

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE ROLE OF POLITICAL THEORY IN CULTURAL STUDIES: FORMATIVE IDEAS

The current state of Cultural Studies in Great Britain is permeated by post-Marxist concepts, particularly following the success of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University. A whole generation of academic workers in Cultural Studies have established the diverse areas of Cultural Studies using Marxist concepts modified for example by concepts taken from Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci. In the Central European context these conceptualizations are perhaps toxic in the twenty-five or so years following the revolutions of 1989. Moreover, there is a need to balance Marxist-derived concepts with ideas from other political traditions. A major difficulty with this is that non-socialist British thinkers tend to regard explicit formulation of political concepts as unsound relying on question-begging notions of tradition, custom and a theory of consent based on the political thinking of John Locke. This chapter, therefore, will be characterized by a lack of symmetrical fit between right wing and left wing thinking. However, it is useful to know from where the ideas that still energize British politics have come.

Political theory can be traced all the way back in European civilization to Plato's Republic and the profounder practical influence of Aristotle, from whom we still retain the word „polis“ to conceptualize a political community. Jesus Christ's pragmatic comment „Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's“ initiated two millennia in the Christian world of political argument, policies, movements and historical events where the separation of church and state underpinned what was expressed and what happened. There is no space to summarize the thoughts of Saint Augustine of Hippo, Dante Alighieri, and Machiavelli. The first major contributions to modern political theory were first Richard Hooker's **Ecclesiastical Polity**(1594), which among its essentially religious arguments attempted to define the relationship of Queen Elizabeth I to religion in her role as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. King James I wrote **The True Law of Free Monarchies** (1598) which advanced the notion of the Divine Right of Kings, a doctrine that he practised in his relationship with the English parliament and which his son, King Charles I, pursued with more energy leading to the ultimate disaster of the Civil War and his own execution in 1649 at the hands of the parliamentarians. The first thoroughgoing theory of political power was advanced by **Thomas Hobbes** in his „**Leviathan**,“(1651) one of the foundation works for modern political thinking. The work was written with the disorder of the Civil Wars weighing heavily on Hobbes's thinking. In this work Hobbes advanced the first social contract theory building on a mechanistic rather than a divine view of human nature. According to Hobbes in "a state of nature" life with government would mean that everybody would have a right to everything in the world. Inevitably, this would lead to a war of "all against all."

In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

In this condition people fear death and have no chance to get things which lead to a reasonable life. In order to obtain these things people agree to a "**social contract**" and create a "**civil society**" where some rights are surrendered in return for protection from violence. Any society is a population controlled by a sovereign authority. It is illogical to resist this authority as the sovereign is created from the sovereign power that the population has

agreed to surrender. Indirectly the population is the creator of all the actions of the sovereign through having conceded their power to the sovereign.

He that complaineth of injury from his sovereign complaineth that whereof he himself is the author, and therefore ought not to accuse any man but himself, no nor himself of injury because to do injury to one's self is impossible.

Hobbes's theory and conception of sovereignty, contains no theory of the separation of powers as advanced in the eighteenth century. For Hobbes the sovereign must control civil, military, judicial and religious powers.

John Locke developed Hobbes's social contract theory with a more positive view of human nature. Although he believed along with Hobbes that human nature allowed people to be selfish he believed that human nature itself was characterized by reason and tolerance. This meant that, instead of the unlimited aggression implied in Hobbes's view of human nature individuals and the need to keep human passions in check through an absolute sovereign, people established a civil society to resolve conflicts in a civil way with help from the government. In a state of nature individuals had the right to defend their "Life, Health, Liberty or Possessions." He also advocated the separation of powers and the notion that revolution is a right and in some circumstances a duty of members of a society. Locke wrote against the background of the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 which deposed the last Catholic King, James II, and his ideas later had profound effect on the forming of the beliefs and ideals which led to the American Revolution and concepts in the American Constitution.

