In this course we shall examine the emergence of toleration as a political topic, in the debate between John Locke and Jonas Proast (1689-1704), consider the contemporary significance of toleration and the moral and/or epistemological premises on which it can be based, and finally discuss three case studies – the place of religion in public life, cultural accommodation, and the regulation of hate speech.

Topics and readings are listed below. Readings will be available on Course Readings. The only required text is Locke on Toleration (Cambridge University Press 2010, available in UWO bookstore and Weldon). It is assumed that students will have access to a personal or library copy of Mill On Liberty.

Evaluation: a final essay, due April 15, worth 75%: class participation, 25%. The essay (15-20 pages is expected) will critically explore one of the week’s topics, while also showing an appreciation of its place in the overall theme of the class. I am open to proposals for essay topics that will span two or more weeks’ readings.

Topics and readings:

0 (Jan 4): Introduction the the course

1 (Jan 11): Locke’s toleration – was it Protestant, fallibilist, or egalitarian? Let’s discuss it: Locke on Toleration pp 1-66.

2 (Jan 18): Locke’s toleration – was it Protestant, fallibilist, or egalitarian? Let’s discuss it some more: Locke on Toleration, remainder of book

3 (Jan 25): Interpretations:

Vernon, Locke on Toleration, Introduction


Adam Wolfson Persecution or Toleration? Lexington Books 2010, chapter 4 (59-78)

4 (Feb 1): Toleration today (?):


6 (Feb 22): The moral-pluralist case:


Susan Wolf "Two Levels of Pluralism" Ethics 102 (1992), 785-98.

7 (Mar 1): Agonism:


8 (Mar 8): Autonomy:

J.S. Mill, On Liberty chapter 3 [personal or library copy]

Sarah Conly Against Autonomy Cambridge University Press 2013, chapters 1 and 2 (16-46)

9 (Mar 15). Religion in public life:

Robert Audi “The State, the Church and the Citizen” and Nicholas Wolterstorff “Why We Should Reject What Liberalism Tells Us” in Paul Weithman ed. Religion and Contemporary Liberalism U. of Notre Dame 1997


10 (Mar 22): Cultural Accommodation:


11 (Mar 29): Hate Speech:

J.S. Mill *On Liberty*, chapter 2 [personal or library copy]


12 (April 5): essays due