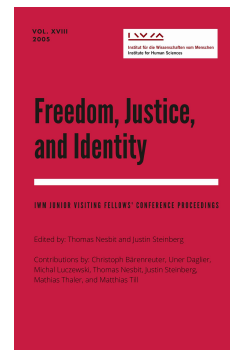


# Freedom, Justice, and Identity – Introduction

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The papers within this collection are as diverse as the people who wrote them. Coming from the United States and Europe's old, new, and soon-to-be, these individuals found quarter at the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen between the months of July and December 2004. In addition to national differences, almost every one of the junior fellows represented here works within a different discipline, using theoretical and discursive frameworks specific to his field. Nevertheless, over the course of their stay at the institute these scholars were able to forge something of a common language or set of languages out of this nearly post-Babelic confusion. They were forced to eschew jargon and to articulate their positions clearly, a practice which is reflected in the relatively non-technical, though by no means simplistic, papers collected here.

These essays coalesce around a few basic themes, including the three that we've used as principles of organization here: freedom, justice, and identity. The philosophical investigations of **Justin Steinberg** (Boston University) and **Üner Daglier** (Boston College), along with the art criticism of **Thomas Nesbit** (Boston University) are broadly concerned with questions of liberty, though their approaches are as wide-ranging as the concept itself. **Mathias Thaler** (Universität Wien) and **Matthias Till** (TU Wien) investigate justice by examining human rights (international justice) and poverty (social justice), respectively. **Christoph Bärenreuter** (Universität Wien) and **Michal Luczewski** (Warsaw University) bring us closer to identifying illusive entities, such as Europe and nation. Each scholar shares yet another tendency: they translate theoretical work into practical concerns, an all-too-rare alchemy you will find in the following essays.

**Justin Steinberg's** "Spinoza and the Problem of Freedom," considers how it is that the seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher Benedict de Spinoza—the arch-determinist—can admit liberty into his metaphysics. Steinberg opens by sketching some of the relevant theological and philosophical background to the problem of freedom that Spinoza inherited. In effect, Spinoza rejects this entire framework by embracing an unmitigated immanent necessitarianism. Furthermore, by adopting other strict metaphysical

doctrines, such as naturalism and substance monism, Spinoza incurs further problems in his struggle to articulate a new account of freedom. Steinberg argues that on the basis of a radical new conception of individuality and internality—in terms of functional coherence—Spinoza is able to give us a rather novel, gradualistic account of liberty. This liberty can be exercised both at the ethereal heights of philosophical comprehension as well as in mundane, self-sustaining activities. Steinberg closes by suggesting how this general conception of free activity may shed light on Spinoza's notion of civil liberation, which has heretofore been poorly understood.

**Üner Dagher's** contribution, "Positive Progress or the Crisis of Enlightenment," while only marginally concerned with liberty, centers on the great classical liberal: John Stuart Mill. Dagher explores Mill's attitude towards religion, paying special attention to the continuities and divergences between the views expressed in his well-known "On Liberty" and those of his later "Three Essays on Religion." He opens by presenting the received view of Mill, namely as a prototypical enlightenment thinker, confident about the gradual progress of reason over superstition. He then proceeds to show us that there are other passages in "On Liberty" where we find signs of a very different Mill, one who is keenly aware of the stubborn power of irrational beliefs and customs. By demonstrating that as early as "On Liberty," Mill foresaw the naiveté of the enlightenment project, Dagher is able to suggest—against such commentators as Gertrude Himmelfarb and C.L. Ten—that there is no radical gulf between the views expressed in this work and those expressed in his later essays. In these later essays, Mill calls for the cultivation of a "Religion of Humanity," a sort of civic religion that would supplant certain irrational and, indeed, *anti-rational* tendencies of ordinary religions, while simultaneously inspiring noble feelings among the enlightened. At the end of his paper, Dagher notes that by emphasizing the utility rather than the truth of religion, Mill bears some of the trappings of German existentialists, such as Nietzsche and Heidegger.

**Thomas Nesbit's** "Otto Mühl and the Aesthetics of Seduction" reassesses the initial performance pieces of the controversial artist. Acknowledging Viennese Actionism as a movement situated between modernism and postmodernism in the arts, Nesbit positions Hermann Nitsch's work as modernism's last hurrah; Otto Mühl's art, on the other hand, contains new elements. Particularly revolutionary in Mühl's mid-1960s pieces is his engagement of gender, especially socially constructed "feminine" zones – such as cooking – that he incorporates into his "masculine" charged artworld. This playful treatment of gender and gender roles signals a major shift in the arts, a movement towards an "aesthetics of seduction." In contrast to an "aesthetics of violence," which can be seen in the militant and occasionally fascist overtones of the avant-garde, the aesthetics of seduction promises liberation not through force, but through play. Beauty is reintroduced, gendered materials become tools and toys, both female and male artists seduce us with their visions. As a lens to view the postmodern shift, Nesbit's concept of seduction promises a radical reinterpretation of twentieth century art.

