Liberalism and Its Critics
Government 366, Smith College
Fall 2008, Thursdays 3:00-4:50 pm

Liberalism is premised upon individual rights and liberties and toleration of different religions, beliefs and lifestyles. This seminar will explore the development of these themes by classic liberal thinkers such as Locke, Mill, and Kant and contemporary political philosophers such as John Rawls. We will then consider some of the most salient critiques of liberalism, which come from diverse intellectual perspectives, including libertarianism, egalitarianism, feminism, communitarianism and conservatism. Among other things, these critics worry that liberty and equality cannot be reconciled; that toleration is an impossible virtue; that liberalism cannot protect the interests of women; that an unswerving faith in rationality precludes other meaningful human experiences, such as those of faith and mystery; and that the liberal emphasis on individual rights hinders the development of virtuous citizens and vibrant communities. We shall ask if liberalism can adequately respond to these concerns while maintaining its core values.

Requirements:

Reading responses, 1-2 pages 5% each (15% total)
9/18 Liberalism
10/9 Rawls
12/4 Religion at risk?

Short papers, 4-5 pages 15% each (30% total)
10/23 Property and distribution
11/13 Political liberalism and toleration

11/26 Final paper proposal 5%

12/18 Final paper, due 12/18, 15-20 pages 40%

Participation 10%
This success of this seminar depends upon everyone coming to class prepared to discuss the readings every week. If you must miss a class, please contact me as soon as possible, preferably before class meets.

** Late papers will not be accepted.
Part I. Philosophical foundations
9/4 Introduction: What is liberalism?

9/11 Liberty: John Stuart Mill

9/18 Autonomy: Immanuel Kant
- Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (abr., in *Justice: A Reader*, p. 158-199)
- Oakeshott, “Rationalism in Politics”

9/25 Concepts and overviews
- Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty”
- Gray, *Liberalism*, “Part II: Philosophical”

** Response due

Part II. Property and distribution
10/2 Liberty and the right to property
- Locke, “On Property” (abr., in *Justice*, p. 84-96)

10/9 Rawls’s Difference Principle

** Response due

10/16 Equality
- Nussbaum, “In Defense of Universal Values,” *Women and Human Development*
- Daniels, “Equality of What? Welfare, Resources or Capabilities?”
- MacPherson, “Rawls’s Models of Man and Society”

10/23 Desert
- Kronman, “Pooling Talents”
- Feinberg, “Appendix: Economic Income as Deserved”

** Paper due

Part III. Pluralism and community
10/30 Toleration
- Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*
- Williams, “Toleration: An Impossible Virtue?”
- Scanlon, “The Difficulty of Tolerance”

11/6 No Class – Otelia Cromwell Day
11/13  **Political Liberalism**
- Sandel, “Political Liberalism” (in *Justice: A Reader*, p. 359-377)

** Paper Due **

11/20  **Tradition and community at risk?**
- Sandel, *Democracy’s Discontent*, “In Search of a Public Philosophy”
- Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart*, “Transforming American Culture”
- MacIntyre, “The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of a Tradition” (in *Justice: A Reader*, p. 315-328)
- Glendon, “Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse,” selection

11/27  No class – Thanksgiving

** Proposal due 5:00 pm Wed., 11/26 **

12/4  **Religion at risk?**
- Fish, “One and the Same: Liberalism and Secularism”

** Response due **

12/11  **Women at risk?**
- Benhabib, “The General and the Concrete Other”
- Okin, “Gender, the Public, and the Private”

12/18  ** Final paper due **

**Readings:**

**Books for purchase**
Michael Sandel, ed., *Justice: A Reader*
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*
John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*

The rest of the readings will be posted on Moodle.

Please note that the syllabus is subject to change based upon the pace and interests of the class (but we’ll definitely use the four books that are for purchase).