

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. Chris Hedges blames the rise of fascism in America on the failure of the liberal class to halt the corporate assault on working people has spawned and that is poised to seize power and radically reshape America. To what degree would you agree or disagree with his analysis? Should liberalism take the rap for this?
6. Abram Shulsky notes that "[d]espite its overall success, liberalism has for two centuries been dogged by a series of counter-ideologies." What are some of these "counter-ideologies" and what do think accounts for their success?
7. Is 'toleration' a coherent concept? Can one believe in moral rights if one does not believe in God?
8. According to Giroux, what are liberalism's 'failures'? Do you agree with his positions about how to move forward?
9. 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?
10. 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:

Death of Liberal Class, with Steve Paikin.