At this point, before we move on to tracing continuous lines of political thought in British culture it is necessary to make a theoretical distinction between **doctrine** and **ideology**. Nowadays the two terms are often confused in political discourse. A political doctrine is a set of political ideas which are explicitly formulated and which characterize an identifiable political movement. A lazy way of describing a political doctrine is by looking at the suffix „ism,“ as in **anarchism, conservatism, fascism, Leninism, liberalism, Marxism, nationalism** and **socialism**. All of these have clearly defined principles which can be rationally analyzed. A second feature of a political doctrine is that the principles are relatively difficult to change because adopting even a slightly different principle might mean blurring the distinction between one doctrine and another. For example, it's difficult to describe the British Labour Party as a socialist party because many of its principles are identical with those of liberalism with regard to social legislation. The Labour government of 1945 to 1951 put into law many of the recommendations of the Beveridge report of 1944 creating a National Health Service, old age pensions, unemployment benefit and so on. The Labour Party is also a good example to demonstrate the rigidity of doctrinal principles. From 1917 to 1995 Clause 4 in the Labour constitution drafted by Sidney Webb was:

To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.

In practical terms this meant the nationalization of key industries and services. Following the privatization of industries and services during Margaret Thatcher's and John Major's times as Prime Minister in the 1980s and 1990s it was felt that the Labour Party was unelectable because of its doctrinal commitment to Clause 4. Tony Blair when he became leader of the Labour Party rewrote this part of the constitution of the Labour Party and persuaded to adopt a new clause:

The Labour Party is a democratic socialist party. It believes that by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone, so as to create for each of us the means to realize our true potential and for all of us a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few, where the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe, and where we live together, freely, in a spirit of solidarity, tolerance and respect.

Political doctrines are visible, explicit constructs open to rational critique. Political ideology is a more slippery concept. In public discourse there is often a difference in use. Often a politician might criticize an opponent's position as "ideological" when they mean an inflexible doctrinal position. "Doctrine" and "doctrinal" are often avoided partly because they clearly retain a notion of political ideas which are relatively inflexible and explicit and it is useful to try to convey that an opponent is not taking into account practical circumstances and is also attempting to conceal from the public their true motives for taking a certain position on a political issue. Political doctrines are often put to use by those holding certain ideologies. For example, the Second Amendment in the American Constitution is often cited by those who support the unrestricted purchase of weapons by the American citizen. However, it is argued with some accuracy that they ignore the actual wording of the amendment and the amendment is misquoted in support of an unrestricted libertarian ideology:

A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

Ideology has come a long way since its first formulation by Napoleon Bonaparte as something not entirely dissimilar to a set of political doctrines. Our contemporary understanding of ideology derives from Karl Marx's formulation of ideology being the dominant ideas of the ruling class in a society. Their dominance is sustained by **false consciousness**, the theory is that people are unable to see things, especially exploitation, oppression, and social relations, as they really are because the human mind is unable to develop a sophisticated awareness of how they are developed and shaped by circumstances. There are post-modern objections to this in that if this is true, it is difficult to argue that there is anybody whose perceptions are not distorted by false consciousness and that the claim fails through a *reductio ad absurdum*. Yet there is truth in the perception that people often have political beliefs based on assumptions that they take for granted. Marxist thinking has struggled to explain why world-wide revolution never happened given the inability of capitalism to avoid systemic economic depressions with the attendant hardships for the proletariat.

The Italian Marxist theoretician, **Antonio Gramsci**, attempted to explain this by extending the concept of false consciousness with one of '**common sense**' (meaning the ideas the majority generally agree on without analyzing them). Ideology is not separate from practical activities of life, but provides people with rules of practical conduct and moral behaviour derived from everyday conditions. The growth of the media, in Gramsci's time, the press, radio and cinema provided the means by which **hegemonic blocs** can be created through powerful representations of meaning particularly those which people regard as "natural" and "common sense." Ideology is reinforced and sustained by common sense and popular culture.

A good example is the almost universal practice of the "working day" in the industrialized nations. **EP Thompson** demonstrated in his "**The Making of the English Working Class**" that the creation of factories and the need to have groups of workers doing the same thing at the same time led to a massive increase in the production of raw materials and finished goods and that this passed on to clerical work, service industries and the education of children very swiftly leading to an enormous change in the structure of human life in industrial

societies. Nowadays we regard this routine as a commonsense and natural organization of our lives without being conscious of its origins.

