

LECTURE / DISCUSSION / DEBATE
LIBERALISM

Terms and concepts to know:

Roots of liberalism
Liberalism as toleration
Hobbes' 'Leviathan'
Immanuel Kant

Liberal thought
Contractarianism
Rights-based liberalism and Locke
Utilitarianism

Study and discussion questions:

1. Discuss the differences between Hobbes' and Locke's views of the "state of nature." Whom do you think gave the more correct interpretation?
2. Discuss the notion of a social contract. Do you agree with Locke that people have the right to replace a government that they do not approve of?
3. Discuss Rousseau's belief that "enlightenment rationality" corrupts natural human goodness. Do you agree that this is true? Have not the principles of the enlightenment contributed to a better world?
4. Discuss Bentham and 'utilitarianism,' or the idea that the value of an action can be measured by its utility to individuals. Are there problems with using the concept of "the greatest pleasure for the greatest number" as a measure of what constitutes 'good' policy?
5. Is 'toleration' a coherent concept? Can one believe in moral rights if one does not believe in God?
6. Examine the utilitarian v. deontological argument. Should values be based on their utility to humans or do values "transcend" individuals?
7. According to Giroux, what are liberalism's 'failures'? Do you agree with his positions about how to move forward?
8. Paul Street takes a pretty critical view of Obama's two terms in office. Does he hit the mark? How and why do you agree with his assessment?
9. Explain what Martin and Pimentel mean by 'the inadequacies of liberalism'. Does their promotion of Marxism and the Catholic social justice tradition seem better?

Readings:

Hoffman and Graham: Chapter 8 and WEB.

Video:

Capitalism (Episode 1) – Adam Smith: The Birth of the Free Market.