

PEARSON EDEXCEL A-LEVEL POLITICS



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Essentials of
**POLITICAL
IDEAS**

SECOND EDITION



**KATHY SCHINDLER
ANDREW HEYWOOD**

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– **Benjamin De Jong**, Jewish Community Secondary School, London

'Another excellent publication from *Essentials*. The book's chapters on Feminism are particularly helpful to me in teaching Paper 2 as they break down a complex topic into easily digestible chunks. It looks at topics such as patriarchy from both the lens of general understanding, and from the specific feminist groups as per the exam specification. This really breaks down the unit for students and teachers alike. Another excellent feature is the tables of agreement and disagreement. These are core to the ideology unit, so having them so plainly written is extremely helpful.'

– **Lucy Ryall**, Poole High School, Dorset

'An earlier edition of this book ignited my passion for A-Level Politics due to its ability to make complex political concepts interesting and digestible. This revised version is a perfect progression as it is tailored perfectly for the Pearson specification, but with enough challenge and detail for anyone interested in ideologies to develop their understanding of the ideas which shape our world.'

– **Ciara McCombe**, Convent of Jesus and Mary Language College, London

ESSENTIALS OF POLITICAL IDEAS

**PEARSON EDEXCEL POLITICS
A-LEVEL**

Kathy Schindler and
Andrew Heywood

Second Edition

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Tour of the Book

Specification Checklist

A useful checklist of the points from the Edexcel specification that will be covered in the chapter.

Historical overview

Liberalism resulted from the breakdown of feudalism in Europe, and the growth, in its place, of a capitalist society. Liberalism reflected the aspirations of the rising middle classes, whose interests conflicted with the established power of absolute monarchy and the landed aristocracy. At the time, liberal ideas were radical as they challenged the absolute power of the monarchy. In place of absolutism, they advocated constitutional and representative government. Liberals criticized the privileges of the aristocracy and the unfairness of a feudal system in which social position was determined by an 'accident of birth'.

The nineteenth century was in many ways the liberal century. As industrialization spread throughout Western countries, liberal ideas triumphed. Liberals advocated an industrialized and market economic order 'free' from government interference, in which businesses would pursue profit and states encouraged to trade freely with one another.

The character of liberalism changed as the rising middle classes succeeded in establishing their economic and political dominance, and industrialization led liberals to question, and then to revise, the ideas of early liberalism. Whereas classical liberalism had been defined by the desire to minimize government interference in the lives of its citizens, later modern liberalism came to be associated with welfare provision and economic management.

Key Questions

- How did liberalism originate?
- What are the main principles that are central to liberalism?
- What are the key strands of liberalism?
- What are the areas of similarity and difference within liberalism?



Specification Checklist

1. Liberalism: core ideas and principles:

- Individualism
- Freedom (liberty)
- The state
- Rationalism
- Equality (justice)
- Liberal democracy

2. Differing views and tensions within liberalism:

- Classical liberalism
- Modern liberalism

3. Liberal key thinkers and their ideas:

- John Locke (1632–1704)
- Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97)
- John Stuart Mill (1806–73)
- John Rawls (1921–2002)
- Betty Friedan (1921–2006)

Key Questions

At the start of each chapter, there is a list of the key questions you will explore.

Tensions Within

Boxes that offer an overview of how different strands of the same ideology feel about important topics.

Tensions within conservatism over society

AGREEMENT

- ✓ Traditional and One Nation conservatism believe in an organic society to provide stability and security based on their view of human nature
- ✓ Traditional and One Nation conservatism argue that the delicate elements of an organic society should not be disturbed
- ✓ Traditional and One Nation conservatism acknowledge the importance of hierarchy and authority which reinforces organic society

DISAGREEMENT

- ✗ Traditional and One Nation conservatism have an organic view of society, whereas the New Right takes an atomistic view of society
- ✗ While traditional and One Nation conservatism support a hierarchic society, the New Right support meritocracy
- ✗ There are differences within the New Right over society. Neoliberalism believes in the cohesion of an organic society but neoliberalism believes in a society that allows free individuals to flourish

Exam Tips

Key advice on how to do well in specific aspects of your exam.

Specification Key Terms

A definition of the key terms named in the Pearson Edexcel specification. It is important to know what these are because they can be used in exam questions.

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Most conservatives, however, support tradition without needing to argue that it has divine origins. Burke, for example, described society as a 'partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead and those who are to be born'. Tradition reflects the accumulated wisdom of the past. The institutions and practices of the past have been 'tested by time' and should be preserved for the generations to come. To stand the test of time means that generations have found the practices or institutions to be relevant; they have survived through different time periods and circumstances and maintained their usefulness. Such a notion reflects an almost Darwinian belief that they have demonstrated their fitness to survive. Tradition also incorporates into it the idea that any changes to society should be cautious, slow and organic in nature. Conservatives in the UK, for instance, argue that the institution of monarchy should be preserved because it embodies historical wisdom and experience. In particular, the monarchy has provided the UK with a focus of national loyalty and respect 'above' party politics.

Tradition

Summary box

- Ideas, practices, customs and ways of life which have survived because they are considered to be beneficial.
- Tradition provides stability and continuity, because humans are drawn to what is familiar. They feel reassured.
- Accumulated wisdom of the past, ideas and institutions that have 'stood the test of time'.
- Tradition also creates social cohesion by connecting people to the past, providing them with a collective identity.