To summarize a political doctrine is an explicit expression of a set of political principles often identified with a political party or movement. A political ideology is a set of assumptions about how we live and should live which is often fragmentary and unarticulated by those who live according to such assumptions. Political ideology often emerges as expressions of what is assumed to be natural or commonsensical. Often its expression is emotional rather than rational.

The classic study of British politics, *Modern British Politics*, was that of the American scholar, **Samuel H. Beer**. He describes political parties and interest groups in Great Britain and how they affect public policy. He found four different types of politics (corresponding roughly to four different historical periods) — **Old Tory, Old Whig, Liberal, and Radical**. The fifth and contemporary type, from the 1940s to the 1970s, he called **Collectivism**. The main part of the book traces the rise of collectivism from the late nineteenth century through the early decades of this century, until it came to dominate British politics in the post war years. A number of British and Irish thinkers contributed to the doctrines and ideologies underlying these strands in British politics.

TORYISM AND CONSERVATISM

A Tory holds a political philosophy (Toryism) based on a British version of traditionalism and conservatism. This political philosophy is prominent in the politics of the United Kingdom, and also appears in parts of the Commonwealth, particularly in Canada. The Tory ethos has been summed up with the phrase "God, King and Country". Tories advocate monarchism, are usually of a High Church Anglican religious heritage and are opposed to the liberalism of the Whig faction. Under the Corn Laws (1815–1846) a majority of Tories supported protectionist agrarianism with tariffs being imposed at the time for sustainability, self-sufficiency and enhanced wages in rural employment.

The Tory political faction originally emerged within the Parliament of England to uphold the legitimist rights of James, Duke of York, to succeed his brother Charles II to the throne. James II was a Catholic, while the state institutions had broken from the Catholic Church. This was an issue for the Exclusion Bill supporting Patricians, the political heirs to the Non-Conformist Roundheads and Covenanters. There were two Tory ministries under James II; the first led by Lord Rochester, the second by Lord Belasyse. A significant faction took part in the ousting of James II with the Whigs to defend the Anglican Church or definitive Protestantism. A large faction of Tories was sympathetic to Catholic Stuart heirs to the throne from the accession of the first Hanoverian monarch in 1714. Although only a minority of Tories gave their support to the Jacobite risings, it was used by the Whigs to completely discredit the Tories and paint them as traitors. After the introduction of the Prime Ministerial system under the Whig, Robert Walpole, Lord Bute's premiership in the reign of George III began a revival.

Conservatism had emerged by the end of the 18th century. It fused moderate Whig economic positions and many Tory social values to create a new political philosophy and faction, in opposition to the French Revolution. **Edmund Burke**, an Irish Whig statesman and writer with **William Pitt the Younger** led the way in this. Interventionism and a strong military were to prove a hallmark of Toryism under subsequent Prime Ministers. Due to these Tories leading the formation of the Conservative Party, members of the party are colloquially referred to as Tories, even if they are not traditionalists. Actual adherents to traditional Toryism in contemporary times may be referred to as High Tories as the traditionalist conservative values of Toryism differ from that of the more liberal and cosmopolitan parts of the Conservative Party.

Burke's pamphlet, "**Reflections on the Revolution in France**", put forward what is still a classic statement of High Tory principles. He was replying to a sermon by a radical clergyman philosopher, Dr. Richard Price (1723-1791) who argued that the French Revolution and the English 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 were alike in promoting the universal rights of man and that love of one's country did not mean that a country was superior to another or that its laws and institutions were superior. Burke's reply argued against these interpretations:

The Revolution was made to preserve our antient indisputable laws and liberties, and that antient constitution of government which is our only security for law and liberty.... The very idea of the fabrication of a new government, is enough to fill us with disgust and horror. We wished at the period of the Revolution, and do now wish, to derive all we possess as an inheritance from our forefathers. Upon that body and stock of inheritance we have taken care not to inoculate any cyon [scion] alien to the nature of the original plant.... Our oldest reformation is that of Magna Charta. You will see that Sir Edward Coke, that great oracle of our law, and indeed all the great men who follow him, to Blackstone, are industrious to prove the pedigree of our liberties. They endeavour to prove that the ancient charter... were nothing more than a re-affirmance of the still more ancient standing law of the kingdom.... In the famous law... called the Petition of Right, the parliament says to the king, "Your subjects have inherited this freedom", claiming their franchises not on abstract principles "as the rights of men", but as the rights of Englishmen, and as a patrimony derived from their forefathers.

