On Individualism

18th May 2015

at the British Academy, London

A SEMINAR ARRANGED BY
AXEL AND MARGARET AX:SON JOHNSON FOUNDATION
ON INDIVIDUALISM

Ideas about the individual, which came to displace the claims of family, tribe and caste as the organising principle of society, had emerged in some form in the West by the 18th and 19th centuries. Some allege that individualism was one of the many fruits of the Enlightenment, but Larry Siedentop has argued that it evolved much earlier than we think. The roots of liberalism – the belief in individual liberty, in the fundamental moral equality of individuals, that equality should be the basis of the legal system and that only a representative form of government is fitting for such a society - were pioneered, he argues, by Christian thinkers of the Middle Ages who drew on the moral revolution carried out by the early Church. Was this the case? What impact did Enlightenment thinkers have on these notions, and did their ideas not bring more radical ideas about the individual with them. Where did ideas about the individual emerge from and how have they evolved since?

The seminar will explore this historical theme and also examine what is meant by individualism? Did the Ancient Greeks and Romans have the same conception of the self or the individual as us or a very different one. Is the term used so broadly that it has lost its meaning? And is it a Western concept or a more universal one? Is individualism conducive to happiness or unhappiness. In the modern context, does too much individualism endanger the public interest and the common good?
The Ax:son Johnson London Seminar Series

Monday 18th May 2015

5.15 pm REGISTRATION & DRINKS

5.25 pm Opening by Bella Thomas

On Individualism

Moderated by Daniel Johnson

Larry Siedentop  Individualism & the Roots of Western Liberalism
Kenan Malik  Individualism, Human Nature & Human Society
Angelica Goodden  The Influence of Rousseau & the French Enlightenment
Edmund Fawcett  “No, liberals are not all individualists”
Mara Delius  The view from Germany

Discussion

7.45 pm DRINKS & DINNER
PARTICIPANTS

Mara Delius Writer and editor for Die Welt
Angelica Goodden Author of Rousseau’s Hand
Edmund Fawcett Author of Liberalism: The Life of an Idea
Daniel Johnson Editor of Standpoint
Kenan Malik Author of The Quest for a Moral Compass: a Global History of Ethics
Larry Siedentop Author of Inventing the Individual

CONTRIBUTORS

Ayisha Albusadi Medical Fellow at Queen’s Square
Adrian Blau Senior Lecturer in Politics, King’s College, London
Louise Borjes Policy Institute, King’s College, London
Michele Bosc
Simas Čelutka PhD Candidate in History, Queen Mary, University of London
Jared Cohen Google Ideas
Jo Cook Lecturer, Medical Anthropology, UCL
Robert Cottrell Director of the Browser
Tony Curzon Price Competition and Markets Authority
Emma Duncan Associate Editor, The Economist
Anthony Dworkin European Council on Foreign Relations
Rebecca Empson Reader in Anthropology, UCL
Daisy Evans Teacher
Peter Jay Journalist and former Ambassador
Ken Gemes Professor of Philosophy, Birkbeck & New College of Humanities
David Goodhart Author and chair of Demos Advisory Council
Angus Gowland Reader in Intellectual History, UCL
Simon Green Professor of Modern History, All Souls, Oxford
Sarah Gustafson PhD candidate in History, Queen Mary, University of London
Mattias Hesserus Ax:son Johnson Foundation
Clare Hornsby Benedictus
Andrew Huddleston Lecturer in Philosophy, Birkbeck College
Jeremy Jennings Professor of Politics, King’s College, London
Natalia Jimenez Chair of the Elias Fawcett Trust
Shefali Malhoutra Film-maker
Anne McElvoy Public Policy Editor, The Economist
Noonie Minogue Writer
Douglas Murray Writer & Chair of Henry Jackson Society & Centre for Social cohesion
Selina O’Grady Author of And Man Created God: Kings, Cults at the time of Jesus
Jane O’Grady Founding member of London School of Philosophy
Jeremy O’Grady CEO of the Week
Margie Orford President PEN South Africa
Adrian Pabst Senior Lecturer in Politics, University of Kent
Bikhu Parekh Writer and author of Parekh Report; Hull University
John Peet Europe Editor, The Economist
Caroline Priday Princeton University Press
Joel Robbins Professor of Social Anthropology, Cambridge
Donald Sassoon Emeritus Professor of Comparative European History
Pavel Seifter LSE
Laetitia Strauch-Bonart PhD Student in Politics at EHESS, Paris
Bella Thomas Convenor of the Ax:son Johnson London Seminars
Georgios Varouxakis Professor of History, Queen Mary, University of London
Sarah Wilford PhD Student, Political Economy, King’s College London
Rod Williams Film maker
Alexander Woolfson Writer and Defence Analyst