Human imperfection

This can be included in a discussion of the conservative view of human nature.

In many ways, conservatism is a 'philosophy of human imperfection' (O'Sullivan, *Conservatism*, 1976). Other ideologies assume that humans are naturally 'good' or that they can be made 'good' if their social circumstances are improved. In their most extreme form, they envisage the perfectibility of humankind in an ideal society. Conservatives dismiss these ideas as, at best, idealistic, and argue instead that humans are both imperfect and imperfectionable.

Human imperfection is understood in several ways:

- 1 In the first place, humans are thought to be **psychologically** limited and dependent creatures. In the view of conservatives, people fear isolation and instability. They are drawn to the safe and the familiar, and, above all, seek the security of knowing 'their place'. Such a portrait of human nature is very different from the liberal idea of self-reliant, enterprising individuals.
- 2 Humans' **intellectual** powers are also thought to be limited. Conservatives have traditionally believed that the world is simply too complicated for humans to fully grasp, as **Michael Oakeshott (1901–90)** (see page 57) put it, 'In political activity men sail a boundless and bottomless sea'. He was suggesting that the world was too complex to fully understand and that this was compounded by human imperfection, as people do not have the ability to make sense of the complex, modern world. He argued that other ideologies tend to simplify problems and promote solutions using 'hotword' ideas which he suggested leads to distortion and simplification.
- 3 Whereas other political philosophies trace the origins of immoral or criminal behaviour to society, conservatives believe it is rooted in humans. Humans are thought to be **morally** imperfect. Conservatives hold a pessimistic, Hobbesian, view of human nature. Humankind is innately selfish and greedy, anything but perfectible, as **Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)** put it, the desire for 'power after power' is the primary human urge. Some conservatives explain this by reference to the Old Testament doctrine of 'original sin'. Crime is therefore not a product of inequality or social disadvantage, as other ideologies believe; rather, it is a consequence of 'immoral' human instincts and appetites.

Exam Tip: As the Right and Left have different views on tradition, you should be able to explain how conservatives and other right-wing thinkers see the value of tradition and how liberals and other left-wing thinkers see the value of tradition.

Spec key term
Human imperfection: The belief that humans are 'flawed' in a number of ways which makes them incapable of making good decisions for themselves.

Definition
Original sin: The sin of Adam and Eve, who disobeyed God as they were tempted to eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden.

Summary Boxes

Bullet-pointed reminders of key concepts to allow you to refresh and consolidate your understanding as you read.

Definitions

A definition of other political terms that are essential to a good understanding of political ideas.

Key Thinker Profiles

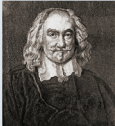
Detailed coverage of the key thinkers you are required to learn for your exam.

Conservatism 86

3. Conservatism key thinkers

Key thinkers are an important part of understanding each ideology. The exam board has specified five key thinkers per ideology and TWE must be included in an answer to create a top answer since the Exam Focus chapter (Chapter 8) for one more discussion of key thinkers. Although key thinkers (and other thinkers) have been discussed throughout the chapter, here we look at each one in detail.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)



An English political philosopher, Hobbes, in his classic work, *Leviathan* (1651), used social contract theory to defend absolute government as the only alternative to chaos and disorder.

Order
For Hobbes, social order demands a decisive and coercive rule for the state. There could be state government or protection ... if every individual remained free to sleep or to starve, the first opportunity to kill anyone comes! Unlike Locke, Hobbes' state of nature was a state of war, which he believed was the natural and purest of unconditional human freedom.

He believed that peace should be the aim of any society. Without peace, he observed, humans live in a 'perpetual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.' Hence an authoritarian state was needed to prevent the collapse of social order.

According to Hobbes, freedom without order and authority would have disastrous consequences for society. His one could be in a state, as the sovereign council would be to do whatever was necessary to ensure survival, there would be a war 'not only to war as to of every man against every man'. This could only be avoided if humans surrendered to a sovereign authority over them to ensure order.

Social contract
While Hobbes is a social contract theorist, he views it differently from liberal social contract theorists like Locke or Rousseau. He argued that the relationship between state and subject was contractual, but once they decided to accept the sovereign power, they were giving that consent to be ruled in an authoritarian fashion. In Hobbes' social contract, the people traded liberty for safety.

People were bound by the social contract so long as the sovereign could protect their subjects. However, if the sovereign failed and the people felt their condition was no worse than the free-for-all state of nature, they had the right to disobey the sovereign authority. At this point, people can depose the sovereign of their power.

Human nature
Hobbes's widely regarded to have a pessimistic view of human nature. He argued that humans were not capable of restraint and even the most ambitious would turn to violence to protect themselves and their belongings. In other words, all humans are naturally competitive and aggressive. They will compete violently for the necessities of life and to gain the reputation which others fear to challenge them. They are also driven by glory in that animals to establish the moral ground that their capacity for reason is fragile. As a result, they think more highly of themselves than others and place too much emphasis on their own short-term interests and aims.

As a result, Hobbes believed that war comes more naturally to humans than order. According to Hobbes, humans are in 'a perpetual and restless desire for power after power that ceases only in death'. To live in order requires humans to accept that natural instincts and allow a sovereign power to rule over them. The best people can hope for is a peaceful life under a sovereign authority to guarantee order and security.

