

"Topics in Political Philosophy" G9750 (Fall 2009) A Seminar on Political Liberalism for Graduate Students (Upper Level Undergraduates may also enroll.) Tuesday 2.10 to 4.
by Professor Akeel Bilgrami

This is a Mellon funded seminar intended for both graduate students and upper level undergraduates. The subject is Political Liberalism with a special focus on issues of negative and positive liberty, and on the limitations of liberalism in dealing with the concept of identity in 'identity' politics. Readings will be from a range of liberal thinkers from Locke and Mill to Rawls and Isaiah Berlin.

Though it is a regular 9000 level seminar for the usual full number of credits, it is special in being funded by a Mellon foundation award and allows me to pay for and bring in guest lecturers from anywhere in the world. The only person asked so far is Jeremy Waldron who has agreed to come and I will be writing to Charles Larmore, Russell Dancy, Will Kymlycka, Charles Taylor, Amy Guttmann (who will probably not accept since she runs a university), Anthony Appiah and one or two others.

The format for the seminar will be this.

Weeks 1 to Week 3 or 4.

For the first hour of each class, I will lecture on the problems that the concept of identity, as in 'identity' politics, poses for standard liberal political theory and philosophy and explore whether liberalism has any conceptual resources that might cope with them; and then we will have a discussion with students for the rest of the class.

Weeks 4 or 5 to Week 11.

I will get from the guest lecturer either an unpublished or published piece of writing to circulate to the class at least a week (preferably two) in advance. We will ask the guest lecturer to speak initially for about five minutes to say why he or she was motivated to write the paper and to add to or subtract anything from it. And then two students in the class selected in advance will present a summary and commentary on the paper for about fifteen minutes each, after which the speaker will respond to them and then I will moderate a discussion between the speaker and the whole class. Since the seminar has some funds, I will be able to take the students who are presenting in class to lunch with the visiting speaker before the class on each Tuesday.

Weeks 12-13

I will return to lecture with the same format as the first three or four weeks and the theme of the lectures will be negative and positive liberty, which is closely related to the issues of the limitations of liberalism discussed in the early weeks.

There are only two requirements for the course: strictly regular attendance and a term paper at the end of the semester of 15-25 pages.