



# POLITICAL IDEAS

**SECOND EDITION**

for A-level

Liberalism, Socialism, Conservatism  
**Feminism, Anarchism**

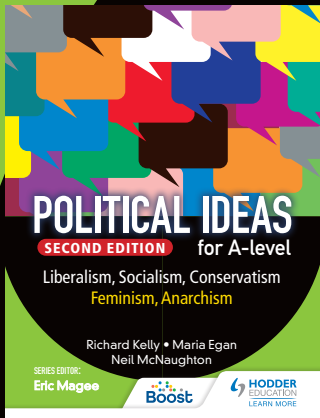
Richard Kelly • Maria Egan  
Neil McNaughton

SERIES EDITOR:  
**Eric Magee**



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Liberalism, Socialism, Conservatism  
**Feminism, Anarchism**

Authors: Richard Kelly, Maria Egan, Neil McNaughton  
Series Editor: Eric Magee

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# Get the most from this book

## Further reading

Websites, books and articles that are relevant to the chapter

## Exam-style questions

Revision questions at the end of each chapter

## Knowledge checks

Putting learning into practice

### Further reading

#### Politics review articles

- Boss, C. (2014) 'Are all feminists radical?', *Politics Review*, vol. 24, no. 3.
- Chen, M. (2018) 'Intersectionality and feminism', *Politics Review*, vol. 28, no. 1.
- Clayton, P. (2012) 'Why do radical feminists criticise liberal feminism?', *Politics Review*, vol. 22, no. 3.
- Grant, M. (2016) 'Is feminism a coherent theory?', *Politics Review*, vol. 26, no. 3.
- Grant, M. (2018) 'Fourth wave feminism', *Politics Review*, vol. 28, no. 4.
- Grant, M. (2020) 'Feminism: the "personal is political" debate', *Politics Review*, vol. 29, no. 3.
- Hammal, R. (2018) 'MeToo', *Politics Review*, vol. 28, no. 1.

#### Books

- Crisdo Perez, C. (2020) *Invisible Women*, Vintage.
- Gwen, F. (2021) *Women Don't Own You Pretty*, Bazen.
- Loide, A. (2019) *Sister Outsider*, Penguin.
- Ngugi Adichie, C. (2014) *We Should All Be Feminists*, Fourth Estate.
- Scint, R. (2016) *Men Explain Things to Me*, Changi.

### Exam-style questions

#### AQA

##### Essay questions

- 1 Feminists are united in the view that the personal is political. Analyse and evaluate this statement with reference to the feminist thinkers that you have studied. (25 marks)
- 2 Feminists agree on the forms of oppression faced by women. Analyse and evaluate this statement with reference to the feminist thinkers that you have studied. (25 marks)
- 3 Feminism is an anti-capitalist ideology. Analyse and evaluate this statement with reference to the feminist thinkers that you have studied. (25 marks)

In your answers you should draw on material from across the whole range of your course of study in Politics.

#### Edexcel

##### Essay questions

- 4 To what extent do feminists argue that sex is irrelevant in shaping human nature? You must use appropriate thinkers you have studied to support your answer and consider differing views in a balanced way. (24 marks)
- 5 To what extent do feminists agree on equality? You must use appropriate thinkers you have studied to support your answer and consider differing views in a balanced way. (24 marks)
- 6 To what extent are feminists united in the belief that reform of the state is the best way to address patriarchal power? You must use appropriate thinkers you have studied to support your answer and consider differing views in a balanced way. (24 marks)

### Knowledge check

- 11 Why did Kate Millett think the 'personal is political'?
- 12 List the factors Millett saw as contributing to the oppression of women.

### Comparing ideas

**Tradition**  
Conservatives have a strong belief in tradition, which they think provides familiarity and helps hold society together. They also see traditional family units as the heart of society and the best way to raise children. Feminists reject tradition, which they see as having kept women confined to the household and excluded from the workplace.

### Cultural feminist views on the sex/gender divide

Cultural feminists believe that sex and gender are linked. The response of cultural feminists to the sex/gender divide sets them entirely apart. Rather than seeing the connection between sex and gender as artificial, they argue that men and women have different inclinations and seek to honour their contrasting masculine and feminine characters. This is known as essentialism. For cultural feminists the problem is not that sex and gender have been artificially connected. The problem is that the roles performed for society by women have been treated as of lesser importance.

To remedy this, cultural feminists emphasise the value of motherhood and highlight those feminine qualities that they think give women an advantage over men – for example, the fact that women tend to be more socially adept than men.

In her 1990 book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, gender theorist Judith Butler presented a different view of the sex/gender divide. She argued that by using the terms 'sex' and 'gender' feminists were bolstering the idea of gender as binary. Feminists should, Butler suggested, focus less on definitions and more on analysing the power structures in society. This change of emphasis would allow gender to be seen as open-ended, rather than rigid.

### Knowledge check

- 11 What makes cultural feminists different from other feminists?

## Chapter 5

### Anarchism

#### Learning outcomes

- This chapter will enable students to:
  - be aware of the early development of anarchism
  - understand the core values of anarchism as a political ideology
  - understand the various types of anarchism and how they differ
  - be aware of the main tensions between the various anarchist traditions
  - know how and to what extent anarchism still flourishes
  - understand the ideas of anarchism's key thinkers

#### Key thinkers

This chapter will frequently reference the key anarchist thinkers cited in A-level exam specifications:

- Max Stirner (1806–56)
- Peter Kropotkin (1842–1902)
- Mikhail Bakunin (1814–76)
- Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1803–65)
- Emma Goldman (1869–1940)



## Learning outcomes

A summary of the learning objectives for each chapter

## Key thinker

Feature boxes giving details of the key people covered in the chapter

## Key terms

Concise definitions of key terms where they first appear



Judith Butler

### The personal is political

Feminist thinking is concerned with both the public and the private spheres. The public sphere is the domain of political, economic and legal activity within a state. It encompasses a state's governing institutions and its workplaces. The private sphere consists of the home and the family.

