

Multiculturalism and Religious Conflict

Modular value: 20 credits

Duration: Term 1

Teaching: One two hour seminar weekly

Lecturer: [Richard North](http://schools/government-society/departments/political-science-international-studies/staff/profiles/north-richard.aspx)

This is a 20 credit module in normative and applied political ideas and ethics which looks at classic arguments and recent debates about multiculturalism. The aim of the course is to introduce students to theoretical and practical perspectives on cultural, religious and ethnic diversity and conflict, and to facilitate a critical understanding of the strengths and weakness of different approaches to the resolution of such conflicts.

The course is split into two parts: Part 1 deals with normative approaches to the problems raised by cultural diversity and part 2 examines recent social, political and ethical issues arising from cultural, religious and ethnic conflict.

Part 1 addresses two general questions: 1. What should the role and function of the state be in a multicultural society? 2. What can the state demand of citizens who are divided by their cultural and religious beliefs? In addressing those questions we discuss and evaluate: the importance and limits of religious toleration; the moral requirement that all cultural, religious and cultural groups be treated and respected as equals; the demands from minority groups for the recognition of their distinct identity; the claim that minority groups should assimilate with the dominant culture.

Part 2 addresses a series of social, political and ethical questions that are raised by multiculturalism. Here the aim is to apply some of the theoretical approaches covered in the first part of the course to the kinds of issues that face multicultural societies. Key questions include:

- Can diverse cultures co-exist harmoniously?
- Should some groups be exempt from the law on grounds of their cultural or religious beliefs?
- Is the toleration of traditional cultural and religious practices bad for women? Should illiberal religious practices be tolerated?
- Should a liberal society permit the existence of faith schools? Should the wearing of traditional religious or cultural dress (such as the veil or the cross) be forbidden in state schools?
- Is there a place for religious-based law (such as Sharia law) in liberal-democratic societies?
- Should human rights or cultural rights have priority? How should liberal-democratic multicultural states respond to non-democratic, mono-cultural states (e.g. theocratic states)?

On completion of the course students will be able to:

- Show understanding of the core concepts and principles associated with the idea of multiculturalism and demonstrate awareness of their critical strengths and weaknesses
- Show detailed knowledge of a range of historical and contemporary arguments concerning multiculturalism and the ways in which the state can and does respond to religious, ethnic and cultural diversity
- Apply arguments and principles from ethics and political theory to a range of practical questions about multiculturalism and religious and ethnic conflict

Assessment

- Term One 1 x 5000 word essay 100%

You may be interested in these modules:

- 20 credits - [Democracy, Power and Citizenship](http://postgraduate/courses/taught/govsoc/modules/democracy-power-citizenship.aspx)

You may be interested in these degrees:

- [International Relations \(with specialist pathways\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/courses/postgraduate/taught/govsoc/international-relations.aspx)
- [Political Science \(with specialist pathways\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/courses/postgraduate/taught/govsoc/political-science.aspx)
- [International Relations \(Gender\)](http://postgraduate/courses/taught/govsoc/international-relations-gender.aspx)
- [Political Theory](http://postgraduate/courses/taught/govsoc/political-theory.aspx)
- [Social and Political Theory](http://postgraduate/courses/taught/govsoc/social-political-theory.aspx)