



Freedom Beyond Sovereignty: Reconstructing Liberal Individualism

By Sharon R. Krause

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Sharon R. Krause

What does it mean to be free? We invoke the word frequently, yet the freedom of countless Americans is compromised by social inequalities that systematically undercut what they are able to do and to become. If we are to remedy these failures of freedom, we must move beyond the common assumption, prevalent in political theory and American public life, that individual agency is best conceived as a kind of personal sovereignty, or as self-determination or control over one's actions.

In *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, Sharon R. Krause shows that individual agency is best conceived as a non-sovereign experience because our ability to act and affect the world depends on how other people interpret and respond to what we do. The intersubjective character of agency makes it vulnerable to the effects of social inequality, but it is never in a strict sense socially determined. The agency of the oppressed sometimes surprises us with its vitality. Only by understanding the deep dynamics of agency as simultaneously non-sovereign and robust can we remediate the failed freedom of those on the losing end of persistent inequalities and grasp the scope of our own responsibility for social change. *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty* brings the experiences of the oppressed to the center of political theory and the study of freedom. It fundamentally reconstructs liberal individualism and enables us to see human action, personal responsibility, and the meaning of liberty in a totally new light.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Beautifully written and clearly argued, Krause’s *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty* is an exciting new contribution to the political theory literature on freedom. Her critique of the self-sovereignty that characterizes most liberal conceptions of freedom, at first blush a radical idea, in fact works to save liberalism from its own often-illogical excesses of individualism. Merging Berlin’s pluralism with his dualistic conception of freedom, Krause develops an understanding of freedom as a plurality of conceptions. Her notion of plural freedom operates from a sophisticated and complicated understanding of human agency as located within contexts that have shaped who we are, the choices we can make, and that we can in turn reconstruct through our choices. Freedom in Krause’s theory is neither simply individual nor collective, but constituted by interactions between individuals and others’ actions and perceptions. From this, Krause develops theoretical tools for negotiating conflicts among different kinds of freedom. This book is a tour de force and should be read by all.”

(Nancy J. Hirschmann, University of Pennsylvania)

“Krause remaps the very concept of freedom, which she persuasively argues is a concept that can’t be reduced to any one of the familiar models. *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty* is thoughtful, well-written, well-argued, and engaging, its argument clear and compelling.”

(Clarissa Rile Hayward, Washington University in St. Louis)

"An important contribution to the literature on freedom, agency, responsibility, and liberalism. Krause's prose is clear and eloquent. She covers huge tracts of disparate scholarship in a small amount of space, knitting together a tight, coherent narrative that follows logically and thoughtfully from one step to the next. The book will be well-received by scholars in political theory, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, queer studies, and critical race studies."

(Ben Berger, Swarthmore College)

“Krause shapes a theory of freedom that extends far beyond the constitutional and formal-legal constraints of liberal individualism. . . . From the perspective of those marginalized by race, gender, and sexual orientation, effective action in the world requires efforts more than laws can provide. Their agency requires equal respect for their identities; anything less is oppression that traditional liberal theory cannot acknowledge or address. . . . Recommended.”

(*Choice* 2015-10-07)

“[The] experience of frustrated freedom is captured beautifully by Krause’s new book. She articulates a simple yet so far elusive truth: that the freedom of a person depends in large part on how other people interpret and respond to her actions. . . . The chief ambition of the book is to uncover the ways in which social stigma and subtle patterns of social interaction can perpetuate unfreedom, and as such it is a welcome challenge to our settled convictions about what it means to live in a free society.”

(*Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* 2015-10-08)

About the Author

Sharon R. Krause is professor in and chair of the Department of Political Science at Brown University. She

is the author of *Civil Passions* and *Liberalism with Honor*.

Users Review

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David Crockett:

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