Liberalism and Its Critics

Government 60.02
Dartmouth College Fall, 2007

Monday/Wednesday/Friday
1:45-2:50 P.M.
X-hour: Thursday, 1:00-1:50 P.M.

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Course Description

Liberal political theory is renowned for its emphasis on rights, freedoms, and limited government; but critics of liberalism hold that the liberal legacy in free societies is one of misguided energies and broken promises. Students in this course chart the development of liberal thought from the Seventeenth Century to the present, with a view to considering the central values and commitments liberals may share, and examining important contemporary work in liberal theory. The course integrates weighty challenges to the moral and political viability of liberalism from communitarian, conservative, libertarian, postmodern, and value-pluralist critics.

We will reckon with a panoply of questions, including the following: Does liberalism overemphasize the importance of the individual at the expense of community? Are liberal societies bound to be licentious, selfish, and atomized? Do liberal theories rest upon a mistaken view of the self and its construction? Are liberal theories committed to the excessive promotion of autonomy for persons, or are they unfair to religion? Should we understand liberalism to be based merely in the pursuit of *modus vivendi*, or might there be some shared vision of a moral life on which liberals can base their theories?

Required Readings

There will be both books as well as course reserve materials for Govt. 60.02. The required six books for the course are as follows:


Each of these texts has been ordered and should be available for purchase at Wheelock Books. Required and recommended readings for the course are either contained within the books listed above, or they have been placed on reserve at the Baker/Berry Library. A complete listing of the items placed on reserve for Govt. 60.02 is given at the end of the syllabus.

**Format**

Govt. 60.02 is not simply a lecture course, since lectures will be joined by in-class discussion in which you are invited to participate. Normally, there will be a period of lecturing at the outset of each class, following which the floor will be opened to discussion. Classes will focus on specific readings (described below in the course schedule), with different works examined in each successive week. There is a good deal of involved reading in Govt. 60.02, but it is crucial that you come prepared so that you can make use of the lectures and the discussions with your cohort. Please also bring the books and your other readings with you, when we discuss them, since we will frequently refer to passages in the texts. If there are changes to be made to the syllabus, or adjustments of other kinds, they will be announced in class.

**Grading**

Students’ grades will be comprised of the following four components:

1. Sixty-minute exam 25% of total grade (covers weeks 1 to 4)
2. Seven-page paper 30% (covers weeks 5 to 8)
3. Final exam 35% (cumulative)
4. Class participation 10% 100%

Late papers will not be accepted, and make-up exams will not be granted, without sufficient reason and advance notice. Students are expected to understand and follow the Academic Honor Principle of Dartmouth College in pursuing studies for this course.
Students with any disabilities requiring special arrangements are encouraged to see the instructor by October 5, in order to arrange appropriate accommodation.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1:** Early Liberal Ideals  
(Total Reading: 58 pp.)

- Sept. 26: Introduction
- Sept. 28: John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* [58 pp.]

**Week 2:** Negative Liberty and the Proper Role of Government  
(Total Reading: 89 pp.)

  John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, chapters 1, 4 [31 pp.]
  Recommended: all of *On Liberty*

**Week 3:** Justice and Equality: Liberals vs. Libertarians  
(Total Reading: 89 pp.)

  Recommended: Rawls, “Justice as Fairness,” in *Collected Papers*
- October 10: Ronald Dworkin, “Liberalism,” [20 pp.] in *Liberalism and Its Critics*  
  Recommended: Rawls, “A Kantian Conception of Equality,” in *Collected Papers*
- October 12: Robert Nozick, “Moral Constraints and Distributive Justice,” [23 pp.] in *Liberalism and Its Critics*  
  Recommended: F.A. Hayek, “Equality, Value, and Merit,” in *Liberalism and Its Critics*

**Week 4:** The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism  
(Total Reading: 84 pp.)
October 15:  • Alasdair MacIntyre, “The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of a Tradition,” [21 pp.] in Liberalism and Its Critics
  • Michael Sandel, “Justice and the Good,” [24 pp.] in Liberalism and Its Critics


Week 5:  Persons, Pluralism, and Liberal Values  (Total Reading: 70 pp.)

October 22:  In-class examination on topics in weeks 1 to 4

  • Judith N. Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” [18 pp.] in Liberalism and the Moral Life (on reserve)

October 26:  • Susan Moller Okin, “Humanist Liberalism,” [15 pp.] in Liberalism and the Moral Life (on reserve)
    Recommended: George Kateb, “Democratic Individuality and the Meaning of Rights,” in Liberalism and the Moral Life (on reserve)

Week 6:  Political Liberalism  (Total Reading: 149 pp.)

October 29:  • John Rawls, Political Liberalism, introduction to paperback edition, Lecture I [68 pp.]
    Recommended: Charles Larmore, “Political Liberalism,” Political Theory, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1990), pp. 339-60 (on reserve)

October 31:  • John Rawls, Political Liberalism, lecture II [42 pp.]
    Recommended: Rawls, Political Liberalism, lecture IV
    Paper topic announced; due Wednesday, November 14

November 2:  • John Rawls, Political Liberalism, lecture V [39 pp.]
    Recommended: Rawls, Political Liberalism, lecture VII

Week 7:  Postmodern Rejoinders to Liberalism  (Total Reading: 82 pp.)


Weeks 8 & 9: Conservative and Value-Pluralist Attacks Against Liberalism (Total Reading: 143 pp.)

November 12: ● John Kekes, Against Liberalism, preface, chapter 1 [25 pp.] (on reserve)  
Recommended: Kekes, Against Liberalism, chapter 2

November 14: ● John Kekes, Against Liberalism, chapters 8, 10, afterword [35 pp.] (on reserve)  
Recommended, Kekes, Against Liberalism, chapter 5

Seven-page paper due


November 19: ● Stuart Hampshire, Justice Is Conflict, preface, Chapter 1 [35 pp.]  
Recommended: all of Justice Is Conflict

Week 10: Justice and the Future of Liberalism (Total Reading: 127 pp.)


Recommended: Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” in Perpetual Peace and Other Essays


Week 11: Course Completion

December 3: Final class: course synthesis
December 7-11: Final exam period; final exam date TBA.

**Materials on Course Reserve** (in order used)


