

4714-001  
Spring 2011

# Syllabus for Liberalism and Its Critics

Professor David Leitch

The purpose of this class is to allow you to familiarize yourself with contemporary debates over liberalism in the modern nation-state and some of its alternatives. The course is divided into three parts. The first part of this course looks at the beginnings of liberal theory and some of the first criticisms and critiques. All of these authors have been instrumental in developing contemporary liberalism. The second part of this course looks at a number of recent theorists interested in defending some form of liberalism. These writers will not always agree with one another, but will all be advocates of liberalism. The third part of this course looks at a number of recent critics of liberalism. In addition to criticizing liberalism, each of these authors will articulate some alternative position. These authors frequently disagree with one another, but are all critical of the contemporary liberal order.

Liberalism has become the dominant political theory in contemporary American discourse, and as such, informs both scholarly debate and political rhetoric. Understanding the varieties of both liberal theories and critical theories helps position you as a more active, engaged, and effective citizen. You can use these analytic tools to help decode political positions and understand how certain seemingly-unrelated policies fit together into a conceptual whole. Moreover, reflecting on liberalism's place in contemporary America necessarily prompts reflection on one's relationship to politics, community, and individuality.

There are two textbooks for this class, Liberalism and Its Critics, edited by Michael J. Sandel, and Multiculturalism, edited by Amy Gutmann, both available at the bookstore and online. We will read most of both of them. While the readings are on the short side, they are dense, so budget a fair amount of time. The early readings are all available online (as they are in the public domain) via Blackboard.

There are three primary assignments for this class. The first is a weekly summary (two pages or so) of the reading, including at least one question you have. If you do not understand the reading, summarize what in the argument you are having trouble understanding. These weekly assignments will be graded simply as A, B, C, or F. The second is a midterm paper, due at the end of Week 8. The third is a final paper. The final paper is a take-home assignment, due during the scheduled final time. Both papers should be somewhere between 6 and 10 pages in length (1800-3000 words). The midterm paper will focus on early liberal writers, and the final will focus on critics of liberalism. In addition to all this, I expect you to attend and participate in class. Grading breaks down as follows:

Weekly summary assignments = 20%

Midterm paper = 40%

Final paper = 40%

If anyone has any questions about academic integrity or citation, please let me know. I expect everyone to follow the University's guidelines on academic integrity and to submit only their

own work. That said, I do encourage the formation of study groups, so long as you submit work that is your own.

Week 1: Introduction

Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Chapters 13 and 16-21

Week 2: John Locke

John Locke, Second Treatise of Government, Chapters 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 9, “A Letter Concerning Toleration”

Week 3: Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse Concerning Inequality, Part 2 and The Social Contract, Books 1 and 2

Week 4: Edmund Burke

Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France

Week 5: John Stuart Mill

J. S. Mill, On Liberty

Week 6: Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant, Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals and, “On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns”

Week 7: Economics and liberalism

Bernard Mandeville, “The Fable of the Bees”; Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations Book I, sections 1-4; Benjamin Constant, “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns”

Week 8: Political liberalism

John Rawls, “Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14, 3 (Summer 1985): 223-251, and “The Right and the Good Contrasted”

Week 9: Contemporary liberalism

Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty”; Ronald Dworkin, “Liberalism”; Friedrich A. Hayek, “Equality, Value, and Merit”

Week 10: Communitarianism

Michael Walzer, “Welfare, Membership, and Need”; Michael J. Sandel, “Justice and the Good”; Alasdair MacIntyre, “The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of a Tradition”; Peter Berger, “On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor”

Week 11: Spring Break

Week 12: Feminism

Susan Moller Okin, Justice, Gender, and the Family, Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 6

Week 13: Recognition

Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition"; Iris Marion Young "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship," *Ethics* Vol. 99, no. 2, January 1989, pp. 117-142

Week 14: Critics of recognition

Susan Wolf, "Comment"; K. Anthony Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Reproduction"; Patchen Markell, Bound by Recognition, Chapters 2 and 6

Week 15: Arendt

Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Parts 1, 2 and 5, and "The Revolutionary Tradition and Its Lost Treasure"

Week 16: Review for final