The main aim of liberal feminists is for women to enjoy equality with men in the public sphere. They want to achieve this through political and legal reform, which will extend the same rights to women as men. Included among these have been the right to vote and to run for political office. In addition, liberal feminists have worked to remove barriers to female progression in the public sphere, such as laws requiring women to resign from their jobs if they got married. They have also campaigned for equal pay, as well as particular rights for women, including paid maternity leave.

Liberal feminists do not concern themselves with what happens in the private sphere. They believe that women should be able to make their own decisions about how to conduct their lives behind closed doors, and take the view that how women behave in private has little bearing on their lives outside the home. Radical feminists disagree completely with liberal feminist reasoning on the significance of the private sphere. The phrase 'the personal is political', made famous by the writings of Carol Hanisch, summed up the radical feminist view that the way women behave at home has an impact on their lives in the public sphere.

There are several reasons why radical feminists believe this to be true. First, they feel that women who are submissive at home will find it difficult to assert themselves in the public sphere. Secondly, they argue that if women do most of the housework and childcare, this limits the time they have to advance their careers, while at the same time freeing up men to spend more time at work. A third strand to their argument is that if the greater part of the household chores and parenting is done by women, this models a pattern of unequal gender relations to the next generation. This will encourage the continuation of the problematic idea of male/female roles. All this explains why the fight for equality at home is crucial to the success of the continued struggle in the public sphere. According to radical feminists, liberal feminists have failed because they have not realised this. Socialist feminists agree with radicals that repression within the home matters. The unpaid work performed by women in

### Key term

**Private sphere** A person's domestic life, which liberal feminists consider to be private on the basis that what happens there is the business only of the individuals directly involved in the household. They believe it is within the state or wider society should interfere.

### Knowledge check

- 12 What is the reason for the liberal feminists' focus on reform in the public sphere?

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Answers to the exam-style questions at the end of each chapter can be found at [www.hoddereducation.co.uk/political-ideas-feminism](http://www.hoddereducation.co.uk/political-ideas-feminism)

# Introduction

This book is aimed at those teaching and studying the 'political ideas' components of A-level Politics specifications. But what, exactly, do we mean by both 'political ideas' and 'political ideologies'? And how do we distinguish them from political *policies*? We are used to discussing specific political policies but these refer largely to short term, pragmatic decisions made by politicians, parties and pressure groups. Policies are developed to deal with particular problems which arise from time to time. Ideas and ideologies, on the other hand, look at longer term issues and consider fundamental solutions to such questions. Furthermore, they are based on strongly held principles, rather than pragmatic responses to short term issues. Two examples can help here.

Let us consider the levels of taxation in a society. A policy to reduce income tax may be a short-term method of pumping more money into the economy, increasing spending and boosting economic growth. It cannot be undertaken permanently but it solves a problem in the meantime. On the other hand, a party or group of politicians might believe that tax levels are generally too high, are a threat to people's economic liberty and individualism, and are a disincentive to work and enterprise; so they should be kept to as low a level as possible in the long term. A low tax society is therefore a political idea.

Political ideologies are a stronger phenomenon altogether. Ideologies are sets of related political ideas which come together to create a vision of some kind of idealised society. Ideologies are based on strongly held, permanent principles and interlocking doctrines. In our example, the idea of a low tax society connects with related doctrines such as opposition to high levels of welfare which may be a disincentive to hard work as much as high taxes, and free, unregulated markets which foster business enterprise. Put these three aims together – low taxation, low welfare and free markets – and we have an ideology, usually known as neo-liberalism.

We can now apply the same analysis to another set of ideas. These concern dealing with poverty and inequality:

- Raising the minimum wage is a short-term **policy** to reduce poverty.
- Reducing the gap in living standards between the rich and poor in the long term is a **political idea**.

- Creating a more generally equal society with equal rights, empowerment for the working classes, intervention by the state to avoid the 'excesses' of capitalism, and public ownership of major industries to spread the fruits of their production more evenly, are interlocking ideas, forming an **ideology**, which we know as socialism.

This book deals with political ideas and political ideologies, but not with policies. Put another way, policies come and go, while political ideas and ideologies have more permanence.

There are three 'core ideologies' and five 'optional' ideologies. Apart from the fact that students must study all three core ideologies to be able to tackle the examination questions, but only have to study one of the options, there is another distinction to be borne in mind:

The **core ideologies** – liberalism, conservatism and socialism – have dominated Western civilisation for over two hundred years. Political discourse and conflict have therefore largely been based on these three. However, they are predominately based on Western civilisation. Today we must look further afield in our study of political ideas, taking a world view and also considering those ideas that shape the relationships between minorities and the perspectives of alienated sections of society.

The **optional ideologies** – feminism, anarchism, multiculturalism, nationalism and ecologism – have generally shorter histories than the core ideologies but often take their inspiration from different forms of consciousness of the world, ranging from Eastern mysticism to gender awareness to modern scientism. Some aspects of the optional ideas have also challenged the traditional ideas associated with liberalism, conservatism and socialism and, as such, can also be described as post modern.

## Five themes

In each chapter, these five themes will enable us to analyse, evaluate and compare political ideas, with a view to helping students prepare for examination questions. As a starting point, these themes should be considered in the following ways:

**Human nature.** This concerns beliefs about the fundamental nature of mankind's relationship with other people and with the world. In the political ideas presented here we will see that various thinkers have described human nature in enormously varied ways, from egocentric to social, from fundamentally good to fundamentally competitive, from gender obsessed to androgynous (having no gender identity) or from dominant over

the natural world (anthropocentric) to claiming to be only an equal part of nature.

**State.** Nearly all people live under the jurisdiction of one state or another. Political ideas and ideologies, therefore, have adopted principles about the nature of the state, what part (if any) it should play in society, how it should be controlled and whether it is a force for good or evil.

**Society.** All societies have a particular structure which has either evolved naturally or been imposed by the state and those who govern the state. Most ideologies have, therefore, developed some kind of vision of what their ideal society would look like. Sometimes this is very specific, as is the case with socialism, some forms of multiculturalism and certain types of collectivist anarchism. Sometimes it is more vague, as is the case with conservatism.