Exam Focus Chapter

A whole chapter devoted to exam skills, with detailed instructions on how to structure your essays and meet key A-Level requirements.

STUDENT EXTRACT – 'To what extent is socialism more divided than united?' – looking at thinker-driven vs strand-driven answers

✘ **Marx and Engels** believe that society is dominated by ideas of the ruling class, known as bourgeois hegemony. These ideas work to divide the workers, therefore they need to be eradicated to create a classless society. On the other hand, more modern thinkers such as **Crosland**, believe in not eradicating class, but attempting to minimize the divide and close the gap between rich and poor.

✔ **Revolutionary socialists** believe that class control of society is a consequence of who owns the means of production. This control is exercised by the dominant class over the working class. **Marx and Engels** believe that society is dominated by ideas of the ruling class, this is known as bourgeois hegemony. These ideas work to divide the proletariat, therefore they need to be eradicated to create a classless society. On the other hand, **social democrats**, like **Crosland**, believe in not eradicating class, but attempting to minimize the divide and close the gap between rich and poor.

Chapter Summary

A bullet-pointed list of what was covered in the chapter, reminding you of what you have read.

Chapter Summary

- Conservatism is primarily an ideology which is concerned with conserving and protecting society.
- The three strands are traditional conservatives, One Nation conservatives and the New Right.
- The New Right is a marriage of two seemingly inconsistent strands – neoliberalism and neoconservatism.
- The New Right fundamentally reject almost all of the values of traditional and One Nation conservatism.

Exam Style Questions

1. To what extent do conservatives agree over the state?
2. To what extent do conservatives agree over human nature?
3. To what extent do conservatives disagree over the economy?
4. To what extent is there agreement within liberals over the economy?
5. To what extent is conservatism a coherent ideology?
6. To what extent are conservatives committed to tradition?
7. To what extent do conservatives support paternalism?

Further Resources

Adams, I. *Political Ideology Today* (2001), Chapter 3, 'Conservatism and the Right' is a straightforward read for A-Level students which explores the prevalence of conservative ideas.

Edwards, A. and Townshend, J. (2002). *Interpreting Modern Philosophy from Machiavelli to Marx*. Chapter 2, 'Hobbes', and Chapter 6, 'Burke', are useful for students looking for a deeper insight into these two key thinkers.

Leach, R. *Political Ideology in Britain* (2015), Chapter 3, 'Conservatism' is an excellent chapter which goes through the development of conservative ideas and values.

Fawcett, E. *Conservatism: The Right for a Tradition* (2020). A comprehensive history of conservative thought from the nineteenth century to the present.

Kelly, P. et al. *The Politics Book* (2013). A clearly written, concise book which covers many of the thinkers discussed in this chapter.

Müller, J., ed. *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought* from David Hume to the Present (1997). The best general reader of traditional conservative political writings.

O'Sullivan, N. (1976) *Conservatism*. A very readable book which explores the history and ideas of conservatism.

Scruton, R. *Conservatism: An Invitation to the Great Tradition* (2018). An erudite exploration of the development of conservative thought and an even-handed defence of traditional conservatism in the modern political discourse.

Sodgewick, M. *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy* (2019). A timely anthology exploring the intellectual foundations of far-right and alt-right conservative ideology that has gained increasing prominence in twenty-first century politics.

Vicent, R. *Modern Political Ideologies* (1995), Chapter 3, 'Conservatism', can be used to stretch and extend a student's knowledge of the content covered in this chapter.

Visit our companion website at <https://bloomsburypub/essentials-of-political-ideas-2e> for more worked examples.

Exam Style Questions

These questions are in the same style as the ones you will respond to on your exams. You can use them to practise your question interpretation and planning skills, as well as to practise drafting full answers.

Worked Examples

This takes all the knowledge from the chapter and shows how to use them to plan exam questions.

Tensions within socialism over the role of the state

Worked example

Paragraph One – Agreement within socialism

- ✔ Evolutionary socialists like social democrats and the Third Way agree that the democratic, parliamentary process via the state, and not revolution, is the best way to help improve the conditions for the most vulnerable in society (**Webb**).
- ✔ Evolutionary socialists agree that a welfare state is a key tool in helping to create a fairer and more just society (**Crosland**).
- ✔ Both social democrats and the Third Way agree that the right kind of state can drive change and play a key role in ensuring that capitalism works in the interests of the most vulnerable.

Paragraph Two – Disagreement within socialism

- Social democrats and third-way socialists disagree on the extent of the role of the state.
- Social democrats (**Crosland**) support the nationalization of the 'commanding heights', whereas the Third Way accepted the privatization agenda of neoliberalism (**Giddens**).
- Social democrats support increased taxation for the rich and a 'cradle to grave', welfare system, whereas the Third Way does not seek punitive tax bands and prefers a welfare system that encourages work.

Paragraph Three – Disagreement within socialism

- ✔ Revolutionary socialists disagree with both social democrats and third-way socialists over the state, arguing that in a truly communist society, the state will 'wither away'.
- ✔ Revolutionary socialists (**Marx and Engels**) argue that the state is not neutral and is part of the superstructure, controlled by the economic base, rejecting Webb's 'inevitability of gradualness'.
- ✔ Revolutionary socialists reject the idea that socialism can be achieved via the state in a top-down manner arguing that the working class must be involved in the process of creating a socialist society (**Luxemburg**).

