

CHID 207A

Introduction to Intellectual History

The Idea of Community

Raymond Williams suggests that what is most notable about the term *community* is that, “unlike all other terms of social organization, (state, nation, society, etc.), it seems never to be used unfavorably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.” It is therefore unsurprising that community has figured prominently in Western thinking about our bonds to and relations with others, whether in political and social theory, religious thought, or the modern disciplines of sociology and psychology.

However, this sense of proximity or closeness that often gives community its positive connotation also suggests a problematic dimension of the idea. In order to sustain itself, a community must define who is to be included in—and excluded from—its boundaries, definitions that are grounded in particular notions of reason, faith, tradition, or shared experience, among other possibilities.

This course will explore the idea of community through an historical and critical examination of the works of canonical figures in the Western Intellectual tradition, as well as critical reflections from prominent theorists who have challenged this tradition from within.



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Instructor: Nick Barr Clingan