

Key Terms

Rationalism	Tolerance	Negative Freedom	Positive Freedom	Harm Principle
Laissez-Faire	Limited Government	Enabling State	Formal Equality	Keynesianism
Egotistical Ind	Developmental	Meritocracy	Minimal State	Meritocracy

Origins of Liberal Ideas

- Enlightenment (1720-1800) was key period scientific discovery/debate/scrutiny of world around us
- French and American revolutions of the 18th Century were definitive moments of liberal thoughts and values
- First political group called themselves liberals were the 'liberales' a group of officers forced king Ferdinand of Spain to implement constitution in 1819
- core values of enlightenment evolved to include the belief that all humans possess the capacity for rational thought. This means that the autonomous human is the centre of existence
- these beliefs mean that liberalism is a universalistic ideology with irrefutable principles

Classical liberalism

Origins

- the origins of classical liberalism can be traced back to the Reformation when Protestants challenged the authoritarian control of the Catholic church limiting free and individual will
- classical liberalism thrived in the age of the enlightenment when rationalistic ideas of Science and Philosophy challenged the traditional religious order

Core Concepts

Social Contract Theory

- Classical liberal **John Locke** argued that individuals consent through a **social contract** to be governed by the state
- the idea that individuals are consensually allowing the government to intervene in society for the benefit of individual rights protections

Foundational Equality

- Foundational equality is the concept that all individuals are born with natural rights which include freedom above the state
- Philosophers **John Stuart Mill** and **Mary Wollstonecraft** emphasised this expansion to minority groups such as women and religions.

Negative Freedom

- Deemed the highest form of Freedom (**freedom from constraint**)
- Similar to free will, being free of any restrictions, such as customs, state intervention and taxation was a **direct constraint on a human natural freedom**. And thus should be abolished
- Limited government best embodies this; minimal interference and only interference where needed (**Harm Principle**)

Laissez-faire Economics

- Further extension of negative freedom
- Wealth enhancement and freedom of enterprise and creativity is enhanced when there is no government preventing the individual from doing so
- **'Market forces'**

Rugged Individualism

- People succeed and fail on their own merit, and thus should act in accordance with their interests
- Destiny is entirely in their hands, if the government provides provisions, it only limits the true development of the human

Representative democracy

- Typically opposing popular democracy, which enforces a tyranny of the majority
- **Well educated and experienced citizens** would become representatives and act on the less educated and experienced citizens
- Representatives would aggregate demands from all societal parts and create a broad consensus, rather following the majority

Modern Liberalism

Origins

- Modern liberalism emerged in the 19th century and is now the modern contemporary form of liberalism arguing for an increased role for the state within both Society and economy
- For many **John Stuart Mills** later writings of that the state enhanced individual freedoms and therefore should have an increased role was a logical continuation of classical liberalism

- **John Rawls** argued for an enabling state that would intervene in society and the economy to ensure equality of opportunity

Core Concepts

Foundational Equality

- Revised position of societal **tolerance with formal equality**
- **Betty Freidan** argues the state must tackle gender disparities and create an equality of opportunity between the two sexes

Positive Freedom

- Negative freedom limits the state from helping those achieve their ideas
- Society is inherently divided, and people are not free from birth, being held down by structures such as class, location and education. Therefore a state must intervene to try and '**level the playing field**' to therefore allow people to realise their full potential and freedoms

Enabling State

- An expansion of positive freedom
- Enables the individual to act upon their freedoms

Keynesian Economics

- Keynes argued governments can prevent economic slumps by means of **regulation**
- In theory avoiding mass unemployment and poverty (thus enhances positive freedom)

Social Justice

- Social justice is fairness as it manifests in society. That includes fairness in healthcare, employment, housing, and more. In a socially-just society, human rights are respected and discrimination is not allowed to flourish.

