

Religion and the Shape of Liberalism
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Introduction:

What follows is an annotated bibliography on liberalism and the way that religion has and continues to shape it. The purpose of the bibliography is to discern exactly what we mean by “liberalism” so that we might better understand the relationship between religion and liberal political arrangements. If this bibliography has a center of gravity, it is on liberalism, on how it is understood (and how it *should* be understood). However, this conception of liberalism will emerge out of its interaction with religion, and hence the dual focus of the bibliography.

Compiling a bibliography on a well-tilled area of research presents obvious challenges. Above all else, there is simply too much ground to cover, and thus many great and important works do not make the final cut. This is true of the field in general, and also of prolific individual thinkers. (To keep the selection of authors reasonably wide, I select only one book from each, with only a couple of exceptions.) In general, and not surprisingly, I tried to select influential texts, looking at strictly quantitative factors like citation counts, as well as at more subjective measures like the general prominence of a text in the literature that surrounds it. The hazard of singling out the most influential texts is that one merely lists the “greatest hits,” creating a list of works with which most people are already familiar. So, while it is unavoidable in this context to list books like John Locke’s *Two Treatises* and John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, these cannot be the only books covered, for then the bibliography becomes less useful.

I have attempted to sidestep this problem by creating a bibliography with an agenda. I will ultimately suggest that there are better and worse ways of understanding liberalism, and that a sort of “thin” liberalism is the best political arrangement we can hope for, at least in pluralist societies. The fact that I am offering an argument circumscribes the range of books I engage with—I certainly cover well-known terrain, but I also go down pathways that are specific to my interests, where the less expected may be found. It is my hope that readers can benefit from both the common and idiosyncratic features of the bibliography. One final organization note: the bibliography is composed of four numbered sections, which are further broken into lettered subsections. Each section or subsection is preceded by a summary paragraph, and texts that follow the introductory material are listed in chronological order.

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(1) Liberalism Defined

To offer an exact definition up front would in some ways be to beg the question: it is only after looking at different conceptions of liberalism, and examining what people find objectionable about them, that we can find our way to the best understanding the term. Nevertheless, we must minimally note that the liberalism under examination is a broad political philosophy that is not associated, at least not exclusively, with any particular political party or movement. Thus in the United States, for example, the Democratic and Republican Parties are both liberal in certain respects (often the same respects), even though the former is regarded as the “liberal” political party according to everyday usage. This observation may seem trite in an academic context, but it is worth making here since the bibliography is pitched to a public that is broader than specialists in religion and politics.

(1a) The History of “Liberalism”

It is news to no one that liberalism is a disputed and slippery term. It means different things to different people at different points in history. The meaning of the term is thus largely the history of the term, and so we begin with three works by historians.

Brinkley, Alan. *Liberalism and its Discontents*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

A history of liberalism starting in the 1930s—what it means and what it has accomplished. Brinkley traces the rise of liberalism in the New Deal and its continued dominance into the 1960s, and then highlights more recent political movements that he regards as corrosive to the liberal project. The book focuses on liberalism in one of its most important cultural contexts: the United States in the 20th Century.

Losurdo, Domenico. *Liberalism: A Counter-History*. Trans. by Gregory Elliott. New York: Verso Books, 2014 (orig. Italian in 2011).

Traces the evolution of liberal thought over the last several centuries, covering thinkers like Locke, Tocqueville, and Sieyès. As a “counter-history,” Losurdo does not tell a triumphalist tale of the rise of liberalism, but instead enumerates its hypocrisies. Since its beginning, Losurdo argues that liberalism has been intertwined with illiberal atrocities like slavery, genocide, and colonialism. As the dominate ideology of the West for hundreds of years, it has also suppressed more radical movements, stunting their influence.

Rosenblatt, Helena. *The Lost History of Liberalism: From Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.

An excellent untangling of the many meanings of liberalism throughout history, starting with ancient Roman notions of civic duty and ending with modern conceptions. Although contemporary understandings of liberalism arguably find their origin in England and became closely associated with the American project after the Second World War, it is more than an Anglo-American political philosophy. Apart from noting its more ancient lineage, Rosenblatt shows the influence of German and French thinkers in formulating principles like freedom of religion and the rule of law.

(1b) Historical Texts of the Liberal Canon

Like any tradition, liberalism has a canon of texts that give the philosophy some measure of unity over time. Important works in the liberal tradition are legion, so here I single out only a few works of particular importance.

Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government*. Ed. by Peter Laslett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988 (orig. 1689).

The *Second Treatise*—“an Essay Concerning The True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government”—is arguably the founding document of liberalism (even though elements of liberal thought can be found earlier). Locke introduces contract theory and his account of natural rights, both central components of liberal political theory.

Montesquieu. *The Spirit of the Laws*. Ed. by Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 (orig. French 1748).

A work of political theory and comparative law whose influence was felt from Catherine the Great in Russia to the Founding Fathers of the United States. Montesquieu advocated for a constitutional system of government that preserves civil liberties and is subject to checks and balances. These became basic features of liberal governments.

Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Ed. Edwin Cannan. Chicago: Chicago University Press. 1977 (orig. 1776).

More central to the development of economics than political theory, but still squarely in the liberal canon because of its discussion of economic freedom. Smith’s text is one of the founding texts of what is often called “classical liberalism.” Like any form of liberalism, classical liberalism emphasizes individual liberty, but places special emphasis on private property’s essential role in securing freedom. Although economic freedom is still very much a part of liberal thinking to this day, it is arguably not as central, with emphases on the supreme good of private property giving way to concerns about the just distribution of goods.