Further Resources

A list of books, articles, websites and films that will help you to explore further.

Digital Resources

Accompanying this book is a suite of supportive online resources to help you get the most out of your learning.

Go online to the companion website at <https://bloomsbury.pub/essentials-of-political-ideas-2e> to access further learning materials to support each chapter.

The screenshot shows the Bloomsbury Online Resources page for the book 'Essentials of Political Ideas 2nd Edition' by Kathy Schindler and Andrew Heywood. The page has a purple header with the book title and authors. Below the header, there is a navigation menu with links for Home, Instructor Resources, and Student Resources. A central text block describes the book as a refreshed and restructured text for the new Edexcel Politics A-Level specification, highlighting its focus on core and non-core political ideas. To the right of the text is a small image of the book cover. At the bottom left, there is the Bloomsbury Online Resources logo and the copyright notice '© Bloomsbury Publishing Plc 2024'. At the bottom right, there is a blue button labeled 'BUY THE BOOK'.

Bonus worked examples – Access a range of additional essay plans to support your understanding of how to apply your knowledge to exam questions.

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Revision planner – Explore these tips from the authors on how to plan and organize your revision effectively.

Flashcards of key terminology – Check your knowledge and understanding of specification terms and other important political concepts.

Further sample student answers – Read examples of exam answers written by students. Guided author annotations will help you to pinpoint exactly what examiners are looking for.

How to Use This Book

Welcome to the latest edition of *Essentials of Political Ideas*, which has been fully revised and updated to cover every aspect of the 2017 Pearson Edexcel Specification. Between the two of us, we have decades of experience in teaching politics and extensive knowledge of the Pearson Edexcel specification. We wanted to outline for you the changes we have made to this edition of the book and why we think it's in a good position to help you do well in this subject.

All the chapters in the book relate directly to a part of the Pearson Edexcel specification for A-Level Politics. You will see in the Tour of the Book (pages xvi-xvii) that we have listed the relevant parts of the specification at the beginning of each chapter. This allows you to see clearly how the content of each chapter relates to the specification. In addition, the page design is also organized to help you identify content and features that are related to the specification, the exam and the skills needed. For example, you will notice that the specification key terms, the tips and the specification checklists are all presented in the same colour (light green) throughout the book. We have also gone beyond the content traditionally found in textbooks to help you understand the debates that will form the basis of the essay questions you will be set, and to help you understand how to bring the content together to answer essay questions.

A unique and exciting aspect of the book is that it offers an entire chapter to help you understand the skills needed to write good answers – answers that address the three Assessment Objectives on which you will be assessed. The Exam Focus chapter at the end of the book is packed full of helpful advice on how to write essays, use comparative language, develop your synoptic skills and ensure you're fully prepared for the A-Level Politics exams.

A final thing to note is that throughout the book you will find links to our companion website. You will find it packed with additional debates as well as downloadable templates and some useful revision tips. Most importantly, we will be regularly adding to the website and plan to provide further examples of annotated essay answers.

We really hope you find this book helpful. We have put all our experience and expertise together to make it the ideal guide for all students of A-Level Politics.

Andrew Heywood

Katny Schiller

Acknowledgements

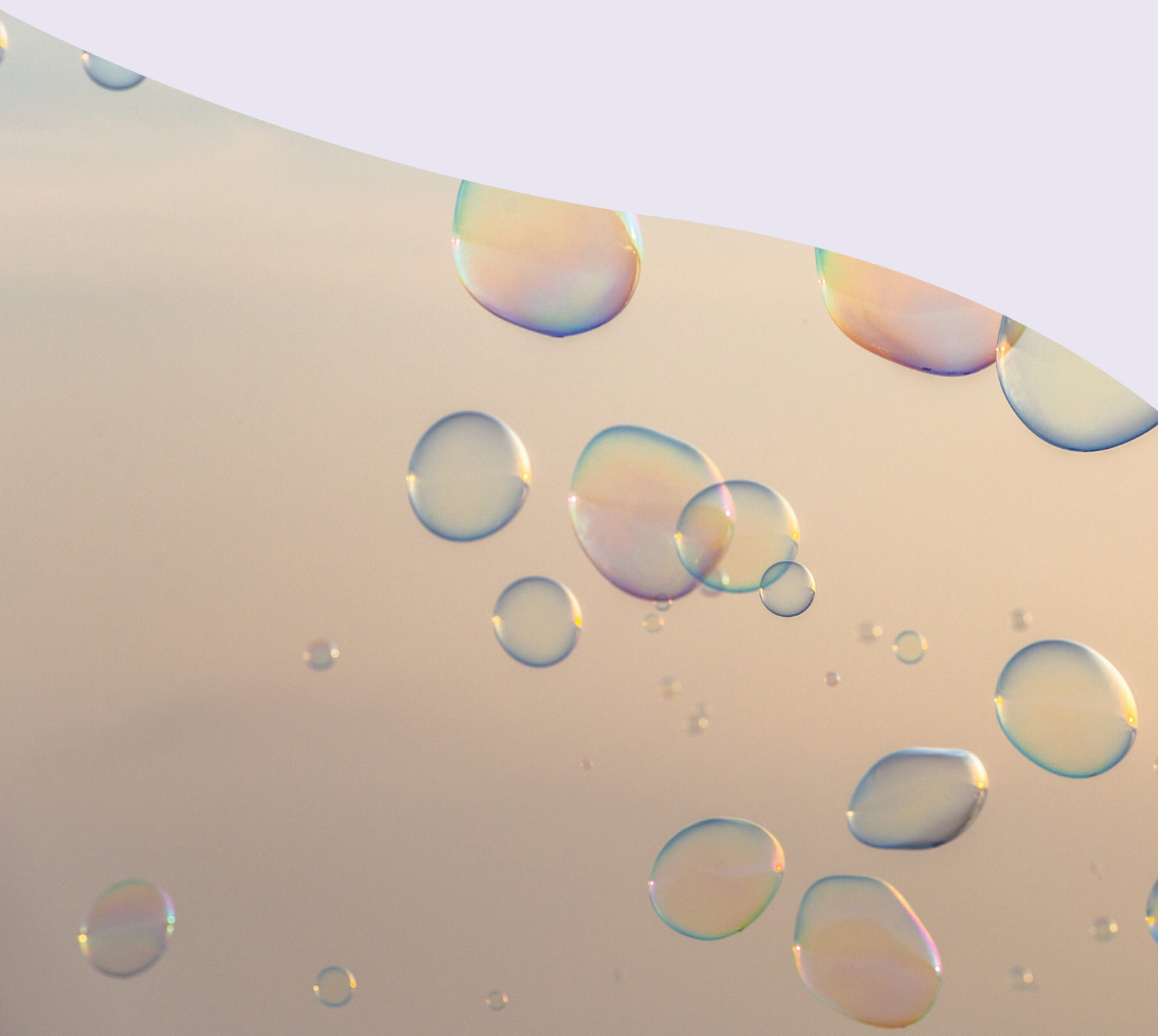
I would like to thank all those at Bloomsbury who we have worked with to make this new edition a reality.