Core Concepts of Liberalism

Individualism

- 'the individual is the key to all existence' - **Arthur Schopenhauer**
- Other ideologies consider the role of the individuals to be subservient to the collective interests of the state or society
- Product of enlightenment thought, a reaction and hostility to hierarchy/privilege/divine rights
- Distinct view of Human Nature because of the individuality of human agents that are different to all other species including free will, rational thought, self-awareness, personality and capabilities
- Any attempt to interfere/restrain these go against very nature of human existence

- According to **JS Mill** the main purpose of any civilised society is to facilitate individualism. The 'default setting' of any society is a focus upon individual freedom

Atomic Individualism

- Atomism is a belief that society is made up of self-sufficient individuals who are motivated by self-interest.
- constructed around a mass of autonomous, **rational individuals**

Ethical individualism

- organising society in such a way as to benefit these autonomous individuals, their needs must be prioritised over any collective body
- Extension of Atomic Individualism

Egotistical individualism (Classical liberalism)

- Humans are self seeking and sufficient which put themselves before others

Developmental individualism (Modern Liberalism)

- This suggests that true freedom is the ability to achieve goals and potential, and that this connects humans, so that if some people aren't free, none of us *TH Green*

Liberty/Freedom

- Freedom is inherently linked with the law '**where there is no law there is no liberty**' John Locke
- **Freedom is a natural right**
- Individuals to be governed by consent, rather absolute monarchies. If the state were to fail to enforce liberty and order, it is in the individuals rights to **withdraw consent** and seek a new one (OFFSPRING DEMOCRACY)
- Classical Liberals believe in negative freedom e.g. JS Mill. Freedom means the absence of restraint, ability to do whatever you wish as long as it does not interfere with the freedom of anyone else. (HARM principle)
- Modern Liberals believe in positive freedom e.g. TH Green. They believe to be truly free individuals must not only be free from restraint but also have the ability to achieve their goals and potential and freedom is linked to freedom and potential of others. Involves role of state.
Without provided provisions, some individuals will never be free

Liberals argue that the extension of indiv rights should only apply to rational and responsible human beings. As such an unborn foetus cannot be in possession of full rights-does not possess the right to live.

This however is still disputed in the Liberal community : [Libertarian perspectives on abortion](#)

Tolerance/Pluralism

- justified by liberals as it is rational, linked to indiv freedom and choice, and benefits society as well as the indiv. Today Libs support the idea of diversity in society and believe that there are Many ways to live the 'good life'. Tolerance also means defending freedom of speech, even if you do not like the views portrayed

Pluralism is a manifestation of tolerance

Pluralism is a theory of distribution of political power that holds that power is widely and evenly dispersed in society rather than concentrated in the hands of the elite or ruling class. Positive view of pressure groups, for example they promote discussion and strengthen democracy

Pluralism = tolerance of moral, cultural and political diversity and is essential for freedom, and only a democracy in which diverse groups are able to compete is a true liberal democracy (with the state as arbiter)

Everyone holds equal moral worth and therefore should be granted the same rights as others

Rationalism and Justice

- Rationalism is the belief that humans are rational creatures , capable of reason and logic

Optimistic view of Human Nature, based on assumption our behaviour is determined by rational interest rather than irrational emotion and prejudice. We are therefore governed by reason and should be entrusted with as much freedom as possible

- Liberals firmly believe that we should be allowed to express ourselves fully as guided by our own free will, lengthy tradition amongst liberal figures and pressure groups of championing the rights of minority groups
- Human happiness is derived from this rationalist perspective (utilitarianism)
- Jeremy Bentham idea of greatest happiness for the greatest number

John Locke 'Reason must be our last Judge and Guide in everything we do'

State

Minimal State

- Only enforce what is needed (Police, Firefighters, Military) to secure a safe society from threats
- Taxation primarily to fund these departments, as well as judiciaries to uphold rule of law
- Government of Consent (Locke) government would be subject to the individuals, in return they must obey its laws

- Should be organised on rational, rather traditional ideas (constitutional monarchy should overtake an absolute monarchy)