Kant, Immanuel. “Perpetual Peace,” in *Kant’s Political Writings*. Ed. by Hans Reiss. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970 (orig. German in 1795).

Argues that states should treat all citizens as free and equal, and that this is best achieved through constitutional government. Kant’s influence on liberal thought, above all else that people are autonomous and thus capable of pursuing their own aims, transcends this particular book, and indeed pervades the Kantian corpus. The idea that people possess dignity and should never be treated as a mere means to an end has become one of the cornerstones of liberal thought.

Constant, Benjamin. “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns,” in *Constant: Political Writings*. Ed. by Biancamaria Fontana. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1988) 309–28 (orig. French in 1819).

Draws a distinction between the “Liberty of the Ancients” and the “Liberty of the Moderns” as he reflects on the causes of French Revolution. The former is associated with republican liberty, which is participatory and requires substantial engagement in public life. The latter is associated with civil liberties and the rule of law, with emphasis placed on a lack of state interference. Modern liberty emerges as societies become larger (thus limiting direct participation) and can no longer depend on slave labor to free up time for elites to deliberate about public affairs. Freedom is conceptualized as “freedom from the state” when the opportunities and burdens of participation are reduced.

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. Ed. by Alan Ryan. New York: Penguin, 2007 (orig. 1859).

Articulates liberalism’s basic presumption in favor of liberty: unless there is a compelling reason to restrict liberty (harm to others or to society as a whole), it is unjustified to do so. This principle is clearly anti-paternalistic, and it is also anti-moralistic, in the sense that a society cannot take moral judgements into effect when deciding what constitutes harm. People may be “harmed” (offended, scandalized, etc.) by a person’s self-destructive behavior, but they are not harmed in the direct, narrow sense that Mill intends when articulating the Harm Principle.

(1c) Liberalism in the 20th Century

As the most successful political philosophy of the last century, having largely triumphed over rivals from the Left (communism) and Right (fascism), liberalism is not short on august defenders. A number of the most prominent political philosophers on the 20th Century are liberals, and this more recent group of thinkers is largely responsible for setting the terms of contemporary debate surrounding liberalism. The emphasis on liberty is still an essential part of liberal thinking in the 20th Century, but issues of distributive justice (at least later in the century, following John Rawls) begin to gain ever greater prominence. It is during the 20th Century, then, that liberalism to some extent splits from classical liberalism—the free-market principles of the latter are still part of 20th Century liberalism, but they enjoy greater emphasis in other schools of thought, especially libertarianism (which is closely related to “neoliberalism”). This is not to suggest, however, that liberal thought in the 20th Century is monolithic: indeed, the thinkers in this section are quite eclectic, demonstrating the range of voices that make up liberal thinking in the 20th Century.

Trilling, Lionel. *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*. New York: New York Review of Books, 1950.

An important collection of essays on liberalism as a literary and cultural phenomenon. Trilling’s work is a reminder that liberalism is, or at least can be, more than cold, rationalist political philosophy. There is also aesthetics to the liberal sensibility that Trilling’s essays attempt to capture.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Trans. by Thomas Burger. Cambridge, MA: The MIT press, 1991. (orig. German in 1962).

On the history and formation of the bourgeois public sphere in democratic societies (it is “bourgeois” because it excludes the poor and uneducated). In Habermas’ telling, up until roughly the late 17th Century, there was no stark divide between public and private spheres, but this changes as liberal constitutional governments begin to emerge across Europe, giving

rise to arenas of free exchange. In time, the public sphere fades as mass societies transform into welfare states subject to forces like consumerism and mass media.

Berlin, Isaiah. 'Two Concepts of Liberty,' in *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969 (orig. lecture delivered in 1958).

Distinguishes between "positive liberty," the liberty enabled by self-mastery, and "negative liberty," the liberty that one experiences in the absence of coercion. It is the negative conception that Berlin advocates and associates with the liberal tradition. Political liberty is only violated when one is prevented from pursuing his or her own ends.

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Rawls is by far the most significant proponent of liberalism in the 20th Century, and his book *A Theory of Justice* revitalized liberal political philosophy. This book, Rawls' first, offers an account of distributive justice that is based on reasoning from the "original position," where an agent can deliberate unimpeded by biases about what is just, and then (hypothetically) consent to a social and political arrangement on the basis of this deliberation. The book thus relies on a type of social contract theory. Rawls contends that we would arrive at liberal principles behind the veil of ignorance: people should enjoy an expansive set of rights and freedoms, and inequalities can only be justified if they were to the benefit of the least advantaged persons (the "difference principle").

Dworkin, Ronald. *Taking Rights Seriously*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977.

Dworkin's first and arguably most influential book. It argues that basic legal, moral, and political rights are nonnegotiable. They cannot be taken away regardless of the will of the majority, and thus rights transcend the written laws of a nation, even a democratic nation (since those laws are often expressions of majority rule).

Gray, John. *Liberalism*. London: Open University Press, 1986.

Provides a conceptually and historically clarifying schema of the liberal tradition, which Grey argues has individualist, egalitarian, universalist, and meliorist elements. These elements unify what might otherwise seem like a disparate set of political priorities.

