1. Description

In the last couple of decades a new conception of liberalism has arisen — the “public reason view” — which developed out of contractualist approaches to justifying liberalism. The social contract theories of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau all stressed that the justification of the state depended on showing that everyone would, in some way, consent to it. However, by relying on consent social contract theory seemed to suppose a voluntarist conception of political justice (what is just depends on what people choose to agree to — what they will); and, as Hume famously pointed out, it seems that ultimately our obligations to act on political justice derive from promissory obligations, which the social contract theory leaves unexplained. Public reason views jettison the notion of consent and contract, and directly focus on the question: what moral and/or political principles do we all have reason to live by?

In this seminar we will look at a number of such views: those inspired by Hobbes, social reason views such as Kurt Baier’s, deliberative democratic views, epistemic/aggregationist theories and, of course, Rawls’ political liberalism. (Yes, and my proposals too). The first part of the course will be devoted to problem that sets the stage for all public reason views: the analysis of pluralism and indeterminacy in the exercise of “free human reason.” The second part of the seminar is devoted to proposals that this diversity does not prevent a moral or political order verified by public reason. The last session will be devoted to an issue that looms large in the public reason literature: the place of religious beliefs in liberal justification and politics.

2. Objectives

(1) Pretty obviously, we want to understand public reason liberalism and Rawls’ place in it. One of the things I want you all to get out of this seminar is that Rawls’s political liberalism is one of a family of related views. It is common to find philosophers who, having rejected some detail of Rawls’s version, assume that the whole family of views is thereby discredited.

(2) Philosophy is in some ways an odd discipline — a lot of it is always about talking (in many other disciplines, talking is just for class, and writing almost the entire research side). Philosophers “do” philosophy, and that usually means discussing and arguing. So one of the main aims of a philosophy seminar is to “do” philosophy, and for you to get a feel about how to
“do” it. There are many styles of “doing philosophy” and I do not want suggest a one-size-fits-all model, but here are some models to avoid:

*The very quiet and thoughtful type of whom one says “Oh, yes, now that you remind me, he was in my seminar last term.”* Some people are more talkative than others, and some pause to think before they speak (I am told). Again, there is a range of perfectly fine styles, but being a great writer and a non-participant in discussions is not good in philosophy. It is important to just get into the habit of entering the discussion.

*The Pit Bull.* I once had a very bright student that the faculty called the “pit bull.” Philosophical exchange was a fight to the death, and once he advocated a position there was no way he would let go until the opponent was dead. Not much came of talking to him, except exhaustion.

*I’ve already made up my mind; I’ll listen to Humeans (x), but I refuse to think about nutty Kantians (y).* And all the different versions filling out x and y. I once had a really good student, but she had made up her mind about everything before she read it. There is a nice and fine line between developing your own view and suffering cognitive closure. Don’t fall off.

(3) The other side of philosophy is writing papers. Writing good professional papers is not at all like writing an excellent undergrad paper. A typical “A” undergrad paper shows that the student understands the material and can point to some problems, or has some suggestions to make. A professional philosophy paper has to develop a sustained thesis, and has to be aware of the difference between an objection to be answered and an interesting problem to be explored. I am happy to work with you as you write, and will read drafts so long as you don’t spring them on me a week before the paper is due.

### 3. POLICIES AND ASSESSMENT

#### 3.1 Reading

Of course you should do the reading before the class. Duh. Many of the readings will be available from my website; others will come from three books, which should be available in the bookstore:

- Russell Hardin, *Indeterminacy and Society.*
- John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (paperback edn.).

The required reading that is not in the above books can be accessed at: www.ppe-journal.org/Gaus/Phil596/Phil596.htm

You can also access these materials off my departmental web page (off of the faculty web page) by following the links.
4. SCHEDULE OF SESSIONS AND READINGS

August 23: Organizational Stuff

August 30: Rationality and Indeterminacy

Required Reading
- Hardin, Indeterminacy and Society, chapters 1 and 2.

Further Reading

September 6: Incommensurability

Required Reading

Further Reading:
- Gaus, Contemporary Theories of Liberalism, ch.2, §2.3
- Ruth Chang, “Introduction” to her edited collection, Incommensurability, Incomparability and Practical Reason (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). (See also the papers by Broome, Griffin, and Raz in the volume).

September 13: Public Justification

Required Reading
Further Reading

Christopher J. Eberle, “Justificatory Liberalism” from Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). (web)

Further Reading


Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” in Kant’s Political Writings ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). This text is widely available on the web.

September 20: Pluralist Liberalism

Required Reading

• Isaiah Berlin “Two Concepts of Liberty” (web selections)
• William Galston, “From Value Pluralism to Liberal Pluralist Politics” from Liberal Purposes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). (web selections)

Further Reading


Gaus, Contemporary Theories of Liberalism, ch. 2 (web).


**September 27: Hobbesian Public Reason**

*Required Reading*

• Hobbes, *Leviathan* (web selections; I am assuming that you’ve read Hobbes, but this includes the most relevant bits.)

• Hardin, *Indeterminacy and Society*, ch. 3.


*Further Reading*


Gaus, *Contemporary Theories of Liberalism*, ch. 3 (web)


**October 4: Social Reason**

*Required Reading*


*Further Reading*

Gaus, *Contemporary Theories of Liberalism*, ch. 4.


**October 11: The Case for Deliberative Democracy**

*Required Reading*

• Jürgen Habermas, “Popular Sovereignty as Procedure” in Bohman and Rehg.

• Joshua Cohen, “Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy” in Bohman and Rehg.

• Joshua Cohen, Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy” in Bohman and Rehg.
Further Reading


October 18: Criticisms of Deliberative Democracy

• Tom Christiano, “The Significance of Public Deliberation,” in Bohman and Rehg.
• Gaus, “Reason, Justification and Consensus: Why Democracy Can’t Have it All,” in Bohman and Rehg.

Further Reading

Guido Pincione and Fernando R. Tesón “Rational Ignorance and Political Morality.” (web)


October 25: Epistemic Democracy.

Required Reading

• David Estlund, “Beyond Fairness and Deliberation: The Epistemic Dimension of Democratic Authority” in Bohman and Rehg.
Further Reading
Gaus, Contemporary Theories of Liberalism, ch. 6 (web).

November 1: Political Liberalism (1)
Required Reading
• Rawls, Political Liberalism, Lectures I, II and III.

November 8: Political Liberalism (2)
Required Reading
• Rawls, Political Liberalism, Lectures IV, V, VI

November 15: Political Liberalism (3)
• Rawls, Political Liberalism, Introduction to paperback edition, Lecture IX.

Further Reading
Gaus, Contemporary Theories of Liberalism, ch. 7. (web)

November 22: Thanksgiving Eve. If you want to meet for a beer or something, I’ll be around.

**November 29 Justificatory Liberalism**

*Required Reading*
- Gaus, *Contemporary Theories of Liberalism*, ch. 8.
- Gaus, “Respect for Persons and the Evolution of Morality.” (web)
- Eberle, “Gaus on Respect” from *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics*. (web)

*Further Reading*

December 6: Religious Belief and Public Reason

*Required Reading*

*Further Reading*


Gaus, “The Place of Religious Belief in Liberal Public Reason.” (web)