Enabling State

- State is to assist the individuals purpose and potential
- Taxation would fund much larger schemes than minimal, such as education, transport, healthcare, welfare which would all enhance the humans ability to act. Thus enhancing pure freedom
- Equality of opportunity
- Unemployed, elderly, ill health individuals all require extra support to equalise their freedoms to the level of a healthy and able man
- Keynesian economics to combat economic downturns (mass unemployment negates freedom as argued by Keynes)
- John Rawls argues increasing taxes on all to ensure proper opportunity equalities and social justice

Social Justice

- Human Rights Act (UK) and Bill of Rights (USA) an embodiment of social justice

Self explanatory

Human Nature

Classical Liberalism

Classical Liberals subscribe to a version of freedom called “negative freedom”, they define freedom as the absence of external constraints - individuals should be given as much freedom as possible

John Stuart Mill explained in his “Harm Principle” developed from Bentham’s concept of utilitarianism, which holds that the actions of individuals should only be limited to prevent harm to other individuals.

Locke explained his main ideas of natural rights as “life, liberty and estate” while Jefferson changed “estate” to “pursuit of happiness” as he believed that it wasn’t a god-given right but rather a man-made one.

Friedrich Hayek, a Neo-liberal who advocated for the rebirth of classical liberalism even stated that the right to property shouldn’t be absolute. He instead argued for more equality of opportunity to property.

Modern Liberalism

Modern Liberals on the other hand subscribe to what's known as positive freedom where individuals must realise their freedom and achieve autonomy.

However they didn't emphasise freedom itself but instead they believed that equality of opportunity should be even more emphasised (far more than what classical liberals first intended).

In his "Theory of Justice", John Rawls explains that "The Harm Principle" isn't enough when it comes to regulating freedom and he says that freedom should instead be tempered with the freedom of all (consistent with the whole of the population)

"Freedom only works when the largest set of people have access to freedom which is consistent across that set".

It is clear that both strands have different interpretations of the natural rights. They also disagree on what aspect of those natural rights should be the main point of focus.

Society and natural rights

- **Thomas Hobbe's Leviathan** argues human nature is so brutally selfish no society could possibly progress without being restrained by a strong state to intervene. The phrase nasty, brutish, and short is a quote from a text that characterised human life without a proper, legitimate government as horrible.
- **John Locke** cited an existence between natural society and natural laws and therefore **all natural rights (life, liberty, property, happiness) precedes the right of the state**. Life before the state was created pleasant and long unlike Hobbes 'nasty, brutish and short'
- **JS Mill**, main purpose of any civilised society is to facilitate individualism, the 'default' of any society with a focus on freedom.

This Liberal belief in 'natural' society where certain natural rights are enjoyed helps explain why Liberals place so much emphasis upon the individual

Rationalism

Optimism brings about progress, where all have intelligence to reason and to forge human happiness. Every individual can principally reason (**rationalism**). Humans' innate reason is within debate, discussion, peaceful argument, opinions and ideas. Progress

The essentials:

The logical starting-point towards understanding any ideology concerns its view of human nature. In straight-forward terms, liberals share an optimistic attitude towards human nature. This is based upon an assumption that our behaviour is determined by rational interest rather than irrational emotions and prejudice. We are therefore governed by reason and should be entrusted with as much freedom as possible.

The liberal belief that humans are rational creatures holds several implications. Firstly, it promotes the view that we are free to choose our own path in life regardless of what society dictates as the 'norm.' Liberals firmly believe that we should be allowed to express ourselves fully as guided by our own free will. There is a lengthy tradition amongst liberal figures and pressure groups of championing the rights of minority groups such as political dissidents and the LGBT community. Secondly, liberals instinctively welcome those fleeing from persecution and discrimination in their native homeland. Freedom of movement is a central tenant of liberalism, and the only logical conclusion amongst people who place reason above prejudice.