**Economy.** Not all political ideas and ideologies contain a strong economic perspective, but some do and this should be reflected in analysis where it applies. Again, socialism is a clear example, while neo-liberals, as described above, base most of their ideas on economics and economic principles. Even some socialist feminists have been able to link most of their analysis to economic relations between the sexes. Many ecologists also see capitalism as the main culprit in the degradation of the natural environment and so propose to control or even abolish it.

**Different types.** All of the ideologies covered in this book are somewhat ambiguous, in that they all have various interpretations and prescriptions. For example, socialism is seen as both a revolutionary and non-revolutionary doctrine, while liberalism advocates both a reduction and extension of state activity. Students will thus be made aware of what both unites and *divides* each ideology's key thinkers.

## Key thinkers

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There are five or six key thinkers identified for each of the political ideologies in the specification. This book describes their main work, beliefs and importance in the development of political ideas. They are not exhaustive, and you may benefit from knowing something of other important writers within the ideology concerned. However, we strongly advise that you refer to each ideology's 5 or 6 key thinkers in your examination answers – as long as such references are relevant and accurate.

As indicated above, each ideology contains different themes and variations. Often, the different thinkers in the text illustrate these variations most effectively. Thus the distinction

between, for example, the liberals John Stuart Mill and John Rawls tells us a great deal about how liberalism evolved between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Similarly, Marx's revolutionary version of socialism tells us much of how dramatically the ideology has been transformed by more recent, moderate, left-wing thinkers such as Anthony Crosland and Anthony Giddens.

## Political Vocabulary

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As we have said, accurate and appropriate political vocabulary should be used wherever possible. Fortunately, both this book and the examination specification itself contain key terms with their meanings. You should take time to understand these and practise using them wherever you can. They can also save you time in your writing as they have specific meanings which will reduce the need for lengthy explanations.

You are strongly advised to learn those aspects of vocabulary with which you are not already familiar, while ensuring you are able to use them in the correct context.



# Chapter 1

## Liberalism

### Learning outcomes

This chapter will enable students to:

- understand the core values of liberalism as a political ideology
- understand how liberal thinking has evolved since the seventeenth century
- understand the various strands of liberalism and how they compare.

### Key thinkers

This chapter will frequently reference the key liberal thinkers cited in A-level exam specifications:

- John Locke (1632–1704)
- Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97)
- John Stuart Mill (1806–73)
- Thomas Hill Green (1836–82)
- John Rawls (1921–2002)
- Betty Friedan (1921–2006).



## Introduction: an influential ideology



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: American liberal or American socialist?

Most commentators agree that liberalism is the most important and influential ideology in the world today. According to a United Nations survey in 2000, almost two-thirds of states around the world could be classed as 'liberal democracies', a seven-fold increase since 1945. The advance of liberal ideas, it seemed, was unstoppable.

This view has since been challenged by developments during the twenty-first century, but liberalism remains an immensely powerful ideology, central to an understanding of modern politics. But what do liberal societies and liberal states embody? How are 'liberals' different from, say, 'moderate' socialists or 'centrist' conservatives? As we shall see, liberalism is not straightforward, and its practitioners are a mixed bunch in terms of their politics.

In the UK and USA, for example, 'liberalism' is usually seen as a 'centre-left' doctrine, challenging the values of conservatism. As a result, self-proclaimed American liberals – such as Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton – find themselves in the same party as self-proclaimed socialists such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, all opposing the supposed conservatism of the Republican Party.

In the states of the southern hemisphere and western Pacific, the term 'liberal' has rather different connotations. In Australia, for example, the Liberal Party is seen as the main opposition to the Labor Party and has a strong appeal to those rejecting leftist or progressive politics.

Clearly, liberalism is both influential and ambiguous. To help us understand this crucial yet complex ideology, it is first necessary to examine how it emerged.

## The origins of liberalism and the influence of the Enlightenment

The roots of liberalism lie in the Reformation, a religious movement affecting much of northern Europe in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Led by religious protestors such as Martin Luther, the founders of 'protestant' Christianity argued that individuals need no longer rely on priests, popes and other intermediaries. Instead, Christianity should assume a more *individualistic* character, with each man and woman undertaking their own *individual* communication with God.



John Locke: Enlightenment icon and classical liberal

However, it was the **Enlightenment** that extended these religious ideas into the political and secular world. The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement that emerged in the mid-1600s, and one that continued to exert a powerful influence during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was defined by *reason* rather than religion, *free thinking* rather than blind faith and rational *scrutiny* rather than spirituality. Put literally, it was a movement that aimed to shed 'light' on the assumptions of what some term the Dark Ages (a description sometimes applied to the medieval era) and to replace those assumptions with more tolerant and inquiring attitudes.

Through philosophers such as **John Locke** (Key thinker 1), often seen as the 'father of liberalism', the Enlightenment inspired a range of radical ideas, such as:

- that every individual has an ability to think freely
- that an individual's life should be determined by his or her own judgements
- that the relationship between individuals and governments should be re-examined, in a way that improves the status of the individual.

These ideas are not unusual today, but in the seventeenth century they were revolutionary, with **Locke** considered an incendiary figure in both England and America. Until then, it had been assumed:

- that the natural form of government was autocratic (dominated by a single individual)
- that an autocratic ruler, usually a monarch, had been appointed by God
- that the monarch's wishes should therefore be automatically accepted by his 'subjects' – a doctrine known as 'the divine right of kings'.

Yet the philosophers of the Enlightenment, and **Locke** in particular, disputed such medieval attitudes, arguing that 'ordinary' individuals should create, by themselves and for themselves, a political system based on reason rather than tradition and superstition – a principle which some political scientists now refer to as **mechanistic theory**.

### Key term

**Mechanistic theory** Linked to the writings of **John Locke**, this argues that human beings are rational and can build a state that reflects their needs (e.g. the need for freedom and self-fulfilment). It rejected ideas such as the 'divine right of kings', which argued that a state should reflect God's wishes and that obedience to such a state was a religious duty.

### Knowledge check

- 1 What was the 'Enlightenment'?
- 2 What was the 'divine right of kings' and why was it at odds with Enlightenment values?

