

The main elements of any political ideology



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The main elements of any political ideology are vast and multifaceted, making the precise explication of such philosophies or of philosophical theory in general difficult at best. Unlike other ideologies which have been birthed specifically by great thinkers to provide a political alternative - complete with a distinct outline or manifesto- as in the case of Communism, the tenets of Liberalism are not as easily defined. However it can be stated that many doctrines stemmed from the revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries and although they were a diverse mix of political theories and beliefs, their controversial nature swept through and altered public opinion. In Britain, liberalism came into politics in 1846 with the emergence of the liberal party, while in France liberalism developed in opposition to the policies of the restored Bourbon kings and became a major force in the Third Republic. However, much earlier in the United States, one of the most famous principles of liberalism " no taxation without representation", had become the rallying cry for American revolution and the demand for democracy. While classical liberal thought is generally understood through this concept pertaining to the primacy of the individual, the forerunners of liberalism: Locke, Bentham and Mill outlined theories such as Utilitarianism, laissez-faire economics, representative government, as well as other convictions, to create the core values of liberal doctrine. The fragmented ideology of classical liberalism had existed for many centuries before Locke drew the dialogue of past philosophers into a more credible and accepted philosophy. As a political theorist, Locke's foremost work, Two Treatises of Civil Government (1690), was a complete and clear statement on man's morality, as well as his rights and obligations with respect to other individuals and society as a whole. In the Treatise, Locke discusses different

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kinds of government, with an emphasis on a liberal, democratic, and civil society, in spite of the aristocratic era he lived in. His works regarded the composition of a civil society, placing emphasis on rule of law and his view of nature. His first great foundational contribution to classical liberalism is his exploration of rights theory. Searching for the basis and importance of rights led him to an exposition of natural law, along with an organizational hierarchy of laws organized on individual rights. For example, any state law conflicting with natural law regarding individual rights should not be obeyed. A second contribution of Locke's is his view of humanity. His political analysis rooted in the state of nature, one contrary to Hobbes, in which Locke asserts that people coexist in relative peace. In their acquisition of property through labor and resources, people had few obstructions to harmony except the need for impartiality regarding dispute resolution. The implication is that humanity is generally good and capable of coexistence in liberty. Third, and of notable concern, Locke debated that the principle of political sovereignty comes only from the consent of those being governed, and that a breach of contract between the state and its citizens gives the people the right to revolt. Perhaps, most importantly, Locke perceives personal liberty as dependent upon private property. This property must be secure under the rule of law, otherwise those in power or without such possessions could manipulate the system to appropriate from those in possession. Ultimately, state intervention was needed solely to intercede when conflict arose and higher reasoning was needed, and then only in context to the needs of its society. Following many of Locke's and Bentham's perspectives, Adam Smith, and his most famous work, *Wealth of Nations*, transformed political justifications of freedom and liberty into viable reasons for free market

activity. Laissez-faire, as it came to be known, was the economic concept of natural law manifested in Smith's notion of the "invisible hand". It demonstrated how self-interest would guide the most effective use of resources in an economy, and gave fiscal validity to liberty. As property and labor rights were integral to the convictions of liberal philosophers, Smith's works served to transport their ideas from the realm of abstract philosophy to that of tangible application of economic realities. The writings of Bentham can most notably be summed by the theory of Utility and by the maxim "the greatest good" -that the amount of human happiness created by a state act was to have its effect in the greatest benefit to the most people. In nineteenth century Britain and elsewhere, this doctrine played an important role in democratic and humane political reforms. It referred to what is good for people based on his scientific methodology regarding the amount of happiness that a state act should create in relation to the number which were benefited, with the ultimate goal being a perfect system of law and government for the people. *Fragment on Government* (1776) and *Introduction to Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1780) were symbolic of his views, and along with the future radicals he envisioned, his views were of great consequence in 19th century Britain. The basis of his thought was that human motive is governed by the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain, with the guiding rule for a society to be the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Therefore, when testing the value of human laws and institutions the main criterion must refer solely to their usefulness. The means to apply this determination are 'reason and law': the right law will produce happiness, since the right law would correspond with reason. In Bentham's draft codes of law, each individual law had an attached

'commentary of reasons on this law' to demonstrate its value, and therefore improve its effect. According to Bentham, those in power could demonstrate any law as reasonable, but a law's true reason -and thereby utility- would give stability to society. Initially, he thought he only needed to appeal to enlightened governments to enact his beneficial reforms. When he found this would not happen, or that his proposals, such as the panopticon -a revolutionary prison designed to allow constant monitoring of inmates- were blocked by the government of the time, he became a supporter of democracy. It was no longer the law that needed revision, but the system of government linked to it. However, as Goodwin notes " Liberalism does not entail democracy, but democracy is probably the best guarantee for liberalism" ¹ Hence, he was active in movements extending parliamentary suffrage, with the culmination of this dream being enacted the year he died(1832). Though one of the later Liberal philosophers, John Stuart Mill's works such as *On Liberty* (1859), *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), and *Utilitarianism* (1863) emerged as the cornerstones of classical liberal theory. As a scholar merging British, French, and German thought, his works sought to explain the many paradoxes of his time. His views called for tolerance of intellectual diversity as well as for a space for each individual that the state and the majority could not touch. He rejected tyrannical public opinion that silences the voice of discord, and understood that man's need for autonomy required an ethical sphere of privacy. However, neither tolerance nor privacy fit easily with the Benthamite equation for imposing the system producing the greatest happiness for the greatest number, causing a small revision of the " greatest happiness" maxim itself. Mill therefore alters his view to include quality of happiness in

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addition to quantity when judging utility, with those higher pleasures of self-realization ranking foremost in quality:... some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone. 2In attempting to reform utilitarianism, Mill incorporated a fusion of other ideologies into classical liberal thought thus causing controversy among scholars. While privacy was an integral tenet of individual freedom, Mill allowed for provisions regarding when this sphere could be invaded. Other questions he pondered regarded the silencing of dissent in popular vote in the context of utility, and further on that topic by whom could the quality of happiness be determined? In general, his works confirm that in most instances people, either alone or in voluntary associations, make decisions regarding their own affairs better than the government, and to that effect, Mill advocated limitations on state intervention. Ultimately, his philosophy became fairly pessimistic, becoming more aware of societal disorder than enlightened evolution, as rapid industrialization created many short-term economic problems which gave rise to a more realist school of thought. Ultimately, as other writers emerged with variations of liberal thought, classical liberalism declined, but the works of Locke, Bentham, and Mill will forever be enshrined as the groundwork of liberal ideology. For their time, the reasoning these men produced was revolutionary not only in academic circles, but ultimately for the common man as well. If it were not for the radical proposals they enlightened, perhaps the western world would not maintain its tolerant and democratic practices that separate it from many areas of the world. Indeed, the very face of world politics itself could be a

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more conservative, perhaps authoritarian, model of government were it not for these 18th and 19th century political and philosophical theorists.