Another important implication derived from this rationalist perspective is the importance of human happiness. All liberals would concur with Aristotle's observation that *"happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence."* There are a number of practical illustrations of this liberal attitude. The right of all adults; regardless of their sexuality, to marry the person they love is a recent illustration of this line of argument. In addition, the liberal concept of utilitarianism seeks to maximise the level of human happiness. According to utilitarian philosophers like James Mill and Jeremy Bentham; society should be geared towards *"the greatest happiness for the greatest number."*

Extension material and application:

On the basis of their optimistic outlook on human nature, liberals seek to empower the individual provided our actions do not undermine the freedom of others. As one of the most prominent liberal thinkers of all time (John Stuart Mill) argued *"the liberty of the individual must be this far limited; he must not make himself a nuisance to other people."* It is on this liberal cornerstone that laws exist in order to prevent incitement to racial and religious hatred. Targeting minority groups on the basis of bigotry is particularly abhorrent to any true liberal.

In all countries and throughout the ages, liberals refute the notion that human behaviour is shaped by the irrational forces of superstition and religion. Instead, they claim that adults are fully capable of making decisions based upon their own reasoning. As a consequence, liberalism is on a collision course with religious fundamentalists of all faiths. Whereas religious fundamentalists believe that our actions are shaped by forces beyond our reasoning, liberals assert that human beings are rational creatures. Indeed, it is the ability to reason that frees us from the outdated traditions and customs of the past. Moreover, no group of people are any less rational than any other. Human rights should therefore apply on a universal basis regardless of gender, ethnicity, social background or sexuality. Consistent with this view, contemporary liberals argue in favour of women's rights within countries that have traditionally imposed suppression (as in Saudi Arabia which now allows women to register to vote and stand for election).

Economic Views

As property is a natural right, it is inevitable that liberalism should support an economy which prioritises private property at the heart of economic arrangements.

Ever since Adam Smith his market theory 'Wealth of Nations 1776' liberalism has been strongly associated with private enterprise and private ownership of the economy.

Adam Smith argues that if obstacles to free trade were swept away, the 'invisible hand' of market forces would guide traders toward success, resulting wealth would trickle down to everyone, and the 'wealth of nations' would be promoted globally. This clearly reflects the optimistic tone of liberalism's core values.

Modern liberals also agree to property rights, but also advocate higher taxation and state economic intervention in order to achieve POSITIVE LIBERTY as it allows marginalised individuals to enact on their wishes, thus enhancing their true freedom without seriously comprising the freedom of others. You COULD apply this to Utilitarianism. The best act for the most

State Views

Although liberals are optimistic about individual freedoms. **Modern liberals** believe in a state of nature, to protect people's rights being taken away. Believing that individual interests and rights may clash and therefore a state is required to mediate.

Classical Liberals believe in a state as a restraint, that all people are naturally born free, and it is their own natural will that must be able to control their path, not a state.

Types of Liberal States

- Constitutional
- Fragmented Government (Dispersal)
- Formal Equality; all individuals have the same legal and political rights in society. Places emphasis on the rule of law. Formal equality ensures people can petition parliament or the right to criticise state the state, exercising right of freedom of speech and publication

Liberals For and Against Democracy

For

All people have the right to reason thus the right to vote`

All people have universal rights

Against

- "The best argument against Democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter." - **Winston Churchill**
- Education
- 100% mutual agreement rather than dictatorship of the majority
- Democracy still displaced people on the wrong end of the stick

Pluralism

Why Is pluralism a key liberal principle

Tolerance

Tolerance is justified by liberals as linked to individual freedom, choice and benefit and the state which allows this to the greatest extent is the most pluralistic, tolerant and liberal state.

There are many other ways to live than a life you have been told to have or given.

Tolerance also means defending speech freedoms. Even if you disagree with what they are saying.

