LIBERALISM AGAINST ITSELF
The Cold War Roots of Liberalism’s Present Crisis

By the middle of the twentieth century, many liberals looked glumly at the world modernity had brought about, with its devastating wars, rising totalitarianism, and permanent nuclear terror. They concluded that, far from offering a solution to these problems, the ideals of the Enlightenment, including emancipation and equality, had instead created them. The historian of political thought Samuel Moyn argues that the liberal intellectuals of the Cold War era—among them Isaiah Berlin, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Karl Popper, Judith Shklar, and Lionel Trilling—transformed liberalism but left a disastrous legacy for our time. In his new book “Liberalism Against Itself” Moyn outlines how Cold War liberals redefined the ideals of their movement and renounced the moral core of the Enlightenment for a more dangerous philosophy: preserving individual liberty at all costs. In denouncing this stance, as well as the recent nostalgia for Cold War liberalism as a means to counter illiberal values, Moyn presents a timely call for a new emancipatory and egalitarian liberal philosophy—a path to undoing the damage of the Cold War and to ensuring the survival of liberalism. Herlinde Pauer Studer, Alexander Somek and Fabio Wolkenstein will discuss with Samuel Moyn his findings and thoughts.

Samuel Moyn is Chancellor Kent Professor of Law and History at Yale University and author of many books on the history of ideas and politics in the twentieth century
Herlinde Pauer-Studer is Professor emeritus, Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna
Alexander Somek is Professor of Legal Philosophy at the Faculty of Law, University of Vienna
Fabio Wolkenstein is Associate Professor at the Institute for Political Science, University of Vienna

Samuel Moyn:
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