

On Liberalism

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Liberals see human beings as subjects, not objects. They reject despotism in its many forms. With Justice Robert Jackson, liberals believe that “compulsory unification of opinion achieves only the unanimity of the graveyard.” Liberal authoritarianism is an oxymoron. Illiberal democracy is illiberal, and liberals oppose it for that reason. Liberals are puzzled by many of those, on the left and the right, who describe themselves as “antiliberal” or “postliberal.” With respect to some claims of “antiliberals” or “postliberals,” liberals agree with Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman: “The refutation of a caricature can be no more than a caricature of refutation.” With respect to those claims of “antiliberals” or “postliberals” that do not amount to a caricature, liberals insist on the importance of freedom of thought and action and deliberative democracy, and on the need to respect reasonable pluralism.