



Agonistic Liberalism

Tuesday 25 February 4.30 - 5.45pm

Speaker

Dr Michael Sevel

Sydney Law School, University of
Sydney

Location

Theatrette (2.02)
Sir Roland Wilson Building, Building
#120, McCoy Circuit, ANU

**Talk is followed by light
refreshments**

Enquiries

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**This lecture is free and open to the
public**



In the 1990s, John Gray coined the term 'agonistic liberalism' to characterize a family of views in political theory which flourished in Oxford in the second half of the twentieth century. Agonistic liberals are committed to one or more traditional liberal principles (eg the priority of liberty or autonomy), and a view of morality often called 'value pluralism': that values are deeply distinct, and, on some views, ultimately incommensurable. With value pluralism comes a commitment to the inevitability of practical conflict, both within and across individual lives. Some critics have argued that agonistic liberalism is self-defeating, on the grounds that it must deny a core tenet of traditional liberalism: the universal truth and rational appeal of liberalism itself. Others argue that agonistic liberalism requires that members of a liberal society must actually believe in value pluralism, which some critics find deeply implausible. I assess these objections in the context of a prominent version of agonistic liberalism, the liberal political theory of Joseph Raz. I argue that the disagreements expressed by these objections reflect deeper disagreements about the nature of moral truth, the relation between values and contingent social practices, and the limits of philosophical inquiry.

Dr Michael Sevel is Senior Lecturer in Jurisprudence at the University of Sydney Law School. He works on foundational issues in legal theory, including political authority and the rule of law, in moral and political philosophy, and related topics in the history of philosophy. He earned a Ph.D. in philosophy and a law degree from the University of Texas at Austin. He is currently writing a monograph for Oxford University Press, *The Philosophy of Joseph Raz*, the first comprehensive treatment of Raz's moral, legal and political philosophy. He is also editing the Routledge Handbook of the Rule of Law, and co-editing *The Rule of Law in Ancient Rome*, an interdisciplinary collection of essays bringing modern conceptions of the rule of law to bear on Roman history and literature.

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