Okin, Susan Moller. *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. New York: Basic Books, 1989.

Argues that the major theories of justice suffer from a fatal blind spot in that they do not consider the institution of the family. As a liberal philosopher herself, Okin offers an internal critique of liberalism, arguing that it does not bring familial structures under scrutiny. The same is true of libertarianism and communitarianism. Thus, no matter the theory of justice on offer, the family is presumed to be just and thus set aside for the purposes of analysis. However, the gender dynamics in families are anything but just, and the injustices suffered by women in the home are replicated in the public sphere. The institution of the family, as Okin describes it, undercuts the liberal principles she ultimately endorses.

Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, Solidary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

A book about much more than political philosophy, but with a couple of influential essays on liberalism, especially “Private Irony and Public Hope.” In this section of the book, Rorty argues that the division between public and private should be encouraged and even celebrated. In the private sphere, we are free to experiment and fashion ourselves as we want. Our beliefs and modes of communication need not adhere to any public standard. Doing so does not compromise our standing in the public square, where we follow the rules of political discourse and the procedures of justice.

Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press, 1992.

An expanded version of Fukuyama’s famous essay “The End of History?” published in *The National Interest* in 1989, the year the Berlin Wall was torn down. Fukuyama argues that the end of the Cold War may also be the “end of history as such.” The ideological wars of history were finally over, and the last battle between communism and liberalism had been fought, with liberalism emerging triumphant. Liberalism would spread until universal, and then meaningful ideological conflict would cease.

Mills, Charles W. *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Liberalism purports to advance values like equality and fairness, but Mills, picking up on themes he’s explored since *The Racial Contract*, argues it has utterly failed if we look at the theory’s track record on race. Liberalism has failed on this front because it has been continuously shaped by racism. The form of government in a country like the United States is thus not liberalism, but “racial liberalism.” It is blind to the reality of white supremacy and the pervasiveness of racial injustice. However, if the racist underpinnings of liberalism can be unmasked and rectified, it will finally be true to its own ideals. Liberalism is desirable as long as isn’t racialized.

(2) Liberalism Critiqued

The liberal tradition has been attacked from thinkers on both the Left and the Right, as well by people who are not easy to locate along the ideological spectrum. Liberalism can also be critiqued for both theoretical and practical reasons. Some argue that it suffers from conceptual incoherence, whereas others focus on its negative effects, on the concrete injustices that can be laid at the feet of liberalism, or at least the nations that conceive of themselves as liberal. Salient examples of each type of criticism—from the Left, from the Right, and from the libertarian position—will be provided. However, since this bibliography is aimed at those with an interest in religious studies and theology, I will also single out religious criticisms of liberalism, which are often grounded in a more theologically conservative or traditional worldview.

(2a) Critiques from the Left

Criticisms of liberalism from the Left are generally made from a socialist and/or Marxist perspective. (Formally, more avowedly communist voices were involved in the discussion, but these have largely fallen by the wayside over the last several decades, as the horrors perpetuated by communist countries came into focus.) A number of these criticisms are leveled not so much at

liberalism as a broad political philosophy that emphasizes liberty and human rights, but rather at the laissez-faire economic policies associated with what is sometimes called (at least by its critics) neoliberalism. Neoliberalism revives some of the central emphases of classical liberalism, such as the importance of free markets and value of private property, and so many left-leaning criticisms of liberalism are largely criticisms of capitalism. Another line of attack from the left centers on the policies of liberal countries, such as the foreign policy of the United States. In this set of criticisms as in the last, it is not always clear that liberalism in general is the object of ire. It is an American incursion in the Middle East, for example, that is objectionable, as opposed to something like Rawls' difference principle.

Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. by Edmund Jephcott. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002 (Orig. German in 1947).

One of the most influential texts produced by the Frankfurt School and a searching analysis of the Enlightenment (the milieu in which liberalism takes shape). Horkheimer and Adorno attempt to understand their present moment (during World War II) by looking at the historical forces that led to it. The “new kind of barbarism” they witnessed did not emerge out of nowhere, but instead is a natural expression of concepts and patterns of thinking that extend back to the origin of Western civilization. While the book does reach deep into history, Horkheimer and Adorno focus on the Enlightenment in particular because it immediately precedes, and in some sense precipitates, their own troubled times. Enlightenment thought and culture, from its conception of morality to its understanding of science, is self-destructive. For this reason, the Enlightenment is in some sense the final stage in the cycle of history (perhaps not as a matter of historical necessity, but at least as a matter of historical fact). The end of the Enlightenment takes us back to the original myths of civilization: “Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology.”

Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. New York: Verso, 1985.

The founding text of post-Marxism, a movement inspired by, but not obedient to, Karl Marx's writing. In this book, Laclau and Mouffe center their analysis on hegemony, on how power is exercised by one group over another. Whereas Marx thought of groups in relatively static terms—the working class is stable group that stands in contrast with those who own the means of production—Laclau and Mouffe think of group identity as fluid and adaptable. Coalitions can easily form and break apart, and groups exercise power differently. The way to understand the march and direction of history is by looking at hegemony, not by relying on an a priori narrative of how class conflict will inevitably unfold.

Chomsky, Noam. *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999.

One of Chomsky's many critiques of global capitalism and the institutions that support it, such as the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, and the World Bank. Chomsky argues that the neoliberal ideology bolsters corporate profits at the expense of the vast majority of people, particularly those in the developing world. Chomsky has also been a fierce critic of American foreign policy, arguing that the US has consistently undercut democracy and human rights since World War II, despite professing to support these values.

