



An Introduction to Politics v2.0

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CHAPTER 2

Ideologies and Isms: The Foundations of Politics



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand what an ideology is and what a political theory is.
2. Understand how scientific method applies to political science.
3. Learn what the two types of theory are and what directions political theories tend to take.



Ideologies and Isms: The Foundations of Politics

- An ideology is a set of beliefs about how the world is and how it ought to be.
 - Descriptive: what the world actually looks like.
 - Prescriptive: how it should ideally be.
- Many ideologies end in the suffix *-ism*.
- Classical liberalism is the most dominant ideology in world politics at the moment.
- Ideology grows out of political theory, which is the part of politics in which people try to come up with ideas for how government should work.



Ideologies and Isms: The Foundations of Politics

- Ideology mobilizes people and organizes people; if citizens believe in something, they will support and work for those beliefs.
- Ideologies contain both truths and assumptions.
- Ideology and theory give us tools for understanding politics and political belief systems and perhaps a way to change them.
- Because ideology tends to substitute belief for understanding, it is not the same thing as a social science, which seeks to understand.



Political Theory: The Beginnings

- Underlying every ideology is a theory about how things are and ought to be.
- Political theory is one of the longest-running and most important debates on the planet: How should society be organized? Who gets power and for what purposes?
- Theory matters because it tells us something about why we do what we do. Theories can give us ideas about what we ought to do, they can help us understand why things happen the way they do.
- Political theory is the “Systematic reflection on the nature and purposes of government, characteristically involving both an understanding of existing political institutions and a view about how (if at all) they ought to be changed.”



Political Theory: The Beginnings

- A theory is a testable proposition about the nature and reality of something.
- If we are to apply scientific method to a theory, a theory becomes a hypothesis. Hypotheses can be tested.
- In social sciences, such as political science, it's a lot more difficult to actively test a theory, if only because people tend to object when you perform experiments on them.
- The kind of theory that we might try to test is called *positive theory*, *empirical theory*, or *explanatory theory*.
- Normative theory tries to say how things ought to be, as opposed to how they are.
 - Norms are averages or standards; social norms are the traditional rules that govern a society.
- All political theories have positive and normative elements.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand different approaches to politics.
2. Understand what ancient thinkers thought was the best state.



What Is and Ought to Be: Three Versions of Politics

- The Democratic Model: most people can know something and because it's possible for people to know something, it's also possible for them to participate in governing themselves.
 - Broadly participatory forms of government will, in fact, perform better than those that don't invite people to get involved, thereby lending legitimacy to states and creating conditions for more comfortable, fulfilling lives.
- The Authoritarian Model: some people have knowledge and others have to be taught.
 - If ruling themselves without proper instruction, the people will go astray.
- The Anarchic Model: government is the problem—not the solution—and that the institutions of government, in fact, lead people astray.
 - As soon as we have a formal government, it becomes a tool of power, which the people who end up in charge will use to oppress everybody else.



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The Ancients: It's All Greek (or Chinese) to Them

- Different societies developed different ways of ruling themselves throughout antiquity, all over the world.
 - Kings could come to rule through election, passing through the hereditary line, or by being the toughest, smartest, and the one who could organize and protect.
- In ancient Greece and in ancient Rome, kings were overthrown in favor of various kinds of republics.
- Athenian democracy frequently bordered on mob rule. Good leaders were thrown out in popularity contests; Athenians could vote to exile anyone they didn't like by writing that person's name on a piece of pottery—*ostraka* in ancient Greek, from which our word *ostracize* derives.
- Democratic Athens: demagogue
 - A demagogue is someone who plays on people's fears, prejudices, and emotions in order to gain political power.



The Ancients: It's All Greek (or Chinese) to Them

- Aristotle's good forms of government:
 - Monarchy: rule by one—by a just king
 - Aristocracy: rule by the best
 - Polity: rule by the people
- Aristotle's forms of government can all erode into “perversions” of the original.
 - Monarchy decays to tyranny: rule by a bad king.
 - Aristocracy decays to oligarchy: rule by the few for their own benefit, often involving excessive greed.
 - Polity decays to democracy: rule by the mob, who tend to give in to the passions of moment and be driven to excessive and extreme behavior.