## Key thinker 1

## John Locke (1632–1704)

John Locke is usually seen as the father of liberal philosophy, with his book *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) regarded as the cornerstone of liberal thought. He is also seen as the central figure in the original version of liberalism, usually referred to as classical liberalism. Locke's importance to classical liberalism lies in the questions he raised about human nature and the type of state that was therefore appropriate.

- Locke denied the traditional, medieval principle that the state was part of God's creation. He disputed that the state had been created by a celestial power, involving monarchs who had a 'divine right' to govern. For the same reason, he rejected the notion that ordinary people were 'subjects' of the state, with a quasi-religious obligation to obey the monarch's rulings. He argued that a 'legitimate' state would be one created by mankind to serve mankind's interests and would arise only from the **consent** of those it would govern.
- Locke asserted that, prior to the state's existence, there was a 'natural' society which served mankind's interests reasonably well. Locke described this natural society as the **state of nature**. However, Locke's state of nature was very different from the 'nasty and brutish' version depicted by conservative thinker **Thomas Hobbes** (see Chapter 3). Owing to Locke's upbeat view of human nature, and his belief that it was guided by rationalism, he also believed the state of nature was underpinned by 'natural rights' (such as the right to property), 'natural laws' and 'natural justice' and was therefore not one that people would desperately wish to leave. The alternative 'state of law' (in other words, the modern state as we know it) was therefore designed to improve upon an essentially tolerable situation, by resolving disputes between individuals more efficiently than was the case under the state of nature.

- For Locke, the 'state of law' would be legitimate only if it respected natural rights and natural laws, ensuring that individuals living under formal laws were no worse off than in the state of nature. The state's structures must therefore embody the natural rights and natural liberties that preceded it. Similarly, Locke's ideal state would always reflect the principle that its citizens had voluntarily consented to accept the state's rulings, in return for the state improving their situation (a principle which later became known as 'social contract theory').
- Because of its 'contractual' nature, the state would have to embody the principle of **limited government** – in other words, limited to governing within pre-agreed rules and always requiring the ongoing consent of the governed. The state's limited character would be confirmed by its dispersal of powers. The executive and legislative branches of the state, for example, would therefore be separate, while its lawmakers (i.e. parliamentarians) would be separated from its law enforcers (i.e. the judiciary).

## Key terms

**State of nature** A notion of what life was like before the emergence of a state. It was used by **John Locke** – and, before him, **Thomas Hobbes** – to justify the different types of state they were proposing and why such states would be an improvement upon the state of nature.

**Limited government** The opposite of arbitrary rule, as practised by medieval monarchs, this relates to **Locke's** assertion that the state should be 'limited' – in terms of what it can do and how it can do it – by a formal constitution.

# The core ideas of liberalism

## Knowledge check

- 3 Summarise the type of state John Locke prescribed.

## Key term

**Egotistical individualism** A term reflecting the liberal belief that human beings are naturally drawn to the advancement of their own, selfish interests. Its defenders claim that, because human beings are rational, egotistical individualism does not necessarily lead to conflict or an insensitivity to the wishes of others.

## View of human nature

### Egotistical

From **Locke** onwards, liberals have argued that each human being is unique and endowed with certain 'natural' rights: for example, the 'right' to life, liberty and the pursuit of self-fulfilment. They also argue that human beings are fundamentally driven by **egotistical individualism** – in other words, by self-interest. As a result, liberals believe that every individual seeks:

- *self-realisation*: to ensure we discover our 'true' and unique selves, free from the constraints and expectations of others, and unhindered by the conventions of society
- *self-determination*: to ensure we are the masters of our own fate and that the realities of our lives can be attributed to our own efforts and achievements
- *self-fulfilment*: to ensure we have fully utilised our 'natural rights' and made the most of our particular talents (see Figure 1.1).

Liberals argue that when these things are denied, human beings are left demoralised, de-energised and afflicted by the sense of a wasted life. Indeed, this argument was at the heart of complaints articulated in respect of women by liberal feminists like **Mary Wollstonecraft** (Key thinker 2) and **Betty Friedan** (Key thinker 6), both of whom argued that male *and* female individuals shared a desire for self-fulfilment and self-determination.

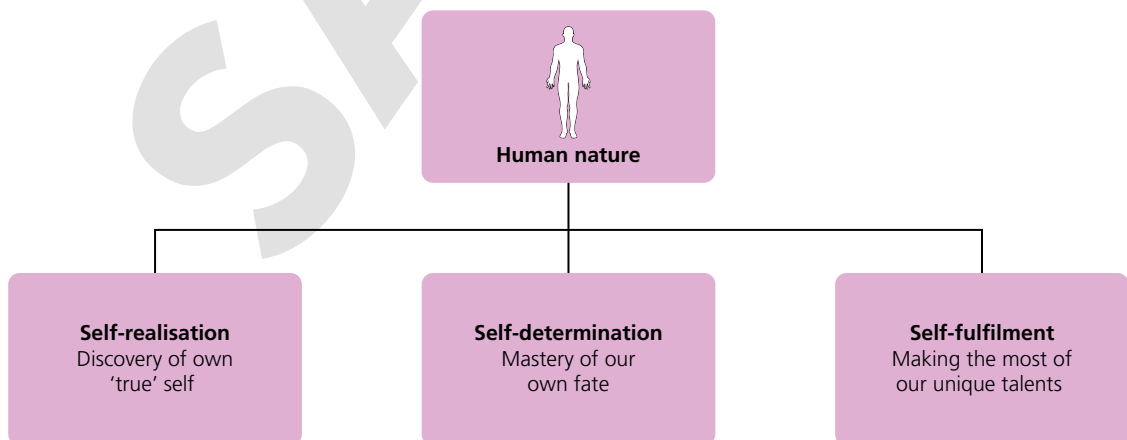


Figure 1.1 Liberal view of human nature





Mary Wollstonecraft

In her acclaimed book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), **Friedan** protested that huge numbers of female individuals were 'quietly suppressed' by the 'gender expectations' of post-war America, and that such women were subsequently 'de-humanised' by a society that, in this respect, was insufficiently liberal. Specifically referring to women in conventional, suburban environments – 'trapped by an obligation to surrender their own dreams in order that husbands and children can follow theirs' – **Friedan** linked rising levels of female depression and suicide to a 'suffocating sense that the natural urge to feel happy and fulfilled was denied'. Illustrating this point, she depicted a 'fictional but typical' housewife in 1960s, small-town America:

As she made the beds, shopped for groceries and comforted the kids, she was afraid to even ask herself the question 'Is this all?'

