

Political Science 359
Liberalism and Conservatism
Spring 2016
Professor Alan Wolfe

Class meets on Mondays/3-5:30PM
Office Hours: Mondays/1-3PM
and by appt.
24 Quincy Road, Room 102

For talk-radio hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, any of the major commentators on Fox News, Congressmen associated with the Freedom Caucus, and just about all the Republican candidates for president in 2016, nothing is worse, when it comes to politics, than a liberal – and no one is better for the future of the country than a conservative, the only question being which conservatives are the genuine thing. On the other side of the spectrum, some, but by no means all, liberals denounce the extreme right as dogmatic, sectarian, and dangerous, standing in the way of needed progress on new social issues and belligerent in foreign policy language. The Democratic message in 2016, no matter who is the nominee, will emphasize the dangers facing us if the Republicans win.

Implicit in the arguments of all such discussions are a number of assumptions that may, on reflection, prove not as clear-cut as they at first seem: Are both liberalism and conservatism coherent bodies of ideas with suggestions for how to make the world better or are they best thought of as dispositions whose content may change depending on time and place? Are they both American ideas or were they developed in Europe, where their meaning is quite different than one finds in this country? What differentiates a conservative from a reactionary or a liberal from a radical? Is it true that, as a character in the Italian novel *The Leopard* proclaims, that if we want things to stay the same, we will have to change? Are libertarians primarily conservatives or liberals? Should politicians tie themselves firmly to any set of ideas, whatever they are called, or keep his or her distance from them?

This course has two purposes. First, it aims to introduce students to some of the classic texts that established those political philosophies now known as liberal and conservative. It then examines contemporary thinkers who use those terms to characterize themselves with the aim of evaluating whether, in doing so, they are faithful to the traditions they wish to embody. In this sense, this course is neither one in political philosophy nor one in contemporary politics but an attempt to rely on both areas of inquiry.

There will be a conventional mid-term and final meant to test how well students have read and understood the assigned books. In addition, each student will be asked to make a short oral presentation using one contemporary thinker or activism, judging that person's work against the body of ideas that have made up the tradition he or she claims to be representing. Examples of such figures are Paul Ryan, Hillary Clinton, Bernard Sanders, Karl Rove, Michael Moore, Ann Coulter, Jonah Goldberg, Paul Krugman, David Brooks, Ross Douthat, Andrew Sullivan, or other names that will be discussed during the course.

These books are required:

Joseph deMaistre, *The Executioner*

John Locke, “Two Treatises of Government” and “Letter Concerning Toleration”

Isaac Kramnick, ed., *The Portable Edmund Burke*

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement*

Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*

Alan Wolfe, *The Future of Liberalism*

Reading Assignments:

January 25, 2016

Joseph DeMaistre, *Executioner*, whole book

February 1, 2016

John Locke, “The Second Treatise,” Chapters 8-18 and “Letter Concerning Toleration”

February 8, 2016

Portable Edmund Burke, pp. 63-81 “The Sublime and the Beautiful”, pp. 94-98 (“Repeal of the Marriage Act”), 131-150 “Present Discontents”, 155-57 (“Bristol”), 194-212 (“Scarcity,”), and 213-29 (“Noble Lord”).

February 15, 2016

Portable Edmund Burke, pp. 259-273 (“Conciliation with the Colonies”), 388-406 (“Warren Hastings”), and 416-474 (“Reflections”).

February 22, 2016

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, whole book

February 29, 2016

Midterm

March 14, 2016

Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, pp. 1000-1069

March 21, 2016

Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, pp. 1-286.

March 28, 2016

Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, pp. 287-583.

April 4, 2016

Alan Wolfe, *Future of Liberalism*, whole book

April 11, 2018

Student Reports

April 25, 2016

Student Reports

May 2, 2016

Conclusion

Final Exam is scheduled for Friday, May 13th at 12:30PM.

If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, dugganka@bc.edu, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD, or Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, paulette.durrett@bc.edu, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities, including temporary disabilities. Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations.