

RELATED ISSUE #II: AN OVERVIEW



Watch the video Individualism and Collectivism Reviewed

In this section you have been charged with assessing impacts of, and reactions to, principles of liberalism. Liberalism, although having a number of specific and diverse applications, is generally held to be a belief in individual freedom and dignity that is to be achieved through as little government intervention as is possible.

As a result of this very general definition, there are many, many examples that may be used to describe liberalism in practice. You are encouraged to review this section in the textbook to more fully understand specific contributions to this concept's development by many Aboriginal/Indigenous People throughout the globe. Sometimes these actions and belief systems arise in response to different interpretations of what is in the best interest because at the heart of liberalism is the belief that individuals will make choices so as to benefit themselves and society. This duality has often been problematic as the interests of individuals and societies have clashed. An example of this was the abject poverty experienced by those working in the early stages of classical liberal thinking. Factory conditions certainly meant that employers were able to enjoy larger profits because of the monies saved by not having proper ventilation or safety devices in place but ... without many of the labor laws and other developments to protect the workers society would not have been able to progress to its current state.

Classical liberal thinkers you are charged with more fully understanding are John Locke, Montesquieu, Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill. A brief summary of each of them is below:

John Locke believed that government should serve the people who would be free to use logic and reason to make decisions. Locke was a supporter of individual freedom, private property and the right of the individual to protect what they owned.

Montesquieu also believed in the worth of the individual. He wanted government to be comprised of distinct branches with separate powers to prevent one branch from abusing its powers. It was essential to him that individuals participate in government to guarantee that the government was responsive to the needs of the citizens.

Adam Smith took a different approach to his advocacy of individual rights and freedoms. Smith was most concerned about the expression of individual self-interest in the market with government being limited to the provision of law, defense and public works to permit the smooth operation of the market while preserving freedom of contract and private property.

John Stuart Mill was yet another supporter of individual rights and freedoms. His central tenants revolved around freedom of speech and thought, both of which he deemed to be essential for social progress as they permitted the fullest possible discourse. Mill staunchly advocated individual liberty so long as said individual did not threaten the welfare of the masses.

In their own manner each of the aforementioned thinkers influenced society in the 19th century and beyond. Your job as a student is to understand how they contributed to laissez-faire capitalism, spurred different political and social reactions to industrialization, challenged the class system or contributed to the evolution of governmental development.



Of course, these were but a few of the ideological options of that period. You should know something about each of the following: **Classical Conservatism, Marxism, Socialism and Welfare Capitalism.**

Note: *Classical conservatism is a belief in a system that supports traditional systems and social structures that exist. It would most easily apply to mercantilist thinking and those supporting the ongoing locus of control enjoyed by property owners from that time. Marxism, Socialism and Welfare capitalism are thoroughly developed in the Economic systems section of this resource.*

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION & LIBERALIST THOUGHT