I have been using Andy Heywood's Ideologies books since I first started teaching over thirty years ago, and every edition has been even better than the last. It has been an absolute honour to have worked on this edition to adapt his brilliant content to the demands of the new specification. I hope I have done it justice.

Of course I couldn't do the work I do without the support of my husband, Danny, who is always the most proud and the most excited about everything I do – thank you.



LIBERALISM



Historical overview

Liberalism resulted from the breakdown of **feudalism** in Europe, and the growth, in its place, of a capitalist society. Liberalism reflected the aspirations of the rising middle classes, whose interests conflicted with the established power of absolute monarchs and the landed aristocracy. At the time, liberal ideas were radical as they challenged the absolute power of the monarchy. In place of **absolutism**, they advocated constitutional and representative government. Liberals criticized the privileges of the aristocracy and the unfairness of a feudal system in which social position was determined by an 'accident of birth'.

The nineteenth century was in many ways the liberal century. As industrialization spread throughout Western countries, liberal ideas triumphed. Liberals advocated an industrialized and market economic order 'free' from government interference, in which businesses would pursue profit and states encouraged to trade freely with one another.

The character of liberalism changed as the rising middle classes succeeded in establishing their economic and political dominance, and industrialization led liberals to question, and then to revise, the ideas of early liberalism. Whereas classical liberalism had been defined by the desire to minimize government interference in the lives of its citizens, later modern liberalism came to be associated with welfare provision and economic management.

Key Questions

- » How did liberalism originate?
- » What are the main principles that are central to liberalism?
- » What are the key strands of liberalism?
- » What are the areas of similarity and difference within liberalism?



Specification Checklist

1. Liberalism: core ideas and principles:

- » Individualism
- » Freedom (liberty)
- » The state
- » Rationalism
- » Equality (justice)
- » Liberal democracy

2. Differing views and tensions within liberalism:

- » Classical liberalism
- » Modern liberalism

3. Liberal key thinkers and their ideas:

- » John Locke (1632–1704)
- » Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97)
- » John Stuart Mill (1806–73)
- » John Rawls (1921–2002)
- » Betty Friedan (1921–2006)

Definition

Feudalism: A system of agrarian-based production that is characterized by fixed social hierarchies and a rigid pattern of obligations.

Absolutism: A form of government in which political power is concentrated in the hands of a single individual or small group, in particular, an absolute monarchy.

Introduction to liberalism and its strands

The central theme of liberal ideology is a commitment to the individual and the desire to construct a society in which people can be free. Liberals believe that humans are first and foremost rational individuals (see page 8). This implies that individuals should enjoy as much freedom as possible, as long as it is consistently applied to all. However, although individuals are entitled to equal legal and political rights, they should be rewarded in line with their talents and their willingness to work. Liberal societies are organized around the twin principles of constitutionalism and consent, designed to protect citizens from the danger of government tyranny. Nevertheless, there are significant differences between classical liberalism and modern liberalism.

Classical liberalism

Classical liberalism is the earliest liberal tradition whose ideas developed during the transition from feudalism to capitalism and reached their high point during the early industrialization of the nineteenth century. Classical liberalism is characterized by a belief in a 'minimal' state, whose function is limited to the maintenance of order and personal security. This is associated with their support for egoistical individualism and negative freedom (see page 14) based on the idea that people need to be left alone to maximize their freedom. For classical liberals individualism was seen as the best advancement for society as a whole.