- Access points
- Choice
- No restrictions of political engagement
- Participation
- Pressure Groups
- Active Citizenship

Positive & Negative Liberties/Rights

Positive liberty: That true liberty is that man is able to act on his free will. If one wishes to do something, they should be able to do it.

Negative liberty: That true liberty is the concept that man is not beholden to outward forces restraining him. The antithesis of liberty is something forcing man to do an action; therefore, that action must be eradicated for liberty to exist.

Negative freedom therefore consists of laws to combat discrimination whereas positive freedom enables those on limited incomes to lead a more fulfilled and meaningful existence.

In later work on the concept of freedom, Isaiah Berlin (1969) argued that positive liberty enables the individual to take control of their life. Positive liberty can therefore be understood to mean the freedom to perform an action of some description. As such, positive liberty facilitates the creation of a welfare state. Negative liberty however reflects the absence of barriers and constraints. We thereby possess negative liberty to the extent that actions are available to us. Of the two, Berlin actually favoured negative freedom because it means we are the masters of our own destiny. Negative freedom upholds the notion of the unencumbered self, whereas despotism is made possible when the state decides what is in our best interests. A state that provides for our welfare needs from cradle to grave ultimately has the ability to take liberty away from us.

The distinction between negative and positive freedom was developed further by the liberal theorist T.H. Green. He fully recognised that laws alone cannot make people good, but they can at least enable individuals to make themselves good. T.H. Green thereby reflects a non-utopian view as to what

legislation can achieve (in contrast to utopian socialists such as Robert Owen). He also believed that our ego is constrained by a degree of altruism.

Economics

In the realm of economic policy, classical liberals such as the Austrian school of economists extol the virtues of laissez-faire economies. The role of the state must therefore be limited to that of a night-watchman (e.g. to ensure that legal contracts are upheld and the marketplace runs smoothly). In contrast, social liberals such as the founder of the modern welfare state William Beveridge (1942) believe that the most vulnerable within society require a degree of state assistance. Frankly, it is difficult to disagree with his assertion that “a starving man is not free.”

Paradox of Positive Liberty

Many liberals, including Berlin, have suggested that the positive concept of liberty carries with it a danger of authoritarianism. Consider the fate of a permanent and oppressed minority. Because the members of this minority participate in a democratic process characterised by majority rule, they might be said to be free on the grounds that they are members of a society exercising self-control over its own affairs. But they are oppressed, and so are surely unfree. Moreover, it is not necessary to see a society as democratic in order to see it as self-controlled; one might instead adopt an organic conception of society, according to which the collectivity is to be thought of as a living organism, and one might believe that this organism will only act rationally, will only be in control of itself, when its various parts are brought into line with some rational plan devised by its wise governors (who, to extend the metaphor, might be thought of as the organism's brain). In this case, even the majority might be oppressed in the name of liberty.

Such justifications of oppression in the name of liberty are no mere products of the liberal imagination, for there are notorious historical examples of their endorsement by authoritarian political leaders.

Social Contract

The social contract is a common term within political discourse which refers to an invisible contract between the people and the state.

Both parties to the contract should behave as if it was tangible and real. Thomas Paine once observed that the social contract “is the only mode in which governments have a right to arise, and the only principle on which they have a right to exist.”

The liberal position on the social contract derives almost entirely from the pioneering work of John Locke (1690). John Locke argued that individuals consent to be governed. This consent may be tacit; in that it is not formally expressed, but consent exists and is provided to the government. Locke also believed that individuals are shaped by their rational interest. For instance, they leave the state of nature (in

which no social contract exists) to protect their individual rights. Crucially, only the agents of the state are powerful enough to provide the required level of protection against that which threatens our liberty. By entering a social contract with the state, the individual is seeking to protect their liberty from the actions of those that pose a threat to it. Far from representing a loss of liberty, offering consent to the state strengthens the liberty of the individual.