The content of his reply emphasized basic constitutional arguments of traditional British Conservatives; the defence of ancient liberties and the notion of a continuous tradition dating back to the Magna Carta of 1215 and the Petition of Right of 1628.

Toryism is associated with preserving the conventions and acts of parliament relating to the British constitution. This is always a matter of public debate partly because the British constitution has never been codified or organized in a written document unlike other democratic countries such as France, Germany, Slovakia and the United States. **Erskine May** (1815-1886) wrote the nearest work to a constitution with "**A Treatise upon the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament**" (now simply known as **Erskine May**) which is a synthesis of the practices and conventions of the British parliament. It is regarded as part of the constitution of the United Kingdom and is influential in constitutional law in many Commonwealth countries. It is particularly influential in the interpretation of parliamentary conventions.

Walter Bagehot was the founder of The National Review and then editor-in-chief of **The Economist** for seventeen years. His book, **The English Constitution** (1867) is important for its exploration of the monarchy and parliament. The British Royal Family is required to study Bagehot as part of their preparation for the duties in adulthood. He coined the expression "**the Queen reigns, but she does not rule**" to describe the constitutional role of the monarch. Bagehot's references to the Parliament of the United Kingdom are not out of date, but his observations on the monarchy are central to an understanding of the principles of constitutional monarchy. He defined the rights and role of a monarch as the right to be consulted, the right to encourage and the right to warn. He also divided the constitution into two components, the "**dignified**", which is symbolic and the "**efficient**", which is the way things actually work and get done. He also praised "**cabinet government**", but in the last half century the Prime Ministers of the day from Mrs. Thatcher onwards have adopted or been forced by the media to adopt a more presidential style with ministers less publicly prominent. Erskine May and Bagehot have provided an underpinning to the Tory strand in politics which also bases its doctrine on the Magna Carta of 1215 and the Act of Settlement of 1701 which

was modified in 2013 to allow heirs to the throne who marry Roman Catholics, as the current heir Prince Charles has done, to succeed to the throne.

WHIGGISM

Whiggism was the name given to the set of political beliefs and economic interests that was opposed to Toryism. It dates from the Parliamentary faction involved in the Civil Wars from 1642 to 1649 and from the crisis of Charles II dying without an heir leading to the succession of his Catholic brother, James II. Following the success of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 Whigs dominated British politics completely until 1760. After 1760 the Whigs lost power to the Tories although they occasionally regained it in coalitions. However, by then Whig ideas had been taken on by the Tories so much so that a Whig such as Edmund Burke was seen as articulating the basis of Conservative philosophy. By then Whiggism had fashioned itself into a belief system that emphasized innovation and liberty and was strongly held by about half of the leading families in England and Scotland, as well as most merchants, Dissenters and professionals. The most influential philosopher was John Locke with his **Two Treatises of Government** (1689) which opposed the theory of Divine Right and absolute monarchy. Locke's theory was more liberal than most Whigs emphasizing natural rights and liberal government. This was later to be profoundly important for American government, but less so for British Whigs who tended towards the moderate position of James Tyrrell (1641 – 1718). He propounded a moderate Whiggism which interpreted England's balanced and mixed constitution "as the product of a contextualized social compact blending elements of custom, history, and prescription with inherent natural law obligations."

Whiggism was important in the development of American politics where the Whig Party later evolved into the present-day Republican Party.