In "Accounting for Humanitarian Intervention," **Mathias Thaler** considers the case for and against military intervention in the name of human rights. According to Thaler, we can discern very clear fault lines between a realist approach to political matters and a

normative or “universalistic approach.” By tracing the accounts of some of the most eminent exponents of these approaches, past and present, and applying their claims to recent cases of intervention in Iraq and Kosovo, he seeks to expose the shortcomings of each of these models. His analysis forces us to reconsider the nature of political justice and justifications, so that we may avoid the wholly amoral approach to political decision-making without being seduced by suspect and all-too-glib appeals to “humanity” and “human rights.” The Scylla and Charybdis are, in contemporary debates, represented by Jürgen Habermas and Danilo Zolo, respectively. By considering how the arguments of these two sides were brought to bear on the case of Kosovo, Thaler is able to expose not only the deficiencies of these models, but also the dangers of trying to negotiate intricate and thorny territory with blunt theoretical tools.

In his paper “Just Numbers,” **Matthias Till** considers the way in which poverty is currently defined and identified. He opens by presenting and critiquing the so-called Laeken indicators of social inclusion adopted by the European Union. While Till observes that “Such a common language puts a normative limit to the arbitrariness of poverty measures and facilitates comparative investigations,” he identifies three major shortcomings of these indicators. First of all, he argues that this framework lacks a theoretical foundation. Since no attempt is made to ground the notion of social exclusion or inclusion, these indicators may overlook “the circumstances relevant to the social praxis of poverty.” Furthermore, the current measures place insufficient emphasis on certain aspects of society that are highly relevant to social inclusion, such as housing, education, and health. And finally, he cites certain problems with the implementation of these indicators in gathering accurate data. In light of these problems, Till considers not only how we might arrive at a more reasonable standard and mode of measuring social inclusion and poverty, but how we might do so in a way that contributes to a just society. He recommends developing Otto Neurath’s approach to understanding wealth and poverty in terms of one’s standard of living in general. As opposed to the current approach, Neurath’s method enables us measure poverty as a complex social phenomenon. Till argues that only when we are able to better capture non-monetary dimensions of social-inclusion and poverty will such indicators serve as guides for just social policies.

In “Researching the European Public Sphere and its Functions: A Proposal,” **Christoph Bärenreuter** addresses the elusive concept of the European Public Sphere (EPS), a topic increasingly relevant as the European Union (EU) expands eastward. While prior scholars have offered theoretical opinions and empirical work on what a EPS may be, Bärenreuter addresses the more difficult task of precisely bridging theory and empirical indicators. His inquiry focuses on media representations of the EPS, carefully noting that this is only one dimension of a massive field of inquiry. After providing a thorough review and critique of prior work, he turns to the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe as a way to link theoretical and empirical investigations into the EPS. Bärenreuter finds their “logic of equivalence” concept valuable to conceptualize how European discourses become homogenized while retaining some degree of national identity through a “logic of difference.” This model can then be applied to show how nations preserve identity while discussing Europe in the media, forming what he coins a “transnational chain of

equivalence.” What makes his concept most valuable is that it offers not only a more complex understanding of the EPS, but a more accurate one, accounting for the multifarious ways Europe is conceived in the EU’s twenty-five member states. Although his study limits itself to the media, it sets the stage for future inquiries into other parts of the EPS, such as the role of civil society and political organizations. Scholars to come will profit by following Bärenreuter’s lead.

**Michal Luczewski**’s essay boldly challenges the entire field of nationalism studies and all who deal with the concept of nation. In “What Remains for Nationalism Studies?,” Luczewski attacks recent ruminations on the subject for sidestepping critical questions. The bulk of his critique focuses on our fear of concretely addressing the dangerous notion of nation itself, resorting instead to seemingly less problematic articulations, such as those involving metaphors of fluidity. But to retreat into these safer waters is to do injustice to reality, Luczewski maintains. Rather than building theory machines that claim to dispense realities, sociologists should return to the field, monitoring how nation is felt on the individual level. Once we have empirical data regarding how people experience nations, we can begin to form broader claims. His essay ends by suggesting the monographic method as a sound solution to the murkiness that has overcome nationalism studies. As a justification for returning to more traditional ways of practicing sociology, Luczewski’s piece makes the case that these outwardly antiquated methods will prompt the sought after revolution to our understandings of nation and nationalism.

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