The Ancients: It's All Greek (or Chinese) to Them

- Confucius and Plato independently arrived at the idea of a philosopher-king.
 - Philosopher-king: the perfect combination of wisdom and power to effectively and fairly rule the state.
 - Confucius emphasized the importance of custom and tradition in cementing the links between the ruler and the ruled; he seems to have seen the structures and formalities of the state as playing a role in teaching and reminding people to do the right thing.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Political theory is a systematic way of studying the performance of government.
- Political theories tend to fall into authoritarian, democratic, and anarchic models.
- Plato thought that average people were not fit to rule and that people would need to be carefully trained to make them into rulers.
- Aristotle also didn't trust common people, but thought a balanced constitution, combining elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, would be best.
- Confucius thought that emphasis on order, tradition, and respect would lead to the best government.
- The Roman Republic had so many checks and balances that it was unable to act when it needed to.



EXERCISE

1. Assume you were studying to be a member of Plato's guardian class. What things would you need to know in order to be an effective ruler?



EXERCISE

2. In what ways do order and tradition play a role in everyday life today? Do these help or hinder progress?



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand how early Christian and Moslem thinkers tried to reconcile the competing spheres of church and state.
2. Understand how political science was reinvented and how that changed views on government.



FROM ANTIQUITY TO MODERNITY

- As the Roman Empire fell apart in the fifth century CE, Europeans faced the challenge of rebuilding society and government.
- Every society is born out of chaos. When times are uncertain, we turn to strong people to create order out of chaos, which creates a different set of conditions and needs.
 - Once order is established, other things are addressed, including food, wealth, and more comfortable existence.
- The one institution that survived the fall of the Roman Empire was the Catholic Church.
- Reconciling church and state was the problem for the next thousand years.



THE ROOTS OF CLASSICAL LIBERALISM

- In Europe, the medieval period gave way to a new beginning around the fourteenth century. While people of ancient civilizations clearly cared about wealth, the philosophers of that age were more concerned with stability and avoiding oppression than with how best to meet people's needs.
 - The Renaissance, and the return of trade and commerce, began to change that.
- Increasing stability and order produced the conditions that made it possible to trade and economic conditions improved creating a new class of people.
 - Merchants, bankers, and manufacturers didn't need or want the interference of feudal lords or crafty cardinals.
- Pre-Renaissance period was largely about how much power should be possessed by the church.
- Renaissance theory increasingly was once again about what the ideal state should look like.



THE ROOTS OF CLASSICAL LIBERALISM

- Machiavelli argued that:
 - You don't get very far by playing it fair if your enemies don't.
 - A just government is a wonderful thing, but the enemies of the just state will use unjust methods to tear it down.
- Modernity: the problem of a world where reason and rationality have begun to replace faith; describes the era after the Middle Ages.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Medieval philosophers tried to reconcile the competing powers of church and state.
- Modern philosophers presumed the existence of the state and set about trying to make it better.
- Social contract theory saw government as a contract between the government and the governed.



EXERCISE

1. Do you practice a particular faith? What should be the role of religion in civil society?



EXERCISE

2. Is government a social contract? How does that contract work for people who weren't born when it was agreed upon?



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand why the US Constitution was designed the way it was.
2. Understand Marx's and Mill's different visions for a just society.
3. Understand contemporary approaches in political theory.



FROM MODERNITY TO THE PRESENT

- James Madison: fourth president of the United States and the chief author of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.
 - He argued for a balance of power in government, which became the division of power in US government between the states and the national government; the division of power between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches; and the literal encouragement of interest groups who would, Madison hoped, keep each other in check.
- Federalism argues for subdivision of power between national and regional governments.



CLASSICAL LIBERALISM

- Classical liberalism: A system of social organization that relies on markets for economic decision making and on democratic institutions for political decision making.
 - A reliance on markets for economic decision making (capitalism).
 - A reliance on democratic institutions for political decision making (democracy, in the broadest sense).
- A reliance on markets means that people get to vote with their dollars, pounds, rupees, or euros on what they want to buy and how much they're willing to pay for it.
- Capitalism is an economic system that relies on the interactions of markets to decide what gets produced and how much it will cost.



MERCANTILISM

- An economic system that encourages states to maximize exports, minimize imports, and accumulate internal wealth.
- A very Eurocentric theory.
- It argued that the state with the most gold was the best off.
- It also argued that nations should maximize overseas colonies to serve as sources of raw materials and markets for finished goods.