As with any contract, there are rights and duties that both parties must abide by. To illustrate, the state has the right to punish those who break the law in some way. Equally, the state must limit itself to that which protects our liberties and freedom. In Locke's words "government has no other end than the preservation of property." If the state were to exceed this power, it would violate the social contract. Individuals would therefore be within their rights to withdraw their consent to be governed. This right is enshrined in the American Declaration of Independence.

The Lockean notion of the social contract remains one of the most enduring aspects of liberal thought. As with all liberal theorists, Locke believes that authority should arise from below rather than above and can only be based solely upon the consent of the governed. In other words, the role and legitimacy of the state must be based upon the agreement of the people. Locke was also the first to put forward the liberal view that law is an essential prerequisite of freedom itself with his maxim "where laws do not exist, man has no freedom."

The central themes of the social contract have been explored further by latter-day liberals such as Karl Popper. He argued that good government can only exist in an open society in which we are free to express our thoughts effectively and replace the government by peaceful means. He also claimed that restrictions upon freedom of speech tend to serve the vested interests of the powerful. Partly because of this, liberals strongly support dissidents who express opinions that are critical of the ruling regime. They also celebrate those who seek to impose change via peaceful measures.

In the contemporary era, the issue of consent remains as relevant as ever. The principle that consent should derive from the people holds a large degree of consensus (particularly in the West), although its application is hardly applied in a consistent manner. Where power is exercised without the consent of the people, the principle of gaining the consent of the people offers the hope of a more democratic way of life. In doing so, Lockean ideas are brought to life.

Modern Liberalism

Modern Liberalism in order to gain state consent, is based around a constitution. The government provides services and limits its own power.

However, liberal democracies do not exactly maximise democracy, many governments avoid referendums, and PR as they give 'Tyranny of the Majority'

Social Liberalism is linked with Modern Liberalism.

Betty Friedan argued consistent to liberal tradition with the 'Harm Principle'

T.H Green, L.T Hobhouse J.A Hobson all argued that humans were not inherently autonomous thus a state is needed to protect them ENABLING STATE

Harm Principle

John Stuart Mill, On Liberty. Mill wrote what is known as the 'harm principle' as an expression of the idea that the right to self-determination is not unlimited. An action which results in doing harm to another is not only wrong, but wrong enough that the state can intervene to prevent that harm from occurring.

Thinkers

John Locke (1632-1704)

Key Works

Two Treatises of Government (1689)

- The state is not the creation of any spiritual creator, or anyone that claims 'divine right' to rule (e.g Monarchies) rather a state of humankind, which represents all individuals
- Before the state existed humans lived in a state of nature, was subject to nature's laws and all hold 'natural rights'
- The state should not ascent 'natural rights' and violate the laws of nature
- Limited in its power and divided into separate agencies (seen in modern governments, separation of powers)
- Tolerance of alternative religious and political views

'Government has no other end, but the preservation of property'

'Where there is no law there is no liberty'

'Reason must be our last judge and guide in everything we do'

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97)

Key Works

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)

- Women are as capable at intellectual and rational thought as men
- If a nation is to progress the free exercise of individualism must be applied (men and women)
- All citizens should not face discrimination and equally be protected from the law
- Women were largely to blame (with men) for their subservient position as it was women who accepted the 'superiority' of the man

'I do not wish them [women] to have power over men, but power over themselves'

John Stuart Mill (1806-73)

Key Works

On Liberty (1859)

- Negative liberty under the harm principle
- 'Self regarding' and 'other regarding' freedoms and issues
- The whole of society would benefit from the individual being able to exercise individualism
- Opposed popular democracy where the interests of the few could crush the many, rather wanting representative democracy

'The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community against his will, is to prevent harm to others'

'The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we don't attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it'

John Rawls (1921-2002)

Key Works

A Theory of Justice (1971)

- Political and social rights in addition to formal equality
- If asked to choose what kind of society people prefer without knowing an advance they would stand in such a society where there is little inequality and equality of opportunity
- Inequality in a capitalist society could be justified as those who do well economically do not do so at the expense of others

'Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others'