Modern liberalism

Modern liberal ideas relate to the further development of industrialization and capitalism. Industrialization had brought about a massive expansion of wealth for some, but was also accompanied by the spread of slums, poverty, ignorance and disease. In these changing circumstances, liberals found it more difficult to maintain the belief that capitalism had brought prosperity and liberty for all. Consequently, many came to revise the early liberal view that the unrestrained pursuit of self-interest produced a free society. As a result, modern liberals rethought their attitude towards the state, freedom and individualism. Modern liberals were therefore prepared to advocate the development of an interventionist or enabling state.

1. Liberalism: core ideas and principles

Individualism

This can be included in a discussion of the liberal view of society, human nature and the economy.

In the modern world, the concept of the individual is so familiar that it may seem difficult to articulate. As feudal societies moved towards a capitalist one, people, perhaps for the first time, were encouraged to think for themselves, and to think of themselves in personal terms. As a result, society was increasingly understood from the viewpoint of the individual.

A belief in the primacy of the individual is the characteristic theme of liberalism, and has influenced it in different ways. Individualism is the belief in the supreme importance of the individual over any social group or collective body and suggests that the individual is central to any political theory. Individuals are private, separate and unique entities who have an identity distinct to others which must be respected. For liberals, society is established by individuals for the fulfilment of their own ends, not the other way round.

Individualism also implies that society should be constructed to benefit the individual, giving moral priority to individual rights, needs or interests. This is best summed up by liberal thinker **John Stuart Mill (1806–73)** when he suggested that '*Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.*' For liberals, protecting the individual and the achievement of individual happiness are the

supreme goals. Individuals were thought to possess personal and distinctive qualities; each was of special value. German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) best expressed this when discussing the dignity and equal worth of human beings in his conception of individuals as '*ends in themselves*' and not merely as means for the achievement of others.

Liberalism's commitment to the individual is inextricably linked to its belief in the rational capacities of the individual. It sees the individual as a rational human being responsible for their own behaviour, capable of making decisions for themselves. Moreover, each individual is thought to know their own best interests. This cannot be decided on their behalf by some paternal authority, such as the state. Equally, no one else can judge the quality of an individual's happiness. If each individual is the sole judge of what is in their own interest and gives them pleasure, then the individual alone can determine what is morally right for them. In other words, the individual should be at the heart of decisions about their economic, political and social life.

Individualism

Summary box

- Liberalism believes in the power and capacity of individuals to transform their own lives.
- It places the individual at the centre of decision making.
- The individual has higher claims than the group.
- It is often understood in the sense of personal autonomy.

Freedom (liberty)

This can be included in a discussion of the liberal view of society, human nature and the economy.

A belief in the supreme importance of the individual leads naturally to a commitment to individual freedom. Freedom can be defined as the ability to think or act as one wishes. Individual liberty (liberty and freedom being interchangeable) is for liberals the supreme political value and, in many ways, the unifying principle within liberalism. For early liberals, liberty was a **natural right**, an essential requirement for leading a truly human existence. It also gave individuals the opportunity to pursue their own interests by exercising choice: the choice of where to live, for whom to work, what to buy and so on.

John Locke (1632–1704), an early liberal thinker, focused on freedom under the law and economic freedom, seeing private property as the embodiment of individual liberty, i.e. the individual's right to own property and sell their labour. **Mill** expanded on this concept of freedom by introducing more human elements. For **Mill**, freedom wasn't just about individuals' economic rights over their property, but also about freedom of speech, thought and religion. It meant being able to develop as an autonomous individuals through education.

Mill's ideas have been described as the 'heart of liberalism'. This is because he provided a 'bridge' between classical and modern liberalism as his ideas look back to the early nineteenth century and forward to the twentieth century. The ideas developed in *On Liberty* (1859) best show **Mill's** contribution to liberal thought. This work contains some of the boldest statements in favour of individual liberty and negative freedom which **Mill** believed to be an important condition for liberty, but not in itself a sufficient one for all. He thought that liberty was a positive and constructive force. It gave individuals the ability to take control of their own lives, to gain autonomy or achieve self-realization.

Mill also believed passionately in **individuality**. The value of liberty is that it enables individuals to develop, to gain talents, skills and knowledge and to refine themselves. For **Mill**, there were 'higher' and 'lower' pleasures. **Mill** was concerned with promoting those higher pleasures that develop an individual's intellectual, moral or artistic feelings. He was not concerned with 'lower' pleasure-seeking, but with personal self-development. As such, he laid the foundations for developmental individualism that placed emphasis on human flourishing rather than the crude satisfaction of interests.

Definition

Natural rights: (God-given) rights that are fundamental to human beings and are therefore inalienable (they cannot be taken away).

Individuality: Self-fulfilment achieved through the realization of an individual's distinctive or unique identity or qualities; what distinguishes one person from all others.

Freedom (liberty)

Summary box

- The ability to think or act as one wishes.
- Closely linked to individualism.
- Liberals believe that the individual should be as free as possible.
- But that it must be constrained to some extent.
- Society must be based on individual freedom for individuals to flourish.

The state

This can be included in a discussion of the liberal view of the state, society and the economy.