Chomsky's support for human rights and the governmental forms that allow them to flourish demonstrates why it is potentially misleading to think of the Left as offering a blanket critique of liberalism.

Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Provides an account of the transition from imperialist nation states, where power was once located, to the emerging Empire (capital "e"). The Empire is made up of global powers: the large countries that belong to groups like the G8, and also the organizations they belong to, such as NATO and the IMF. As autonomists, Hardt and Negri argue that "networks"—autonomous and horizontally organized groups, as opposed to hierarchical groups like unions or political parties—can be organized to resist elites and the Empire they perpetuate in their own self-interest.

Shelby, Tommie. *We Who are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

A defense of black political solidarity, which is often taken to be conflict with liberal values like equality and fairness. While Shelby rejects any biological understanding of race and notes the hazards of certain forms of identity politics, he still thinks that black solidarity can be harnessed for emancipatory purposes. Black solidarity may fit uneasily with liberalism in the abstract, but it meets the immediate need to fight racial inequality and eliminate racism. So, it may be necessary to use tools that are in tension with liberal principles in order to better achieve those very principles.

Invisible Committee. *The Coming Insurrection*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009 (orig. French in 2007).

Predicts the imminent collapse of capitalism, and the social and political institutions it supports, in part because of the capabilities unleashed by networked humans. The book was published in France in 2007, and was used as evidence in the criminal case against the Tarnac Nine. For a far-left manifesto, it was a popular book, and gained widespread attention in both the US and UK after it appeared in English translation.

Davies, William. *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014.

Argues that neoliberalism essentially reduces politics to free market economics. Since politics touches virtually every domain of our lives, we are essentially being governed by the "logic of competition." A polity with competitiveness at its center is unhealthy, and a government that props up such a system is at risk of losing its legitimacy.

Iglesias, Pablo. *Politics in a Time of Crisis: Podemos and the Future of Democracy in Europe*. New York: Verso Books, 2015 (orig. Spanish same year).

Argues that austerity measures serve the wealthy at the expense of the welfare state, which average citizens depend on. Iglesias' analysis pertains to the economic policies of Europe over the last several years, but his critique has broader applicability. Iglesias is the leader of

Podemos, a new radical left party that has supplanted the PSOE, the traditional socialist party of Spain, in many of the country's cities.

(2b) The Libertarian Critique

I said above that liberalism, apart from being attacked from both the Left and the Right, is also critiqued by thinkers “who are not easy to locate along the ideological spectrum.” Libertarians are an example of such thinkers, and their criticism of liberalism comes from both directions. They will join the Left in decrying the foreign policy of liberal Western countries who assume a global role, and they will join the Right in criticizing the distributive justice sought by liberals. Thinking of libertarianism as a critique of liberalism highlights the importance of terminology. In many ways, libertarianism is just an outgrowth of classical liberalism. So, when the Left criticizes so-called neoliberalism, it is often offering a critique of libertarianism as well, since they advocate broadly similar economic policies (essentially, unfettered capitalism).

Friedman, Milton. *Capitalism and Freedom*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Argues that capitalism is necessary for both economic and political freedom, and that the former is a precondition for the latter. Friedman is specifically speaking of the role of a free market in a liberal society, linking “liberal” with the classical liberal tradition. Understandings of “liberal” that deviate from the classical tradition betray its true meaning, as he thinks happened in the United States following the Great Depression.

Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books, 1974.

Written in part as a response to Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. The first line of this book is this: “Individuals have rights, and there are things no person or group may do to them (without violating their rights).” Liberals agree, which is why both liberals and libertarians are not consequentialists. However, in the set of basic inalienable rights Nozick has in mind, he includes property rights, which is where he deviates from liberalism (at least in the 20th Century). Thus, his central point is that the state cannot take someone's property (assuming it was acquired legitimately) in the pursuit of any overall social conception of the good. The state could do this if it were, for example, attempting to maximize utility, but not if it respects individual rights.

Narveson, Jan. *The Libertarian Idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.

A helpful book that neatly lays out the key concepts of libertarianism, which Narveson identifies as Individual Rights (inherent to humans and not given by the state), Spontaneous Order (the way that people naturally order themselves absent a central authority), Rule of Law (we are free to do as we please as long as it doesn't infringe on others), Divided and Limited Government (as spelled out in a written constitution), Free Markets (wherein the terms of an exchange are set by its participants), Virtue of Production (legitimately acquired property belongs to the owner and cannot be taken by the state), and Peace (which generally reigns in the absence a centralized government perusing its own interests).

Otsuka, Michael. *Libertarianism without Inequality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003.

A defense of “left-libertarianism,” which combines elements of traditional libertarianism with egalitarianism. Otsuka argues that we should possess the broad rights to conduct our lives as we see fit, but that this must be checked by the fact that everyone collectively owns the world and its resources. This, according to Otsuka, opens up more room for equality of opportunity, while still preserving a strong principle of self-ownership.

(2c) Critiques from the Right

For the purposes of this bibliography, this is something of a pidgin category, falling as it does (and I suppose as it should) between libertarian critiques and religious critiques of liberalism. Critiques from the Right often fall into either or both categories. However, I leave this as a distinct category to highlight books that defend (or explain) the conservative political philosophy associated with the Republican Party in the U.S., which is set up in opposition to liberal theories of government, generally associated (rightly or wrongly) with the Democratic Party.

