

“Hayek on Liberty” reading list – 145 pages

Socratic Seminar Reading List
Institute for Humane Studies

Reader Abstract: The primary theme of this reader is Hayek’s “knowledge problem” and all that can be extrapolated from that in a socio-economic context. The secondary theme of the reader is the phenomenon of “spontaneous order” as Hayek’s approach to best deal with the knowledge problem in society.

Session I: *The Knowledge Problem and Spontaneous Order* – 41 pages

Hayek, Friedrich A. “The Use of Knowledge in Society.” *The American Economic Review* 35, No. 4 (September 1945): 519–530.

Hayek, F. A. “Cosmos and Taxis,” and notes. In *Law, Legislation and Liberty, Volume 1: Rules and Order [Phoenix Edition]*, 35–54, 154–160. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Session Abstract: As the session title suggests, these two readings introduce the students to the concept of the “knowledge problem” and “spontaneous order.” Particularly, in the second reading, Hayek presents spontaneous order as a means of dealing with the knowledge problem, in contrast with central direction.

Session II: *Competition as a Discovery Procedure and The Constitution of Liberty* – 31 pages

Hayek, Friedrich A. “The Meaning of Competition.” In *Individualism and Economic Order*, 92-106. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Hayek, Friedrich A. *The Constitution of Liberty*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

- “Introduction” (pages 47-54)
- Chapter 1, “Liberty and Liberties” (pages 57-72)

Session Abstract: The first reading is Hayek’s critique of the economic concept of “perfect competition.” It introduces the knowledge problem in a specifically economic context because one of the assumptions of perfect competition is the assumption of perfect knowledge. The chapters from *The Constitution of Liberty* introduce and define the ideas of “freedom” and “coercion” with elaboration on the complexities of the concepts that people often fail to consider or recognize.

Session III: *The Constitution of Liberty* – 32 pages

Hayek, Friedrich A. *The Constitution of Liberty*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

- Chapter 2, “The Creative Powers of a Free Civilization” (pages 73-90)
- Chapter 3, “The Common Sense of Progress” (pages 91-106)

Session Abstract: The readings in this session, building off the previous readings, demonstrate Hayek's views on how socio-economic progress is achieved. The selections detail how individuals benefit from the exercise of freedoms by other individuals, even if they don't personally value the particular liberty in question. By allowing individuals the freedom to pursue their own plans according to their individual knowledge, society enjoys an aggregated benefit from individual liberty.

Session IV: *The Constitution of Liberty* – 41 pages

Hayek, Friedrich A. *The Constitution of Liberty*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

- Chapter 4, "Freedom, Reason, and Tradition" (pages 107-132)
- Chapter 5, "Responsibility and Freedom" (pages 133-147)

Session Abstract: The final session deals with the tension between determinism and freewill and altruism and self-interest, placing these ideas in the context of individual responsibility. The main idea, relating back to Hayek's various definitions of freedom, provided in the Session 2 readings, is that the benefits of freedom outlined in Session 3 necessarily depend on the freedom to make mistakes and suffer consequences. The "freedom from" concept is antithetical to the idea of "freedom to."