

Values and ideas

Human nature - A collection of inherent qualities essential to the individual.

Liberty - Classical liberals believe that liberty consists in each person being left alone, free from intrusion and able to act in whichever way they may wish. Modern liberals prefer a more 'positive' notion of liberty, defined by Berlin as the ability to be one's own master, to be autonomous.

Natural rights - God given rights that are essential to human beings and are therefore inalienable.

Individualism - Individualism is the belief in the prime significance of the individual over any grouping or collective body.

Equality - People have equal moral value. This implies political and legal equality as well as equality of opportunity.

Pluralism - Pluralism is a commitment to diversity or profusion, the existence of many things.

Rationalism - Rationalism is the belief that the world has a rational formation, and that this can be understood through human reason and enquiry.

Justice - Justice is about giving each person what he or she is 'due'.

Toleration - Toleration means forbearance, a readiness to accept people thinking, speaking and acting in ways which we disagree with.

Ideological traditions

Classical liberalism

Egoistical individualism - The belief in the prime significance of the individual leads to an emphasis on self-interestedness and self-reliance.

Negative freedom - The lack of external limitations on the individual, permitting freedom of choice.

Minimal state - The state is a necessary evil that should play the role of the night-watchman.

Civil society - An area of autonomous associations and groups, created by private citizens and enjoying independence from the state. Civil society includes businesses, clubs, churches and so on.

Modern liberalism

Individuality - Self-fulfilment gained through the realisation of an individual's unique identity or qualities.

Positive freedom - Self-mastery or self-realisation. The achievement of autonomy and the development of capacities.

Social liberalism - Provision of welfare support for its citizens by overcoming poverty, disease and ignorance.

Economic management - Governments should influence the level of aggregate demand.

Political liberalism

Liberal state - The sovereign state restrains others from encroaching on individuals' liberties.

Constitutional government - Governments are limited in their power by constitutional constraints.

Liberal democracy - A form of democracy that combines both limited government and a system of regular and competitive elections.

Social contract - A hypothetical agreement amongst individuals in which they form a state in order to avoid the disorder and chaos of the 'state of nature'.

Rule of law - Law provides a framework within which all citizens act and beyond which no one, not even the state, can go.

Economic liberalism

Market - A system of commercial exchange between buyers and sellers, controlled by impersonal 'market forces'.

Market forces - The economy operates according to a set of impersonal pressures that promote economic prosperity.

Free market - Unfettered market competition, free from state interference.

Laissez-faire - Economic activity should be free from state interference.

Economic management - Governments should influence the level of aggregate demand.

Keynesianism - Economic theories of JM Keynes relating to aggregate demand.

Demand management - The government should regulate demand through fiscal policy.

Liberal state

Self-reliance - Individuals make what they can of their own lives.

Social Darwinism - Social circumstances are dependent upon talent and hard work.

Equality of opportunity - Each individual should have the same opportunity to rise and fall in society.

Welfare state - A state that takes the primary responsibility for the social welfare of its citizens, enacted through a range of social-security, health, education and other services.