Buckley, William F. *Up from Liberalism*. New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959.

An early critique of liberalism before there was an organized conservative movement to resist it. (Buckley played a large role in organizing that very movement.) Buckley unearths the assumptions of liberalism—for example, that equality is desirable and can be achieved through the activities of the state—and attempts to discredit them. He is also critical of the Republican Party of his day, which he thought was largely liberal in its governing philosophy.

Oakeshott, Michael. *On Human Conduct*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Oakeshott’s main statement of his political philosophy, consisting of three connected essays. The first offers a theoretical account of human reason and agency, the second discusses what social arrangements we should adopt in light of his account of human reason and agency, and the third discusses the extent to which his ideas on political associations are borne out in modern Europe. In these essays, Oakeshott distinguishes between “enterprise associations,” where the state is organized around and legislates for a universal goal, and “civil associations,” where the state merely imposes laws for the sake of order, but does not seek an overarching common purpose. Reflecting his conservative sensibility, which he defines in an earlier essay (“On Being Conservative”) as a preference for the familiar over the unknown, he thinks societies should be organized as civil associations.

Nash, George H. *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (30th University Edition). Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2006 (orig. 1978).

A thorough and influential history of the postwar conservative movement. In Nash’s telling, prior to WWII, there was not really a discrete political philosophy in the United States labelled “conservatism.” Both Democrats and Republicans alike thought of themselves as liberals, in the sense that their governing philosophies broadly belong to the liberal tradition. Of course, this changed over time, setting up the now familiar contrast between “conservatives” and “liberals.”

Skocpol, Theda, and Vanessa Williamson. *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Highlights recent changes in the Republican Party following the 2008 presidential election and the rise of the Tea Party. In contrast to earlier iterations of the Republican Party, which often emphasized the virtues of small government following libertarian thinkers like Milton Friedman, the Tea Party is in favor of many government entitlement programs, provided they go toward those who “deserve” them, and not to “freeloaders.”

(2d) The Religious Critique

Like libertarian critics of liberalism, those who critique liberalism on religious grounds resist easy ideological categorization, especially according to the “liberal” and “conservative” labels by which American politics organizes itself. Several of the books below are indeed funded by a “conservative,” traditionalist worldview, but even these texts vary considerably from one another, and in any case they wouldn’t align with critiques from the Right in significant ways. So, all that unites the following books is that they express reservations about liberalism on religious grounds, or on grounds that religious critics of liberalism endorse. In this context, liberalism is closely linked to modernity, which is charged with creating cultural and societal conditions that are alien to the ancient and medieval world. Liberalism is also associated with the actual policies, both foreign and domestic, of Western democracies. Thus, the liberalism that is under attack is basically a way of life pursued by people in the West over the last several hundred years, and not always the abstract principles of liberal political philosophy (although these too are often criticized).

De Maistre, Joseph, *The Generative Principle of Political Constitutions*. Ed. and trans. by Jack Lively. New York: Routledge, 2017 (Orig. French in 1809).

Critiques one of the foundations of liberal thought, which is that constitutions are contracts between government and governed. Contrary to Enlightenment aspirations, constitutions are not the products of reason, but reflections of the unwritten legal norms of an existing political order that God commandeers for His purposes. Humans are of course the agents who write the constitution, but God’s providence is behind a constitution’s design and development. The precursor to this work, *Considerations on France*, outlines a similar understanding of the French Revolution: it is a human event, but guided by God’s providence, with events like the Reign of Terror serving as a divine rebuke to the Enlightenment.

Schmitt, Carl. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Trans. by George Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 (Orig. German in 1922).

An essay on sovereignty. The work famously begins with “Souverän ist, wer über den Ausnahmezustand entscheidet” (Sovereign is he who decides on the exception), encapsulating what Schmitt regards as the essence of sovereignty. The sovereign must (and should) have the authority to determine at which moments it is necessary to act outside the rule of law; that is what makes a person sovereign. In formulating his authoritarian views, Schmitt not only rejects liberalism, but in some sense the entire paradigm in which liberal political philosophy operates. All political concepts are just secularized theological concepts, according to Schmitt, and political theory is to the state as theology is to God. His denunciation of liberalism has a theological underpinning of sorts, but one that is fairly unique to Schmitt (or at least is not shared by the other rejections of liberalism that follow).

McIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

A critique of the current state of moral discourse in modern liberal societies, which he thinks is fragmented and incoherent. Prior to modernity, there was a “well-integrated” moral tradition centered on the virtues, but this tradition has collapsed and is in need of revival. What has taken its place is an emotivism that precludes rational exchange, since each person is reasoning from incommensurate premises based on intuition.

Michael, Sandel. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Not a religious critique per se, but a founding text for what came to be known as communitarianism, a movement that helps frame religious objections to liberalism. In this book, Sandel critiques Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, and in particular the suggestion that we can arrive at a satisfying account of justice from behind the veil of ignorance. Sandel argues that such a hypothetical state is not even possible to imagine, since all people are embedded in contexts (like their families) that define who they most fundamentally are. You cannot arrive at a conception of what is good and just as an “unencumbered self.” It is partly in response to Sandel’s criticisms that Rawls reconceives of his account of justice in *Political Liberalism*, where he eschews a metaphysical account that is universally true in favor of a political account that rational people can agree to, despite their differing background beliefs.

Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.

Heavily influenced by *After Virtue*, and concurring with McIntyre that citizens of liberal societies are adrift because they lack a moral and cultural framework. Under liberalism, conceptions of the good are regarded as private and personal, and thus citizens lack shared narratives and values. In these conditions, it is difficult to find meaning, communicate effectively with others, and lead a virtuous life. Amidst the fragmentation that liberalism breeds, we frantically search for universal principles to which all rational people will assent. But there are no such principles, and so instead we must look for traditional contexts to provide moral orientation.

Walzer, Michael. *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. New York: Basic Books, 1983.

Like Sandel, Walzer does not offer a straightforwardly religious critique of liberalism, but instead helps build (again like Sandel) the communitarian critique of liberalism that religious thinkers often embrace. Broadly, Walzer argues against the concept of primary goods, or goods that are common to all people. (Rawls posits that there are such goods in *A Theory of Justice*.) Walzer thinks it is mistake to group all goods together and then seek to equitably distribute them, since different communities assign different values to different roles. A variety of goods will exist in any community, and these will be distributed according to principles internal to the community. The fact that one lacks a good from one sphere and enjoys a good from another doesn’t render the community inequitable in the relevant sense. A community can have “complex equality,” with goods apportioned according to the social logic of the community, even as it lacks simple equality (an equitable distribution of primary goods).

Neuhaus, Richard John. *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1986.

Argues that the public square is “naked,” by which Neuhaus means it is barren of the religious speech and values that are central to the lives of the majority of Americans. Americans came to accept the rules of secular discourse, almost without realizing it. The naked public square encourages distrust of (and even hostility toward) religion, and it also undermines moral and political order, which depend on religious foundations, according to Neuhaus.

Milbank, John. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

A book broadly about theology’s capitulation to the social sciences, which attempt to explain religion from a neutral, secular standpoint. However, Milbank argues that the social sciences are anything but neutral, and in fact contain several questionable assumptions about the nature of theology. Liberalism is implicated in the book in that secularism is alleged to have been constructed in the “discourses of liberalism.” Liberalism creates a poisonous context for theology, in other words.

Milbank, John, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (eds). *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

The collection of essays that kickstarts the Radical Orthodoxy movement, which sees liberalism as the political expression of an all-encompassing secularism that has taken hold of the modern world. Proponents of the movement argue that secularism has encroached upon and hollowed out the functions of religion. Secularism and its attendant liberalism have not forsaken religious concepts like salvation; instead, they have appropriated them and stripped them from their original context, leaving them empty and effectively meaningless. The state cannot save people; only God can.

Eberle, Christopher J., *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

A critique of “public reason,” or the idea that laws can only be justified on grounds that every rational person can accept. Eberle argues that religious beliefs can serve as the sole justification for a coercive law, provided a public justification is sought, but unable to be found. To support this position, which he calls “conscientious engagement,” Eberle argues that religious beliefs and liberal values are on equal epistemic footing, and since liberal values are used to justify laws that apply to all citizens, religious beliefs should be able to serve as the justification for such laws too.

Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

An “anthropology of the secular” that explores the concepts and historical forces that have shaped modern secularism in the West and Middle East. The secular is often thought of as a neutral space that is governed by uncontested concepts like rationality, and as such it is

thought to stand in contrast to the “non-rational” dimensions of life, like religion. Asad complicates this view by interrogating the secular in the same way that anthropologists have interrogated religion. According to Asad, the secular is not the natural successor or rational alternative to religion; instead, it is a complex category shaped by contingent historical events and shifts in power, just like religion.

Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

An ethnographic study of the women’s piety movement in Cairo, Egypt that complicates Western liberal assumptions about female agency and empowerment. Do Muslim women cease to “free” when they adhere to orthodox practices that are patriarchal, at least according to the secular West? Through her analysis, Mahmood questions whether these women actually lose their agency by exercising it.

Gregory, Brad. *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012

A book not about liberalism per se, but about the historical forces that gave rise to it, which Gregory argues started with the Reformation. According to Gregory, liberalism is the poisoned fruit of a changing religious landscape that increasingly focused on individualism at the expense of community. Now we are beset by conditions of hyperpluralism, with no unifying understanding of the good, and liberalism is the sterile political system we instrumentalize to pursue our own (often base) ends.

Pfau, Thomas. *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013.

An account of modernity, of how it came to be, and how it forgot its past. The book is, like Gregory’s, not about liberalism primarily (or even secondarily), but it is about the sort of world that elevates liberalism to the preeminent political philosophy. When our selves are fragmented—when will is untethered from reason, such that acts cease to be made intelligible by the goodness of the end they seek—all we can hope for is a flat proceduralism. By prescribing rules to follow, liberalism helps people stay out of each other’s way as they pursue their own ends (however unintelligible). In the modern world, politics is merely a way of coping with a problem, not a project that unites us around a worthwhile project.

Deneen, Patrick J. *Why Liberalism Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018.

Argues that liberalism is the victim of its own success, and has become an ideology riven by internal contradictions. According to Deneen, liberalism’s emphasis on values like individualism and autonomy has led to ever-increasing inequality and environmental degradation, and it has compromised the health of families and communities, the sources from which humans most fundamentally derive happiness and meaning.