LIBERALISM

Liberalism is a political and social philosophy founded on notions of equality and freedom. Since its first principles were formulated by John Locke in his *Two Treatises on Government* it has undergone a variety of additions and transformations and the adjective „liberal“ is now attached to a wide spectrum of political doctrines ranging from the extreme left to the extreme right. All parties claiming a liberal element emphasize individual rights, but they differ in their opinion on the role of the state. Some such as the British Labour Party or Scottish National Party see government in a highly interventionist role whereas the British Conservative Party aims at reducing the role of the state albeit with contradictory positions when it comes to issues such as the use of soft drugs.

British liberal politics emerged from the remains of the great eighteenth century Whig party which fractured in 1760 into twenty or thirty years of various "Whig" factions attached to powerful political aristocrats. The defining events which brought about a new political formation were the American Revolution and the French Revolution of 1789. Reaction to the French Revolution stimulated Burke's *Reflections* which became the basis of British Conservative doctrine and Tom Paine's **The Rights of Man** (1791) which contributed to the political rationale for the new American republic, but also was a founding document for political radicalism in Britain, reflected in the wholesale banning of the book during the Napoleonic Wars for fear that it would cause a republican revolution. Unlike Toryism and Whiggism liberal politics extended beyond a debate about the powers of the monarchy, parliament, the defence of Great Britain and anxiety about the preservation of Protestantism in the United Kingdom and the Church of England as the established denomination of England, Wales and Ireland. Liberalism extended into economics and social questions under the pressure created by the industrialization of Great Britain and a change in the demographic character of Britain due to urbanization, a consequence of industrialization.

Resistance to this widening of the scope of government has become part of the ideology of conservatism in Britain and even more noticeable in the United States. However, the multiple strands in liberal thinking has contributed to all political ideologies in the western industrialized nations and in Britain led to the formation of the Liberal Party following the realignment of traditional political forces in the 1830s and 1840s due to the extension of voting rights in the **Reform Act of 1832** and the adoption of free trade signalled by the **Repeal of the Corn Laws** in 1846. Liberalism also provided theoretical constructs for radicalism and for socialism.

The core beliefs of liberalism derive from the philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Classical liberals share the belief that governments are created by individuals to prevent conflict among themselves with a modification taken from Locke that individuals should be free to pursue their ambitions, but without infringing on the liberties of others. Economic liberalism which appeared out of the work of Adam Smith in his work, **The Wealth of Nations** (1776), requires that individuals should pursue their economic self-interest without government interference. This is very much a dogma in American conservative ideology. In the period immediately following the Napoleonic wars economic theory provided a rationalization of the exploitation of the new urban proletariat. The rationale for this is seen in the idea that workers would have a financial incentive by preferring to work for an employer who paid the best wages. However, the worker had to act as an individual and was at a disadvantage which Adam Smith himself had noted:

A landlord, a farmer, a master manufacturer, a merchant, though they did not employ a single workman, could generally live a year or two upon the stocks which they have already acquired. Many workmen could not subsist a week, few could subsist a month, and scarce any a year without employment. In the long run the workman may be as necessary to his master as his master is to him; but the necessity is not so immediate. (Wealth of Nations)

Much of the political turmoil in Britain from 1815 to 1858 was due to the struggle to gain living wages by the new urban proletariat resisted by a combination of the new class of industrial employers who wished to keep wages as low as possible and the traditional Whigs and Tories who feared a French-style revolution brought on by the combination of groups of urban and agricultural workers. Collective action was regarded as dangerous.

This individualistic liberalism was also supported by the population theories of **Thomas Malthus** in **An Essay on the Principle of Population** (1798) and his notorious prediction based on the arithmetical increase (1-2-3-4) in resources being overwhelmed by a geometrical increase in population (1-2-4-8). Malthus held that war, starvation and disease held a population in check and ensured that resources would more or less be sufficient for the population. The dreadful conditions in manufacturing towns and cities were thus regarded as inevitable and attempts to improve would only lead to an unsustainable growth in population leading to the misery that Malthus held to be a natural condition of humankind.