## Key thinker 2

### Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97)

While **John Locke** laid the foundations of liberal thought in the seventeenth century, one of those who developed classical liberal ideas in the eighteenth century was Mary Wollstonecraft. Her most important publication, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), remains a classic of political thought and is still strongly linked to feminist ideology. Yet, though gender was crucial to her work, her arguments were rooted in liberal individualism.

- Wollstonecraft's primary claim was that the Enlightenment's optimistic analysis of human nature, and the belief that we are guided by reason, should apply to all human beings, male and female. She went on to argue that, in eighteenth-century England, both society and state implied that women were not rational and thus denied them individual freedom and formal equality. Women, for example, were rarely allowed land ownership or paid employment, and sacrificed what little individualism they had to become wives. Once married, a woman had little legal protection against violence inflicted by her spouse, and no recourse to divorce. Neither could women

vote for those who governed them – a blatant violation, Wollstonecraft pointed out, of 'government by consent'.

- Yet Wollstonecraft was not simply a spokesperson for women's interests. She argued that by fettering female individualism, nations such as England were limiting their stock of intelligence, wisdom and morality. As Wollstonecraft observed, 'such arrangements are not conditions where reason and progress may prosper'.
- Like many upholders of 'classical' liberal ideals, Wollstonecraft welcomed both the American Revolution of 1775 and the French Revolution of 1789. Indeed, her other major work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), attacked **Edmund Burke**'s critique of the French Revolution and his related defence of custom, history and aristocratic rule (see Chapter 3). Wollstonecraft thus stressed her support for republican government, formal equality and a constitution that protected individual rights. But such formal equality, she restated, must be accorded to all individuals, and not just men. For that reason, she

applauded the French Revolution's emphasis upon 'citizens' and its apparent indifference to gender differences.

- Wollstonecraft conceded that women themselves were complicit in their subjugation, generally desiring only marriage and motherhood. For this to be corrected, she argued,

formal education should be made available to as many women (and men) as possible. Without such formal tuition, individuals could never develop their rational faculties, never realise their individual potential and never recognise the 'absurdity' of illiberal doctrines like the divine right of kings.

### Knowledge check

- 4 What do liberals mean when they say we are 'egotistical'?
- 5 Why did Betty Friedan think that women in modern societies were often oppressed?
- 6 Summarise how Wollstonecraft's early feminism relates to liberalism's core values.
- 7 What is meant by being 'rational'?
- 8 Why do liberals believe that being rational guards against callous selfishness?

### Key term

**Developmental individualism** Sometimes referred to as 'individuality', this relates to the liberal philosophy of **John Stuart Mill**, who wished to focus on what individuals could *become*. It helps explain Mill's strong emphasis on the role of *education* in a liberal society.

### Rational

Critics of liberalism suggest that such egotism makes for selfishness and endless conflict between individuals. Indeed, this gloomy view of egotism is conveyed by the work of key conservative thinker, **Thomas Hobbes** (see chapter 3).

But liberal thinkers dispute this. According to both **Locke** and **John Stuart Mill** (Key thinker 3), we may be egotistical, but our behaviour is also rational and therefore respectful to others; guided usually by reason and logic rather than emotion and impulse. In this way, our rationality allows us to realise that selfishness and disrespect for others can rebound to our disadvantage. Put simply, if we do not respect others, in *their* pursuit of self-realisation, then others might not respect us – with the result that we ourselves could be left frustrated. As a result, liberals see human nature as fundamentally self-centred, but also thoughtful and empathetic, drawn to intelligent compromise and mutual understanding with others.

### Progressive

Most liberal thinkers are also keen to argue that human nature is not set in stone. Instead, it is constantly progressing and developing through greater knowledge, an improved understanding of the world around us, and greater education. In short, human beings today are likely to be more rational, intelligent and respectful than they were in the past.

This idea is called **developmental individualism** and links strongly to the doctrine of 'utility' or 'utilitarianism' – a doctrine advanced by the radical philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), and asserting that human beings are guided by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. However, as **Mill** wrote:

I regard utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being ... better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.

## Keynesian capitalism

Reflecting its rejection of negative liberty and minimal government, modern liberalism is less prepared to endorse laissez-faire capitalism and more willing to back *dirigiste* capitalism, involving greater state intervention in a market economy. Of crucial influence here was the economist John Maynard Keynes, who argued that minimal state intervention led periodically to mass unemployment, a resulting loss of freedom for millions of individuals, and the grave prospect of fascism and communism. Keynes therefore argued that self-fulfilment and liberty were seriously endangered by joblessness and resulting poverty.

As a liberal, Keynes was naturally keen to protect capitalism. But as a *modern* liberal he believed that the best way to do this was through state 'management' of capitalism, thereby ensuring economic stability and a workforce 'enabled' to be 'free' by full employment (see Box 1.3).

For more recent modern liberal thinkers, such as **John Rawls**, Keynesian economics was crucial. The expansion of state spending that **Rawls** and others prescribed, to overcome the 'five giants' cited by the Beveridge Report (see Box 1.3), needed to be financed by taxation. **Rawls** believed that a sufficient tax yield could only be assured by the steady economic growth promised by Keynesianism, in contrast to the 'boom and bust' cycles associated with laissez-faire capitalism. However, as shown by the UK economy in the 1970s, **Rawls** and others were naïve to assume that Keynesianism would prevent the return of recession.

### Knowledge check

- 47 How is Keynesian economics meant to promote individual freedom?
- 48 Which economic problems were Keynesianism economics supposed to cure?