(3) Liberalism Defended

In the first section of the bibliography, some of the leading lights of liberalism were invoked, and the classic works of these thinkers constitute something like a preemptive defense of liberalism (in the sense that any argued articulation of a position is also a defense of that position). These are the texts around which a case for liberalism must be built. However, in this section, I will focus on more recent works that respond, directly or indirectly, to the criticisms leveled against liberalism that we confronted in the last section, especially those made by religious thinkers.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

An exploration of the modern notion of the self—what it is and where it comes from. As we saw in the last section, many view modernity with suspicion, and insist that modern understandings of the self are relativistic (or worse) because they are untethered from an objective cosmic order and substantive account of reason. However, Taylor rejects this view, arguing that the modern self is not understood in merely subjective terms because it is anchored in an understanding of human good. The turn inward that marks the modern period has heightened our awareness of our own subjectivity, but it has also led to a deeper appreciation of who we are and what counts as worthwhile. The book is not a defense of liberalism per se, but in affirming the era in which liberalism rose and flourished, Taylor offers a rejection of some of liberalism’s fiercest critics.

Holmes, Stephen. *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

An exploration of the origin and development of antiliberal thinking, as well as the complex but ultimately misguided (in Holmes’ view) motivation behind it. For much of the 20th Century, liberalism primarily had to contend with Marxist critiques, but these slowly faded away in the twilight of the last century. Communitarism, and some of its more extreme fundamentalist variants, took up the antiliberal mantle, and thus liberalism has come under renewed attack over the last few decades. Holmes provides the backstory to the resurgence of antiliberalism—it starts with critics of the Enlightenment like Joseph de Maistre, further develops under Carl Schmitt, and is expressed today by philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre—and argues that what lies behind this thinking is not hostility toward liberal principles like religious tolerance or free speech, but the deterioration of social cohesion. Ultimately, Holmes pushes back against the antiliberals, correcting misrepresentations and defending the basic necessity of liberal democracy.

Waldron, Jeremy. *God, Locke and Equality: Christian Foundations of Locke's Political Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Attempts to show that Christian theism is at the foundation of Locke’s political philosophy, and thus at the foundation of the basic principles of liberalism, above all else the commitment to equality (that we are all “one another’s equals” to use a phrase from the first line of this book, and the title of one of Waldron’s later works). As such, liberalism is not the enemy of Christianity that many critics imagine, but the very ground on which it stands. Indeed, the central contentions of the liberal worldview are at risk of falling apart if its theological underpinnings are removed.

Stout, Jeffrey. *Democracy and Tradition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Offers an account of democracy as a tradition. Stout argues that democracy, and the liberalism intrinsic to it, is not a dry proceduralism void of moral content, but a rich tradition in its own right, complete with its own values, patterns of reasoning, and intellectual leaders. He is primarily challenging the types of religious critiques of liberalism we confronted in section (2d), which Stout calls the “new traditionalism.”

Eisgruber, Christopher L., and Lawrence G. Sager. *Religious Freedom and the Constitution*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Argues that religion is unfairly privileged in certain cases and unfairly hindered in others. To rectify this, Eisgruber and Sager argue that religious freedom should be equated with what they call “Equal Liberty,” which reduces to two principles. First, no one’s views and commitments should be devalued simply because they are informed by religious or spiritual formation. Second, all people, religious or not, should be granted the same expansive rights, such as the right of free speech and the right of free assembly. The authors show how an application of the Equal Liberty principles resolves constitutional disputes without advantaging or disadvantaging religious citizens. Religion is treated fairly within the context of the U.S. Constitution, and thus there is no incompatibility between religion and liberalism.

Laborde, Cécile. *Liberalism’s Religion*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.

Simultaneously argues against those who think religion should enjoy special treatment and those who think it should not. Laborde argues that religion cannot be treated by the law as merely a conception of the good, since it is a more complex phenomenon involving collective identity and an entire way of life. However, religion can be “disaggregated,” and each component part, along with its non-religious counterpart, can be treated equally and appropriately under the law. The vulnerable identity of a religious group may be treated with special care by the law, not because it is a religious group, but because it is vulnerable.

(4) Liberalism Chastened:

We have now looked at various forms of liberalism, as well as at those that dissent from one or all of these iterations, and one might be left with the impression that it is now time to pick a side. You are either with liberalism (in one form or another) or against it (with this opposition also taking various forms). In some sense, this is true, but the final position one arrives at, and should, be more nuanced. In particular, one can embrace a type of “chastened” liberalism, a philosophy that recognizes that basic liberal principles are (barring extraordinary circumstances) inviolable, while at the same time insisting that a liberal political arrangement is not really good in itself. It is not good in itself because those living in liberal societies may be forced to make serious moral compromises—*in extremis*, even complicity in evil may be necessary—but it is nevertheless the best system we can hope for since it allows us to avert moral calamities, like violations of conscience that call the worthwhileness of life into question (e.g., forced conversion). Thus, liberalism should be thought of as first and foremost a solution to a problem, the problem of pluralism and the fracturing of value that inevitably follows in its wake. Pluralism may not be a problem in general, since diversity of viewpoints might be said to

make the world a richer place (even as one questions the value and integrity of certain positions), but it is certainly a *political* problem, one that liberalism is well-equipped to handle, indeed uniquely so.