This form of liberalism has been described as classic liberalism and was the dominant ideology in nineteenth century Britain. It was underpinned by **laissez-faire economics** derived from Adam Smith. A radical strand was added to the new parliamentary parties in the 1840s which limited aristocratic privilege expanded religious liberty as with the Catholic Relief Act of 1829. The advocacy of free trade quickly became an economic orthodoxy which remained in place until the 1920s.

A more enabling liberalism developed under the influence of Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism and the **Greatest Happiness Principle** popularly defined as "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." In his **An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation** (1789) Bentham defines utility in the following terms:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do... By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever according to the tendency it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words to promote or to oppose that happiness. I say of every action whatsoever, and therefore not only of every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government.

John Stuart Mill was brought up by his father, James Mill, on strictly rational principles; something the younger Mill regretted his whole life. But he developed Utilitarianism from an impersonal doctrine into a more human argument in both his *On Liberty* (1859) and his *Subjection of Women* (1869). In *On Liberty*, a classic of political thought Mill advances the principles that the individual ought to be free to do as he wishes unless he harms others. Individuals are rational enough to make decisions about their well-being. Government should interfere when it is for the protection of society.

The sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinion of others, to do so would be wise, or even right...The only part of the conduct of anyone, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns him, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.

Mills' views logically extended to freedom of speech and was developed by the American judge, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr, into a doctrine which defines American interventions to preserve national security,

The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent.

The phrase "a clear and present danger" is a commonplace not only of American political rhetoric, but even popular action films.

Mills' argument led him to advocate equal rights for women. (He was the first politically important figure to do so) and for a fully participatory democracy. Although he advocated what seemed to be contradictory ideas in extensive participation in democracy as opposed to the enlightened competence of the rulers he argued that the ignorance of the masses would be overcome once they were given the chance to participate.

His political thinking opened the way for principles which are now commonplaces in democratic society, for example, equal opportunity. An idea like this supported the social reforms in Victorian society alongside a continuing paternalistic ethic from conservative politicians such as Lord Shaftesbury and Richard Oastler which alleviated working conditions and protected women and children from exploitation. Mills' ideas led to "enabling" legislation, such as the Education Acts, which gave greater opportunities to those without wealth or connection in British society. They became an integral part of the later Liberal party programme especially in the first decade of the twentieth century.

IMPORTANT THINKERS

Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury (1588 – 1679), was an English philosopher best known today for his work on political philosophy. His 1651 book *Leviathan* established social contract theory, the foundation of later Western political philosophy.

Though on rational grounds a champion of absolutism for the sovereign, Hobbes also developed some of the fundamentals of European liberal thought: the right of the individual; the natural equality of all men; the artificial character of the political order (which led to the later distinction between civil society and the state); the view that all legitimate political power must be "representative" and based on the consent of the people; and a liberal interpretation of law which leaves people free to do whatever the law does not explicitly forbid.

He was one of the founders of modern political philosophy and political science. His understanding of humans as being matter and motion, obeying the same physical laws as other matter and motion, remains influential; and his account of human nature as self-interested cooperation, and of political communities as being based upon a "social contract" remains one of the major topics of political philosophy.

John Locke (1632 – 1704) was an English philosopher and physician, widely regarded as one of the most influential of Enlightenment thinkers and commonly known as the "Father of Liberalism". Considered one of the first of the British empiricists, following the tradition of Sir Francis Bacon, he is equally important to social contract theory. His work greatly affected the development of epistemology and political philosophy. His writings influenced Voltaire and Rousseau, many Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, as well as the American revolutionaries. His contributions to classical republicanism and liberal theory are reflected in the United States Declaration of Independence.

Adam Smith (1723 – 1790) was a Scottish moral philosopher, pioneer of political economy, and a key figure in the Scottish Enlightenment. He is best known for two classic works: *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), and *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776). The latter, usually abbreviated as *The Wealth of Nations*, is considered his magnum opus and the first modern work of economics.

Smith laid the foundations of classical free market economic theory. *The Wealth of Nations* was a precursor to the modern academic discipline of economics. In this and other works, he developed the concept of division of labour, and expounded upon how rational self-interest and competition can lead to economic prosperity.