Support for a state is a key feature of liberalism. However, although liberals support the existence of a state, they're deeply concerned about it too. In the words of Thomas Paine, they see the state as a '*necessary evil*'; 'necessary' to create an ordered society where freedom can flourish, but 'evil' in its potential to undermine individual liberty.

Liberal thinking about the state is underpinned by the assumption that the liberty of one person is always in danger of becoming the ability to abuse another. Each person can be said to be both a threat to, and under threat from, every other member of society. Our liberty therefore requires that other members of society are restrained from encroaching on our freedom, and in turn, their liberty requires that they are safeguarded from us. This protection is provided by a sovereign state, capable of restraining all individuals and groups within society.

This is broadly what is known as **social contract theory** which was developed by theorists like **Locke**. He constructed a picture of what life had been like before government was formed, in what was called a '**state of nature**'. Locke described it as a state of perfect freedom, a state of equality (foundational equality) and bound by a law of nature. It would '*be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence ... the state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges everyone*'. **Locke** recognized, however, that there were problems with life in the state of nature. When natural laws were violated, there were no police, prosecutors or judges, the victims must enforce the law themselves. **Locke** suggested that people would realize that a state of nature is unsatisfactory and agree to transfer these rights to a government. **Locke** argued that it was reasonable for a community to surrender some of its liberty in favour of a government, which is better able to protect those rights than any one person could alone. This is the theory of the social contract; legitimate government is established by the explicit consent of those governed.

According to **Locke**, citizens do not have an obligation to obey all laws, especially if they come from an arbitrary or unlimited government. Government is established in order to protect natural rights. When these are protected by the state, citizens should respect government and obey the law. However, if government violates the rights of its citizens, they in turn have the right of rebellion.

The social contract argument embodies some important liberal attitudes towards the state:

- » First, it emphasizes that political authority comes 'from below', i.e. the consent of the people.
- » It is created by citizens themselves, not by some higher unknown force.
- » It exists to serve the needs and interests of the people.
- » The individual is more important than society.
- » Roles and people are interchangeable, i.e. individuals should be able to rise and fall according to merit.
- » Society has no fixed social structures.

The state embodies the interests of all its citizens and acts as a neutral referee when individuals come into conflict with one another. This is known as **mechanistic theory** of the state.

Spec key term

Social contract theory: The idea that the state is set up with agreement from the people to respect its laws which serve to protect them.

Definition

State of nature: A society characterized by unrestrained freedom and the absence of established authority.

Spec key term

Mechanistic theory: The idea that the state was created by the people to serve them and act in their interests.

For **Locke** the contract between state and citizen is a limited one: to protect a set of defined natural rights. As a result, **Locke** believed in limited government. The legitimate role of government is limited to the protection of '*life, liberty and property*'. Therefore, government should not extend beyond its three 'minimal' functions:

- » Maintaining public order and protecting property
- » Providing defence against external attack
- » Ensuring that contracts are enforced

Other issues and responsibilities are the concern of private individuals. Thus, although liberals are convinced of the need for government and state, they are also acutely aware of the dangers that government embodies. In their view, all governments are potential tyrannies against the individual.

The state

Summary box

- All liberals believe that the state is necessary, although it has potential for evil.
- They believe it can serve a useful role in society.
- This is based on social contract theory.
- Also useful here is the harm principle.

Role of the state in the economy

This can be included in a discussion of the liberal view of the economy, the state and society.

As the feudal economic system was replaced by capitalism, liberals recognized a connection between their ideology and capitalism. As a consequence, liberals have largely been supportive of the capitalist system, recognizing the role it could play in upholding individual liberty and supporting meritocracy and also because of the wealth creating ability of a capitalist economic model.

Locke famously described individual's fundamental rights as, '*life, liberty and property*' highlighting the importance of ownership as fundamental to human existence. For **Locke**, the right to private property is key. He argues that all individuals' labour power belongs to them. Individuals can use their labour power to create goods (property) which belong to them. However, Locke makes four key stipulations:

1. Individuals can't take something if it involves harming someone else.
2. Individuals can't take possession of more than they can use.
3. Individuals must leave '*enough and as good*' for others.
4. Individuals can only acquire property by their own labour.

All liberals recognize the capitalist system as the clearest embodiment of individualism. For liberals, the free market encourages individuals to make rational choices about how they work, what they buy, sell, save or spend. The marketplace therefore upholds the key principle of free choice. They also accepted that capitalism would result in some inequality, which they argued would play an important role in incentivizing individuals. As Milton and Rose Friedman argued in *Free to Choose* (1979), '*the essential part of economic freedom is freedom to use the resources we possess in accordance with our own values – freedom to enter any occupation, engage in any business enterprise, buy from and sell to anyone else, so long as we do so on a strictly voluntary basis*'. The role of the state in these affairs was simply to ensure property was secure and contracts were honoured to allow free trade and market competition to flourish.

So, liberals broadly agree that the economy should be based on private property and private enterprise. This leads all liberals to support the economic system of capitalism that puts private property at the heart of all economic arrangements.

However, liberalism encompasses two contrasting economic traditions – classical liberals have viewed the market economy as a vast network of commercial relationships, in which both consumers

and producers indicate their wishes through the price mechanism. Modern liberals, on the other hand, reject the idea of a self-regulating market economy, arguing instead that the economy should be regulated, or 'managed', by government.