The texts that follow do not articulate the precise view I am advancing, but they help develop it in various ways. In defending liberalism, I should also note that they are in broad continuity with the texts in the previous section. Books found in this section are particularly congenial to my thinking, but they could easily fit within Section (3). Thus, these final two sections are best thought of as two parts of the same basic argument.

Shklar, Judith. "The Liberalism of Fear." *Liberalism and the Moral Life*. Ed. by Nancy Rosenblum. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1989) 21-37.

An influential essay about the aspirations and limitations of liberalism, and one that encapsulates much of Shklar larger political vision. In this piece, Shklar argues that the meaning of liberalism has become obscured. Over time, liberalism became associated with the technocratic and judicial elitism of Western democracies: experts shaped policy that was enshrined by the courts, and the unruly voice of the people was conveniently sidestepped. Liberalism became a bloodless framework for enacting policy, and left by the wayside was the core of liberalism: "to secure the political conditions that are necessary for the exercise of personal freedom." This freedom should not be cast in the abstract language of rights; rather, it must be understood as a concrete check against state power. Liberalism grants a role for the state to thwart crime and violence, but this function must be accompanied by the guarantee that state power can never be used to terrorize citizens. Securing freedom from state violence is the chief aim of liberalism and the reason it must be defended.

Rawls, John. *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005 (orig. 1993).

Offers a *political* theory of justice, and as such the theory is justified not because it is true, but because it is "reasonable" (i.e., accepted by all reasonable people, regardless of their broader beliefs). *A Theory of Justice*, in contrast, advances an account of justice ("justice as fairness") that is true for all times and places. This expanded edition of *Political Liberalism* contains his *Chicago Law Review* article "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," which Rawls calls "by far the best statement I have written on ideas of public reason and political liberalism." In this essay, Rawls conceded that *Political Liberalism* construed of public reason too narrowly, which among other things precluded religious reasoning that he would later deem permissible.

Insole, Chris. *The Politics of Human Frailty: A Theological Defense of Political Liberalism*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004.

Divides religious believers into two camps. The first claims that their preferred religious doctrines are true, and then attempts to arrange a society in accordance with them, thereby pursuing a particular vision of the good. The second may also make truth claims about their preferred religious doctrines, but not for the purposes of ordering a society. Insole argues that we must align ourselves with the later camp because of our "human frailty." This frailty ensures that we are not in a position to impose our understanding of the truth, or our conception of the good, on other people. We must be humble and generous toward others, which is precisely what the liberal tradition at its best commends.

Sullivan, Winnifred Fallers. *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Argues that there is no stable or coherent concept of “religion,” at least not within the context of American law. The book is based on Sullivan’s experience as an expert witness for *Warner vs. Boca Raton*, a case centered around a multifaith and nondenominational cemetery in Boca Raton, Florida. In Sullivan’s judgement, no one party involved in the case could discern in a principled way which memorials counted as religious and therefore legitimate. From this experience and her broader scholarship, she concludes there can be no special protections for religion, since “religion” is not an intelligible referent. If religious faith means nothing distinct in a pluralist society, what compromises must religious believers accept?

Brenkman, John. *The Cultural Contradictions of Democracy: Political Thought since September 11*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.

An exploration of the meaning and aspirations of liberal democracy against the dark backdrop of the war on terror. Interrogating the “contradictions of democracy,” Brenkman criticizes the political thought on the Right and Left. The Right is overly confident in the capacity of the United States to spread democracy and freedom around the world, and the Left is trapped by endless negative critique, preventing it from offering any normative vision for how the United States should conduct foreign affairs. Drawing on thinkers like Hannah Arendt and Isaiah Berlin, Benkman urges a middle road, one that embraces goods like freedom and self-rule while recognizing the limits and costs of spreading these values abroad.

Connolly, William E. *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.

Against the “evangelical-capitalist resonance machine,” which controls the religious and economic culture of the United States, to the detriment of our shared political culture. As in his earlier and later books, Connolly argues that all positions are based on faith and lack objectivity, and societies are harmed when citizens assert the truth of their position as a way to dominate political debates, with the Christian Right being paradigmatic offenders. Connolly urges a pluralistic public discourse that he thinks will converge around egalitarian policies, since coalitions are more effectively formed when everyone concedes the contestability of their own views. His vision is ultimately “tragic,” since there is no meaning inherent to life, no objective truth to discover, and no providence behind history, although these further metaphysical claims are not necessary to take on board to appreciate his political vision.

Quong, Jonathan. *Liberalism without Perfection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Against “liberal perfectionism,” or the view that the state should help people live valuable, autonomous lives. Quong argues that states cannot serve this function, since they should offer no judgement on what counts as a healthy choice or a worthwhile life. Instead, governments should limit themselves to arranging societies in such a way that people have a fair opportunity to lead whatever lives they want to lead. Following Rawls’ later work, Quong is specifically defending political liberalism, which brackets deep metaphysical questions

about truth and goodness to achieve a more pragmatic end: to organize a stable system of government to which all reasonable people can consent.

Anderson, Amanda. *Bleak Liberalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Following thinkers like Lionel Trilling, Anderson argues that liberalism is a rich and complex tradition, and not just a dry proceduralism. Crucially, she also argues that liberalism is realistic, in the sense that it acknowledges the difficulties inherent to all political systems. Liberalism is often dismissed as naive because of the meliorist streak that runs through it, and Anderson's book is in part an attempt to refute this charge.