Edmund Burke (1729 – 1797) was an Irish statesman born in Dublin, as well as an author, orator, political theorist, and philosopher who, after moving to London, served as a member of parliament (MP) for many years in the House of Commons with the Whig Party.

Burke is remembered mainly for his support of the cause of the American Revolutionaries, Catholic emancipation, the impeachment of Warren Hastings from the East India Company, and for his later objections about the French Revolution, the latter leading to his becoming the leading figure within the conservative faction of the Whig Party, which he dubbed the "Old Whigs", as opposed to the pro-French Revolution "New Whigs", led by Charles James Fox.

In the nineteenth century Burke was praised by both conservatives and liberals. Subsequently, in the twentieth century, he became widely regarded as the philosophical founder of modern conservatism.

Jeremy Bentham (1748 – 1832) was an English philosopher, jurist, and social reformer. He is regarded as the founder of modern utilitarianism. Bentham defined as the "fundamental axiom" of his philosophy the principle that "it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong". He became a leading theorist in Anglo-American philosophy of law, and a political radical whose ideas influenced the development of welfarism. He advocated individual and economic freedom, the separation of church and

state, freedom of expression, equal rights for women, the right to divorce, and the decriminalizing of homosexual acts. He called for the abolition of slavery, the abolition of the death penalty and the abolition of physical punishment, including that of children. He has also become known in recent years as an early advocate of animal rights. Though strongly in favour of the extension of individual legal rights, he opposed the idea of natural law and natural rights, calling them "nonsense upon stilts".

John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873) was an English philosopher, political economist, feminist, and civil servant. One of the most influential thinkers in the history of liberalism, he contributed widely to social theory, political theory and political economy. Mill's conception of liberty justified the freedom of the individual in opposition to unlimited state control.

Mill was a proponent of utilitarianism, an ethical theory developed by his predecessor Jeremy Bentham, and contributed significantly to the theory of the scientific method.

A member of the Liberal Party, he was the first Member of Parliament to call for women's suffrage.

Walter Bagehot (1826 – 1877) was a British journalist, businessman, and essayist, who wrote extensively about government, economics, and literature. In 1867, Bagehot wrote *The English Constitution*, a book that explores the nature of the constitution of the United Kingdom, specifically its Parliament and monarchy. It appeared at the same time that Parliament enacted the Reform Act of 1867, requiring Bagehot to write an extended introduction to the second edition which appeared in 1872.

MAIN POINTS

- The philosophy underlying British politics can be traced back to the seventeenth century to the work of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke especially with regard to the idea of a social contract.
- Old Toryism is associated with the slogan "God, King and Country." It survives in the High Tory principles of Anglicanism, the Monarchy (or the royal prerogative exercised by Parliament) and protectionism.
- The Whigs used the work of John Locke to support their principles of freedom from absolutist monarchy.
- Edmund Burke effectively fused Old Toryism and Whiggism into Conservative principles which are still the basis of Conservative party politics...
- John Locke's principles form the basis of liberal politics, but were expanded by Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarian philosophy, "the greatest happiness of the greatest number", and the economic ideas of Adam Smith and the free market economy. The idea of liberty received its greatest articulation and expression in *The Essay on Liberty* by John Stuart Mill who argued for principles of equal opportunity.
- Modern liberalism has two strands, one an enabling philosophy which seeks to achieve social progress through maximizing opportunity for all regardless of gender, race or social status and the second a libertarian philosophy which stresses the free market and economic competition regardless of surrounding circumstances. The former approach underpins progressive politics such as the Labour Party's politics and the latter has been absorbed by the Conservative Party stressing the reduction of government interference in restricting the operation of market forces. A similar tension can be observed in American politics.

SEMINAR EXERCISES

- What aspects of Old Toryism are still present in contemporary British politics. In Bagehot's terms are they dignified or effective?
- What do you understand by a social contract in terms of Slovak politics?
- How would you compare British notions of political freedom with Slovak notions of political freedom?
- Which British institutions support the idea of the greatest happiness for the greatest number?
- Which British institutions support the idea of equality of opportunity?
- Compare the attitude of British governments to competition and the market with those of the Slovak government?

READING

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