Definition

Reason: Using the power of the mind to think, understand and form judgements logically.

Paternalism: Power exerted from above, which governs in the interests of the people.

The Enlightenment: The Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason, was a philosophical movement in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. At its core was a belief in the use and celebration of reason, the power by which humans understand the universe and improve their own condition. The goals of rational humanity were considered to be knowledge, freedom, and happiness.

The economy

Summary box

- All liberals support private property and capitalism.
- All liberals believe that the state plays a useful role in the economy.
- They believe the economy should enhance individualism and freedom.

Rationalism

This can be included in a discussion of the liberal view of human nature.

Rationalism is the idea of basing one's opinions and actions on **reason** and knowledge rather than on religious, emotional or superstitious notions. It is the belief that knowledge flows from reason rather than experience, and places heavy emphasis on the capacity of human beings to understand and explain their world, and to find solutions to problems.

Liberals are firmly of the belief that humans are guided by reason, capable of knowing their own mind and making decisions in their own best interests. In other words, they have the capacity to weigh things up and recognize the costs and benefits of one course of action over another. This is why liberals believe individuals are capable of benefiting from freedom. Further, liberals believe that individuals are capable of personal self-development and of bringing about wider social and political change. A faith in reason, moreover, leads liberals to believe that conflict can generally be resolved by debate, discussion and argument, greatly reducing the need for force and bloodshed.

For **Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97)**, reason was at the heart of her philosophy for the equal treatment of men and women. She criticized male writers who considered '**females rather as women than human creatures**' and argued that both men and women should be treated equally, as they were both rational human beings. The rights of 'man' should therefore apply to both genders.

This commitment to rationalism shows how liberalism is very much part of the Enlightenment project. The central theme of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the desire to release humans from their reliance on superstition, prejudice and ignorance. Before the Enlightenment, assumptions about society suggested that humans couldn't and shouldn't think for themselves and that instead they should rely on the knowledge and wisdom of those in positions of authority to tell them what to do, an outlook known as **paternalism**. **The Enlightenment** challenged this approach, and centred instead on the idea that reason is the primary source of authority and legitimacy. It advocated ideas like liberty, progress, tolerance and constitutional government and encouraged the idea that every human is a rational individual who is the best judge of their own interests and who exercises free will.

Rationalism

Summary box

- At the core of rationalism is the belief in reason and logic.
- All liberals believe that humans have rational capacities.
- They believe that humans are capable of making progress through rational thought.
- Hence they should be free to exercise their rationality.

The Enlightenment

1610	Galileo publishes <i>The Sidereal Messenger</i> which suggests that the earth revolves around the sun. It was considered one of the texts that started the Enlightenment movement.
1687	Isaac Newton sets out his main laws of motion and gravity in his book <i>Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy</i> .
1689	John Locke publishes <i>Two Treatises of Government</i> which outlines a passionate defence of natural rights and indicates the view that rulers need to serve the public: if they do not, they lack authority. This book will go on to be highly influential in the American and French Revolutions.
1721	In his book, <i>Persian Letters</i> , Montesquieu mocks King Louis XIV, Catholicism and satirises all social classes. This was unheard of at the time.
1734	In <i>Letters on England</i> , Voltaire criticises religious and political systems. This causes outrage and he is forced to flee Paris.
1751	The <i>French Encyclopédie</i> is first published which collates, for the first time, the principal works of the Enlightenment.
1762	<i>The Social Contract</i> is published by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It rejects the idea that power and authority in society is passed down by the state and the Church, rather than through the general will of the people. He famously argues that “man is free yet everywhere he is in chains”.
1776	The United States Declaration of Independence famously states that, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” These ideas are the basis of the values of the Enlightenment.
1787	In an attempt to avoid bankruptcy due to his extravagance, King Louis XVI seeks to raise taxes in France. This causes a crisis leading to the beginning of the French Revolution.
1791	Thomas Paine publishes <i>The Rights of Man</i> , arguing that popular revolution is permissible when a government does not safeguard the natural rights of its people. This is seen as clear support of the French Revolution and republicanism in general.

The liberal theory of justice is based on a belief in equality of various kinds; however, it is important to note that for liberals, equality is understood in a fundamentally different way to socialists (see Chapter 3). Liberals recognize equality in three different ways.

Equality (justice)

This can be included in a discussion of the liberal view of society, the economy and human nature.

(i) Foundational equality

In the first place, individualism implies a commitment to **foundational equality**. Humans are ‘born’ equal in the sense that each individual is of equal moral worth, an idea embodied in the notion of natural or **human rights**. The key word to understand here is ‘worth’. All humans are considered to be of equal value; in other words, one cannot grade humans in order of importance or significance on the basis of age, wisdom, birth, wealth or any other factor. All humans are valuable, all human life is deemed to be sacred, and all are endowed with what Thomas Jefferson referred to as **inalienable rights** because humans are entitled to them by virtue of being born: they cannot, in that sense, be taken away. To be born human is to have inalienable rights. It is also worth noting that the liberal view of tolerance is based on foundational equality.

Natural rights are now more commonly called human rights. For **Locke** and Jefferson, rights are ‘natural’ as they are invested in humans by nature (or God). Natural rights establish the essential

Spec key term

Foundational equality: Rights that all humans have by virtue of being born which cannot be taken away.