## Liberal democracy

As we saw earlier, classical liberals were wary of democracy, fearing that it endangered natural rights and tolerance. However, once modern liberals began championing the extension of the state, the extension of democracy became harder to resist. As **T.H. Green** admitted, 'if the state is to do more for its people, then the state must do more to secure their consent'. In other words, positive liberty and an enabling state required the embrace of universal adult suffrage.

It was a modern liberal prime minister (David Lloyd George) who oversaw the start of enfranchisement for women in 1918. More recently, Liberal parties in the UK have championed a reduced voting age, first to 18 and now to 16, while calling for the 'democratisation' of Parliament (via an elective House of Lords) and elected devolved government in the nations of the UK.



### Knowledge check

- 49 Why did increased state intervention make liberals more sympathetic to democracy?
- 50 How have recent liberal politicians championed greater democracy?
- 51 How have recent liberal politicians tried to restrain the possible effects of democracy?

Yet modern liberalism's support for democracy is not unreserved. It has shown little interest, for example, in direct democracy and referendums. It has even been willing to limit representative democracy through its backing of the UK Human Rights Act (which transferred powers from elective representatives to unelected judges) and its firm support for the European Union (despite the undemocratic nature of key EU institutions, such as the European Commission). Like classical liberals, modern liberals seem inclined to excuse democratic shortcomings in return for ensuring 'liberal' outcomes, such as the EU's guarantee of free movement for its individual citizens. Modern liberals were also inclined to see the Brexit referendum as a shocking example of **Mill's** 'tyranny of the majority' and a vindication of his view that big decisions are best left to liberal-minded parliaments.

### Box 1.6: Liberal democracy in action – mission statement of the 'Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe' (ALDE), 2021

Founded in 2004, ALDE is a group that brings together liberal-minded politicians in the EU and European Parliament. It aims to promote values that are 'both liberal and democratic', and calls upon the EU to:

- develop in as decentralised a way as possible
- develop stronger democratic links to EU citizens
- develop higher standards of accountability and transparency in its dealings with EU citizens
- respect and promote personal freedom and self-fulfilment for all EU citizens.
- promote the protection of minorities, regardless of ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, faith or age.



European liberalism: ALDE politicians, 2021

## Debate 2

### Has modern liberalism abandoned the principles of classical liberalism?

#### Yes

- Classical liberalism defined liberty as individuals being left alone (negative freedom). Modern liberals think individuals are not free unless they are actively 'enabled' via interference from others (positive freedom).
- Classical liberalism championed a minimal state. Modern liberals champion an enlarged state.
- Classical liberalism often saw taxation as 'theft' and sought to restrict it. Modern liberals see increased taxation as the means to increased public spending.
- Classical liberalism favoured laissez-faire capitalism from which the state is detached. Modern liberals favour Keynesian capitalism, where the state seeks to 'manage' market forces.
- Classical liberalism had an ambivalent view of democracy, prioritising the interests of property owners. Modern liberalism has championed representative democracy.

#### No

- Both classical and modern liberalism have an optimistic view of human potential.
- Both classical and modern liberalism believe in rationalism and the tolerance of minorities.
- Both classical and modern liberalism see individualism as the 'end goal' of politics and society.
- Both classical and modern liberalism believe in capitalism and criticise state ownership.
- Both classical and modern liberalism believe in a constitutional ('limited') state and 'government by consent'.

**Evaluation check:** To what extent are classical and modern liberalism distinct ideologies?

## Social liberalism

### Key term

#### Social liberalism

Reflecting the work of **Betty Friedan**, this updates liberalism's historic belief in tolerance. It calls for legislation which illegalises discrimination against individuals on grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability and gender identification.

Modern liberalism is also defined by efforts to update the classical liberal stress on tolerance – especially tolerance of minorities. This approach has become widely known as **social liberalism**.

From the mid-twentieth century onwards, modern liberalism became strongly linked with calls for greater racial and sexual toleration. Key thinkers such as **Betty Friedan** protested that too many individuals in modern society were denied equality of opportunity on account of 'essentialist' factors like ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. Given their acceptance of positive liberty and an enabling state, modern liberals like **Friedan** argued that solving such problems required fresh legislation and various forms of 'affirmative action' – that is, discrimination favouring groups that had, historically, been discriminated against (often referred to as 'positive discrimination'). From the



Betty Friedan

1960s onwards, modern liberalism thus became associated with both affirmative action and other initiatives, such as:

- the USA's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, established in 1964, which required 'affirmative action' or 'positive discrimination' in respect of hiring employees from racial minorities
- the US Supreme Court's *Roe v Wade* decision of 1973, protecting a woman's right to abortion
- the UK's Race Relations Acts of 1965, 1968 and 1976, banning various forms of racial discrimination
- the UK's Marriage Act 2013, legalising same-sex marriages.

As **Friedan** explained, such 'corrective' legislation was perfectly consistent with the original aim of the liberal state: namely, the promotion of tolerance and equal opportunity. However, social liberalism has most recently been linked to individuals affected by 'gender dysphoria', or a mismatch between someone's biological sex and their gender identity. Indeed, many regard the campaigns for transgender rights as the latest liberal challenge for those championing tolerance. As transgender activist Shon Faye wrote, 'We are symbols of hope for non-trans people too, who see in us the possibility of living more fully and freely'. However, among modern liberals this remains a polarising debate, with many liberal feminists seeing transgenderism as a threat to the individual rights of cisgender women.

### Knowledge check

- 52 What new threats to individualism were identified by Betty Friedan?
- 53 Explain why Friedan's feminist views were consistent with liberalism in general and modern liberalism specifically.

## Key thinker 6

### Betty Friedan (1921–2006)

Betty Friedan is linked mainly to the development of feminist ideology, through her acclaimed work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Yet her ideas also broadened liberal interest in equality of opportunity.

