
2021-22 Equity, Balance, and Inclusion (10<sup>th</sup> grade)  
2022 Environmental Ethics (2 iterations)

#### 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)

### Other Teaching Related Activities

- 2021 Teaching Resource Coordinator for the NU Philosophy Graduate Students  
 2021 Graduate Admissions Coach at InGenius Prep

- 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

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***Service and Involvement***

Departmental Service and Involvement

- 2021-2022 Carriage House Dorm Complement House Counselor
- 2018 Organizing Committee of Philm, Northwestern's Philosophy and Film Group
- 2017-2021 Northwestern University Morality And Politics (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
- 2014-2021 Paper Reviewer at The Northwestern Society for the Theory of Ethics and Politics (NUSTEP) Conference. Organizing Committee 2018
- 2014-2021 Practical Philosophy Workshop. Co-Organizer 2017-2018
- 2014-2017 Animal Studies Reading Group
- 2014-2015 Marx's *Capital* Reading Group

University Service

- 2015-2021 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
- 2014-2021 Organizer; Effective Altruism Chicago

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***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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**Laura Valentini**

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**Cristina Lafont**

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**Mark Sheldon**

Distinguished Senior Lecturer Emeritus  
Northwestern University  
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**Chad Horne**

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*Extended Dissertation Abstract*

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

This dissertation addresses two distinct but related questions. First, how should we conceive of *social freedom*? Second, given this conception, what *ideals* would best satisfy the demands we are under as citizens and moral agents? In answer to the first question, I defend a novel account of *social freedom*. **It is a conception of freedom as independence that understands freedom 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. In answer to the second, I defend a set of three social ideals as the best means of realizing freedom: (i) robust freedom of exit, (ii) democracy in collective institutions, and (iii) egalitarian informal norms. My view provides two key 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. Second, *contra* republicans and other institutionalists, informal norms can effectively facilitate our realizing freedom.

**Republicanism, Liberalism, and Social Freedom – Chapter 1**

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 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. The republican makes the mistake of adopting a ‘moralized’ conception such that an individual counts as unfree only if they are constrained unjustifiably. In so doing republicans obscure the harm of unfreedom even when such unfreedom is ultimately justifiable—thus undermining our theory’s ability produce right action. On the other hand liberals struggle to recognize an enslaved person with an absentee or ‘benevolent’ master as unfree because liberal conceptions focus too much on present interference or constraint leaving them 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.

Hence, the necessity of my alternative understanding of freedom as the robust absence of socially remediable constraints. My 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.

### **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 politically illiberal answer to justificatory demands. I defend three such ideals: exit, democratic voice, and an egalitarian ethos.

#### *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—secures freedom by limiting 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 as central to normative philosophy as 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.

### **[Summary of Other Research Available Here](#)**

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#### 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.