CLASSICAL LIBERALISM

- Relies on democratic institutions, where political decisions are made by people casting votes.
- States decide which citizens are qualified, and those people get to vote in free elections.
- The state may set rules regarding who can run for office, such as a minimum age requirement, but if, for example, you reach that age, the state cannot decide that you can't run.
- This kind of government is called a *republic*.



CLASSICAL LIBERALISM AND ITS CRITICS

- Classical liberalism claims to provide people with maximum freedom and maximum wealth.
- By allowing people to spend and invest as they wish, and by depending on open elections, it provides a higher degree of individual liberty than some alternatives.
- It creates the opportunity to participate in the economic and political life of a country.
- By relying on markets to make economic decisions, it tends to produce more wealth, more efficiently (at lower costs).
- Because it depends on elections for political decision making, it gives citizens an outlet for their discontent and allows them to make changes to law and policy.



CLASSICAL LIBERALISM AND ITS CRITICS

- While classical liberalism tends to produce more wealth, it may distribute that wealth unevenly.
- An uneven distribution of wealth can lead to wealthy people dominating the political system.
- Because the creation of wealth often gets tied to the broader concept of liberty, the system may have a difficult time dealing with problems generated by market activity, such as pollution.
- If the specific political system is more inclusive (gives everybody a real voice), it may not be very efficient in decision making and may in fact be slow to respond to people's needs.



AMERICAN CONSERVATISM

- American conservatism is a subset of classical liberalism.
- It argues for less government involvement in the economy.
 - It argues that people should be able to make their own choices about where to spend their money, pointing out that taxes to support government programs effectively make those choices for you.
- Pillars of Conservatism:
 - The rule of law
 - Independent courts
 - Representative government
 - Private government
 - Private property
 - Foreign policy
- It favors lower taxes, a balanced federal budget, and less regulation of the economic system.



THE ROOTS OF CONSERVATISM: REVOLUTION AND COUNTERREVOLUTION

- The American Revolution was followed by the French Revolution in 1789, with somewhat less benign results.
- Revolution produced different reactions among political thinkers.
- A strong believer in representative government, Burke is nonetheless often regarded as the father of modern conservatism.
 - He argued against rapid, radical change, saying instead that human institutions are there for a reason and embody the collective wisdom of generations.
 - Burke said that the just state must have strong institutions and civil liberty.
- In Burke's mind, it is in fact the existence of the state that makes civilized life possible, and therefore the institutions of the state are important and should be preserved.



THE ROOTS OF CONSERVATISM: REVOLUTION AND COUNTERREVOLUTION

- The 1800s saw a broader push for more popular participation in government and the Industrial Revolution, which began the movement from a world in which most people were farmers to a world in which people were not.
- John Stuart Mill argues for broader political participation. He saw the benefits of expanding wealth and thought that open and accessible political institutions were the best way to address the inequalities generated by the uneven flowering of capitalism.
 - Free markets: leaving the economy alone and letting capitalism work as intended.



POPULISM

- An approach to politics in which candidates and leaders claim to represent the interests of the common people as opposed to those of the rich and the powerful.
- Populism is not an ideology. It is an approach to politics.
- At its best, populism displays a genuine concern for citizens whose rights and needs have not been considered.
- At its worst, populists can be as oppressive as the people they have replaced.
- Populists make an appeal to the common person and claim to represent their interests, as opposed to the interests of the rich and powerful.



LIBERTARIANISM

- Libertarians believe in the least amount of government possible: national defense, police and fire, and not much else.
- True libertarians are not at all concerned with social issues, as they don't see that as government's job.
- It offers considerable freedom of choice on a range of issues.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the difference between socialism and communism.
2. Understand the difference between fascism and Nazism.
3. Learn what anarchism is, and understand how its views of people and politics differ from many other philosophies.



ALTERNATIVES TO LIBERALISM

- Classical liberalism is perhaps the dominant ideology of our time.
- After WWII, countries moved from authoritarian governments to liberal ones.
- Economies moved away from planning and toward markets for decision making.
- Governments have moved to democratization.



SOCIALISM

- Socialism is an economic system that relies on public ownership of productive resources and relies on planning to determine what will be produced and how much it will cost.
- Whereas capitalism is more concerned with generating wealth and efficiency, socialism is more concerned with equality of outcome.
- Wealth is more evenly distributed, and people tend to get the minimum of what they need: food, clothing, housing, and health care.
- There's less of everything to go around, and consumers tend to see lower quality and less choice.
- Most states have a mixed economy, which is an economy that includes elements of both socialism and capitalism.