- As with all liberals, a concern for individualism lay at the heart of Friedan's philosophy. She insisted that all individuals should seek self-determination and the realisation of their potential. Yet, like **Mary Wollstonecraft** two centuries earlier, Friedan identified gender as a serious hindrance to women.
- Friedan argued that it was illiberal attitudes in society, rather than human nature, that condemned most women to underachievement. She maintained that these

attitudes were nurtured and transmitted via society's various 'cultural channels', such as schools, organised religion, the media and mainstream literature, theatre and cinema. These channels of 'cultural conditioning' left many women convinced that their lot in life was determined by 'iron laws' rather than their own rationality and enterprise. Friedan sought to challenge this 'irrational' assumption.

- Friedan's reputation as a liberal as well as a feminist thinker was underlined by the fact that she disdained violence or illegality as a means of pursuing change, arguing that significant progress was possible via the procedures of a liberal state. She thus acknowledged her country's Lockean constitution and believed

in its capacity to improve individual lives. Consequently, she rejected the Marxist-feminist argument that the state was dominated by

'patriarchal' corporations. Instead, Friedan favoured liberal constitutionalism.

### Debate 3

#### Do liberals have a consistent view of the state?

##### Yes

- Liberals consistently believe in a constitutional state, drawn up after rational discussion.
- Liberals consistently believe in 'government by consent' and the notion that the state is a 'contract' between government and governed.
- Liberals consistently believe in 'limited government', with politicians restrained by a constitution.
- Liberals consistently reject any state where power is concentrated.

##### No

- The liberal state has not consistently upheld foundational equality: it was slow to adopt the principles of democracy, sexual equality and universal adult suffrage.
- The liberal state has not consistently upheld 'government by consent': it allows the wishes of a majority to be defied sometimes via assorted 'checks and balances'.
- The liberal state is not consistently minimal in scope: modern liberals advocate a major extension of state intervention in the name of 'positive liberty'.

**Evaluation check:** To what extent are liberals wary of the state?

## Conclusion: liberalism today

### Knowledge check

- 54 What is meant by 'affirmative action' or 'positive discrimination'?
- 55 How does the campaign for transgender rights relate to the liberal belief in individualism?

During the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, liberals had several reasons to be cheerful. The collapse of Soviet communism in 1989, the emergence of new capitalist states in eastern Europe and the phenomenon of 'globalisation' all strengthened the assumption that capitalism and liberal democracy were somehow 'normal' and irresistible.

Meanwhile, in established liberal democracies, such as the UK and the USA, liberal values seemed reinforced by new trends in politics and society. Parties such as New Labour embraced economic liberalism (as shown by its defence of privatisation); Conservative leaders such as David Cameron embraced social liberalism (as shown by his government's legalisation of same-sex marriage); and individualism was advanced further by the spread of mobile phones and personal computers, and the growing ease with which citizens could express themselves.

Yet there were also developments which seriously challenged liberal assumptions. On 11 September 2001, the atrocities witnessed in the USA marked a new and dramatic stage in Islamist terrorism – an uncompromising, quasi-theocratic phenomenon, and a startling challenge to basic liberal values like rational debate

and human rights. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Professor Francis Fukuyama had claimed that liberalism marked 'the end of history'. Yet, within a decade, it seemed more credible to argue that the new century would see what Professor Samuel Huntington called 'a clash of civilisations,' between western states upholding liberal norms and certain non-western states that favoured rule by dogmatic religious principles.

Post 9/11, liberal democracies were thus obliged to respond to the new and alarming threats posed by terrorism – for example, through increased state security, heightened state surveillance of suspected individuals and fresh state restrictions on immigration. Such responses seemed to further threaten individualism, while stoking illiberal sentiments such as xenophobia and suspicion of minority religions.

There were other reasons why liberalism faced fresh scrutiny in the twenty-first century. The financial crash of 2008, and the economic crises affecting Eurozone countries like Greece after 2013, revived the socialist critique of economic liberalism. The emergence of Jeremy Corbyn as the UK's Leader of the Opposition in 2015, and the popularity of US politicians such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, all indicated that 'consent' for capitalism was not so widespread.

On the other hand, concern for minority rights remains a crucial aspect of liberalism and, in recent years, has played a prominent part in political discussion. Following the shocking murder of George Floyd in 2020, the issue of justice and freedom for racial minorities resurfaced powerfully in the USA with the Black Lives Matter campaign – an issue which quickly spread to the UK. Likewise, the campaign for transgender rights, and debate concerning the reform of the Gender Recognition Act, attracted increased attention in UK politics and was a source of intense debate at the 2021 Labour Party conference.

Yet this may simply have created fresh problems for liberalism by exposing 'intersectional' clashes between different groups of 'oppressed' individuals. Louder support for transgender rights, for example, has led to criticism from some feminists (and vice versa), while campaigns for gay rights arguably 'harm' the sensibilities of those attached to certain minority-religion communities. It is still unclear if these 'post-modern' disputes can be resolved in a way that ensures tolerance for all.

In recent years, liberalism's critics have also linked modern liberal causes to a 'tyranny of the minority'. Among such critics, there has been a tendency to see 'political correctness' and 'cancel culture' as modern examples of liberalism's historic readiness to constrain illiberal opinion – exemplified by **Mill's**



Black Lives Matter march,  
January 2022

argument that votes should only be granted to the 'enlightened'. Yet, in an era of growing distrust towards mainstream politicians and authority figures generally, the liberal notion of 'enlightening' public opinion seems hard to sustain. Brexit and other manifestations of political 'populism' (such as the presidency of Donald Trump) clearly highlight the difficulty of ensuring a liberal consensus.

For liberals, the problem was compounded from early 2020 by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. In liberal democracies across the world, states responded with a huge extension of their powers and a corresponding reduction of basic individual liberties and, perhaps, natural rights – such as the right of people to leave their home and meet freely with others. Equally as striking, though, was the high level of public support for such restrictions. The conclusion many drew was that people were more inclined to give their 'consent' to a state that prioritised their safety and security than one that prioritised liberty and individualism. Climate change was another grave challenge to liberal assumptions: averting environmental catastrophe is likely to require co-ordinated, collective efforts that require significant restrictions on individual consumption, individual travel and individual choices generally.

Contemporary problems like terrorism, pandemics and climate change might prompt us to revisit the very roots of liberalism. **John Locke's** political philosophy presupposed a 'state of nature' marked by peace, reason, liberty and ample resources. However, in a world that appears scarred by war, scarcity and tension, **Locke's** analysis seems increasingly fanciful. Whether this diminishes the political and electoral appeal of liberalism remains to be seen.

## Summary: key themes and key thinkers

	Human nature	The state	Society	The economy
<b>John Locke</b>	Human beings are rational, guided by the pursuit of self-interest, but mindful of others' concerns.	The state must be representative, based on the consent of the governed.	Society predates the state: there were 'natural' societies with natural laws and natural rights.	State policy should respect the 'natural right' to private property and arbitrate effectively between individuals competing for trade and resources.
<b>Mary Wollstonecraft</b>	Rationalism defines both genders: intellectually, men and women are not very different.	The monarchical state should be replaced by a republic which enshrines women's rights.	Existing society 'infantilises' women and thus stifles female individualism.	A free-market economy would be energised by the enterprise of liberated women.



	Human nature	The state	Society	The economy
<b>John Stuart Mill</b>	Though rational, human nature is not fixed: it is for ever progressing to a higher level.	The state should proceed cautiously towards representative democracy, mindful of minority rights.	The best society is one where 'individuality' co-exists with tolerance and self-betterment.	Laissez-faire capitalism is vital to progress, individual enterprise and individual initiative.
<b>John Rawls</b>	Mankind is selfish yet empathetic, valuing both individual liberty and the plight of others.	The state should enable less fortunate individuals to advance, via public spending and public services.	The society most individuals would choose is one which allows unequal outcomes, but where the condition of the poorest improves.	Free-market capitalism should be tempered by the state's obligation to advance its poorest citizens.
<b>Thomas Hill Green</b>	Human beings are guided mainly by reason, but their reason is increasingly affected by social and economic circumstances.	The state should actively eliminate social and economic obstacles to individual liberty.	Society was fundamentally altered by industrialisation, which in turn requires a reappraisal of 'freedom'.	A free market economy is the most conducive to individualism, but it can threaten equality of opportunity.
<b>Betty Friedan</b>	Human nature has evolved in a way that discourages self-advancement among women.	The state should legislate to prevent continued discrimination against women.	Society remains chauvinistic towards women, though women are complicit in their repression.	Free-market capitalism could be an ally of female emancipation, if allied to legislation precluding sexual discrimination.

### Tensions within liberalism

- **Human nature:** all liberals believe that individuals are generally rational, intelligent, keen to advance their individual happiness and respectful of other individuals' wish to do likewise. However, early classical liberals such as **John Locke** believe that individuals are innately blessed with such qualities, while **John Stuart Mill** and modern liberals like **John Rawls** tend to think such qualities are *potential* features of human nature, to be developed by enlightened liberal authorities.
- **The state:** all liberals believe the state should function according to prearranged rules and procedures, leaving power fragmented and authority subject to the consent of the governed. However, liberals vary on the extent of state activity. Classical liberals such as **Mill**, in accordance with 'negative' liberty, believe state intervention should be minimal and individuals left unchecked (unless they hamper the freedom of others). Modern liberals such as **Betty Friedan**, in accordance with 'positive' liberty, believe state intervention should be more extensive, thus 'enabling' us to reach our potential. Liberals also disagree over how democratic the state should be. Modern liberals like **Rawls** are satisfied that representative democracy enhances constitutional government, whereas classical liberals like **Locke** saw universal suffrage as a threat to property rights.

- **Society:** all liberals believe society predates the state and that certain 'rights' are 'natural'. However, classical liberals like **Locke** see society as a collection of potentially autonomous individuals, seeking various forms of self-determination, while modern liberals such as **Rawls** think industrialised societies leave individuals less autonomous and therefore in need of greater state support.
- **The economy:** following **Locke's** assertion that property is a 'natural right', all liberals believe the economy should be based on private enterprise. However, while classical liberals support Adam Smith's laissez-faire capitalism (involving minimal state intervention), modern liberals like **Rawls** have more sympathy for Keynesian capitalism (involving extensive state 'management' of market forces).

### Further reading

#### Politics Review articles

- Egan, M. (2020) 'Liberalism and freedom', *Politics Review*, vol. 30, no. 1.  
 Hardy, J. (2019) 'Liberalism and natural rights', *Politics Review*, vol. 29, no. 1.  
 Tuck, D., and Egan, M. (2021) 'Do liberals believe in state intervention?', *Politics Review*, vol. 30, no. 4.

#### Books

- Faye, S. (2021) *The Transgender Issue: An Argument for Justice*, Allen Lane.  
 Freedman, M. (2015) *Liberalism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press.

## Exam-style questions

### AQA

#### Short-answer questions

- 1 Explain and analyse three reasons why liberalism takes a positive view of human nature. (9 marks)
- 2 Explain and analyse three ways in which liberalism promotes individual liberty. (9 marks)

#### Extract question

- 3 Read the extracts below and answer the question that follows.

#### Extract 1

The sole end for which mankind is warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection. The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over a member of a civilized society, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be 'better' for him to do so, or because it will make him happier, or because in the opinion of others it would be wise or even right.

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859)



## Extract 2

To my mind, there are three things above all that every citizen of this country needs as conditions of a happy and useful life ... He needs freedom from want and fear of want, freedom from idleness and fear of idleness from unemployment, freedom from war and fear of war.

William Beveridge, *Why I Am a Liberal* (1945)

Analyse, evaluate and compare the arguments being made in the above extracts as to the significance of liberty within liberalism. In your answer, you should refer to the thinkers you have studied. (25 marks)

## Edexcel

### Essay questions

- 4 To what extent do modern and classical liberals agree over the nature of the state? You must use appropriate thinkers you have studied to support your answer and consider differing views in a balanced way. (24 marks)
- 5 To what extent does liberalism have a consistent view of liberty? You must use appropriate thinkers you have studied to support your answer and consider differing views in a balanced way. (24 marks)
- 6 To what extent are liberalism and democracy in conflict? You must use appropriate thinkers you have studied to support your answer and consider differing views in a balanced way. (24 marks)