COMMUNISM

- Communism implies a high degree of socialism, and a one-party state.
- Soviet communism had all the problems of socialism and then some.
 - While it did mean that people had jobs, homes, and health care, consumer goods were often inferior and in short supply.
- Other communist governments included China, North Korea, Cuba, and Yugoslavia.



RADICAL ROOTS: THE MARX BROTHER

- Karl Marx did not believe in free markets, God, capitalism, or democracy.
- Labor theory of value: The worth of anything is reflected by the labor it took to produce it.
- Dialectical materialism: the conditions of production determine the material and political conditions of life.
- Marx promoted socialism: developing as a response to the excesses of industrial capitalism.
 - The workers would control the means of production, and people's needs would be met "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."



ANARCHISM: THE ONLY GOOD GOVERNMENT IS NO GOVERNMENT

- Anarchism is an ideology that argues that human institutions such as big government and big business make us worse off, not better off.
 - They want nearly no government.
 - Their vision is driven by localized cooperation.
- Anarchists range from people who think society should be organized collectively (anarchocommunists) to a libertarian strain that believes in private property and free enterprise—just no government (and no big business).
- Anarchosyndicalists want to replace capitalism with an economy run by workers for workers, with production for use, not for profit, and an end to wages.



NAZISM AND FASCISM

- Fascism is an ideology that glorifies the power of the state and says that the individual is not important except as part of the state.
 - “We’re right; you’re wrong if you’re against us; and we’re right because we say we’re right.”
 - Fascism glorifies the power of the state, but it’s hard to tell how that makes the majority better off.
- Fascism argues that some people are just better than others and should be in charge.
- Nazism is a variant of fascism that glorifies the state, based on appeals to allege racial superiority.
- Nazism and fascism could be said to be forms of totalitarianism, a kind of authoritarian government that relies on an arbitrary application of the law (it’s not the same for everybody) and the cult-like status of official leaders.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Other ideologies outside of classical liberalism and its variants tend to offer greater equality of outcomes but generate less overall wealth.
- Socialism is an economic system that provides greater equality of result but less equality of opportunity.
- Communism combines a socialist economy with a one-party government.
- Anarchism has not been tried on a large scale outside of the Tiv in Nigeria.
- Fascism glorifies the state; individuals are important only as part of the state.
- Nazism glorifies the state, with an expressly racist approach to politics.



EXERCISE

1. How would the place where you work be different if it was a government agency?
If it's already a public agency, what would be different if it was privatized?



EXERCISE

2. Which countries still claim to be communist? What things could cause that to change?



LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Learn how new ideologies have developed in more recent times.



POSTMODERN IDEAS ABOUT POLITICS

- Political theory scholars often refer to the current age as *postmodern*, a term that lacks any kind of precise definition.
- Sometimes it is a rejection of rationalism, the idea that through reason and evidence, we can figure out the right choices to make.



FEMINISM

- Women have only begun to receive equal political and economic rights in the last 150 years.
- Feminism: is the broad historical and contemporary movement to advance the cause of women's rights in society.
- We can find feminism that is essentially conservative, liberal, libertarian, or radical.



ENVIRONMENTALISM

- Environmentalism is the movement to preserve and protect the planet by limiting humanity's impact on the biosphere.
- Evangelical environmentalists cite biblical precedence for the need to protect the planet, noting that according to the Bible, God made us shepherds of the Earth to watch over it.
- Free-market environmentalists argue that law markets, and property rights will best protect the environment.



IDEOLOGY: A CHOICE

- People subscribe to one ideology or another because they believe that this system will work better.
 - They may make that decision based on evidence, and they may make that decision based on faith.
 - Most people are subject to the “confirmation bias,” or the tendency we have to seek and interpret new information as confirming what we already believe.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Postmodernism is sometimes a reaction against rationalism and sometimes a response to the confusion and problems of contemporary politics.
- Feminism is a broad and longstanding movement that seeks to ensure equal rights and opportunity for women in all walks of life.
- Environmentalism seeks to encourage people and policies to limit their impact on the planet and thereby preserve higher standards of living for all.



EXERCISE

1. Do you feel that women where you live are treated the same as men? Do they have the same opportunities? Are there parts of life where they don't have the same opportunities?



EXERCISE

2. What environmental laws impact your life? How would it be different if those laws didn't exist?