

Three major Western ideologies are described below—conservatism, classical liberalism, and socialism. Although there is broad agreement about the core beliefs within an ideology, it is subject to varying interpretations across individuals and across cultures. And an ideology can have distinct versions, as in the differences within socialism between its Marxist-Leninist form and its democratic socialist form.

## Conservatism

**Conservatism** attempts to prevent or slow the transition away from a society based on traditional values and the existing social hierarchy. As the word suggests, the essence of conservative ideology is to conserve the many valued elements of the system that already exists. What the conservative wishes to preserve depends on the time and place, but certain underlying elements are highly valued. Particular importance is placed on stability, tradition, and loyalty to God and country. The relationship of the individual to society and an antipathy to egalitarianism (i.e., equality of conditions) are at the core of conservatism.

**The Individual** Conservatism makes two key assumptions about human nature. First, individuals are not consistently rational. In many situations, people are emotional and are unable to reason clearly. Thus, tradition and religion, rather than reason, are viewed as the most reliable sources for guiding society because they support stability and moderate change. In the words of one British conservative, “The accumulated wisdom and experience of countless generations gone is more likely to be right than the passing fashion of the moment” (Hearnshaw 1933:22). Second, individuals are inherently unequal in intelligence, skills, and status. Some individuals and groups are superior to others, and those who are superior should be in positions of power in society and in government.

**Individual, State, and Society** Individuals have a basic need for order and stability in society. They belong to different groups that are unequal in power, status, and material possessions. Social harmony is maintained when these various groups work cooperatively together. Traditional values and ethics provide the guidelines for group cooperation as well as individual behavior. And it is the role of societal institutions such as the family and the church, as well as government (the state), to communicate and enforce these values.

Individual liberty is valued and individual rights should be protected, but only within a framework of mutual responsibility. No individual or group has absolute freedom to do whatever it wants; rather, each should behave in a manner consistent with society’s traditional values. The superior groups should be allowed to enjoy the benefits and exercise the responsibilities associated with their position, but they should also protect the weak from severe hardships, a responsibility that the French call *noblesse oblige*—“the obligations of the nobility.” And government should use its power to maintain social order; to preserve traditional values, especially regarding family life, religion, and culture; and to protect private property rights. State military and economic power should also promote the country’s interests abroad and defend against intervention by other states.

**Equality** Because inequality is a natural aspect of society, it is foolish and even dangerous to seek egalitarianism. Forced equality is unwise because it disrupts the natural, cooperative hierarchy among groups, causes social conflict, and endangers the fundamental goal of order and stability. Attempts to force equality are also unacceptable because they directly undermine individual liberty, which is of greater importance than equality.

Thomas Hobbes, Plato (427–347 B.C.E., who proposed rule by philosopher-kings), and Confucius (551–479 B.C.E., who celebrated rigid social hierarchy), all reflect core values of conservatism. Other important advocates of conservatism include Edmund Burke, a British member of Parliament; British prime ministers Benjamin Disraeli and Winston Churchill; and, to a lesser extent, American Founding Fathers James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. In the conversation at Burger King at the beginning of this chapter, Glen's views were generally consistent with conservatism.

Most contemporary conservatives are pragmatic. They are less concerned about the form of government than about the use of government to promote order and stability. The conservative perspective is sympathetic to government intervention when the objective of the policy is to maintain or return to traditional values such as patriotism, family, morality, piety, and individual responsibility. In every era, conservatives resist current threats to the traditions they value. Today, those threats often include multiculturalism; expansion of the welfare state; and forced equality across class, race, and gender. A conservative government might actively support a state religion, expand its military power to influence other countries, suppress disorderly protest, provide minimal relief to those in poverty, or make abortion illegal. Some new policies are supported, but the rationale is always “to change in order to preserve,” as the British Conservative Party has put it. Many of the contemporary political leaders who come closest to the spirit of conservatism are in certain countries in Asia and the Middle East (e.g., Brunei, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia) where social hierarchy, order, and traditional values are celebrated.

### Classical Liberalism

The ideology of **classical liberalism** places the highest value on individual freedom and posits that the role of government should be quite limited. In part, this ideology emerged in the 16th through 18th centuries as a response to rigid, hierarchical societies, such as those in feudal Europe. Intellectuals and those in commerce, among others, desired to be free from the constraints imposed by the dominant political, economic, and religious institutions in their society. They posited that each person should live responsibly but also should be allowed to live in the manner dictated by her beliefs and to enjoy fully the benefits of her efforts, with minimal limitations from these stifling, conservative institutions.

**The Individual** John Locke (1632–1704), a primary theorist of classical liberalism, describes individuals in a “state of nature” prior to the existence of government (see his *Second Treatise of Government*, 1690). Each person enjoys natural rights to life, liberty, and property. Each person is rational and has the ability to use reason to determine the sensible rules (the “laws of nature”) that shape how

she should live in pursuit of her own needs and without harming others. Notice two important contrasts with conservatism for classical liberalism: (1) the freedom of each individual to pursue her natural rights is the highest value; and (2) each individual is rational and responsible, and is the best judge of what is in her self-interest. (Notice also that the classical liberal's view of the state of nature is far more benign than the one described by conservative Hobbes as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.")

**Individual, State, and Society** A person's full capabilities can be realized only if she is not limited by a conservative social order in which tradition and hierarchy are dominant. The social order celebrated in conservatism not only restricts individual freedom but also stifles progressive change and growth. In the classical liberal view, no one is forced to accept the authority of the state (government). Individuals can consent to be governed—choosing to "contract" with a minimal government, the main roles of which are limited to clarifying the laws of nature and enforcing the occasional violations of those laws. The state should mainly be a night watchman, a low-profile police officer who ensures the basic safety and freedom of every individual. Thomas Paine's (1737–1809) slogan captures this perspective: "That government is best which governs least."

For similar reasons, classical liberals celebrate a *laissez-faire* economy, a view particularly associated with the writings of Adam Smith noted briefly in Focus. Each person should be free to pursue her economic goals by any legal activity and to amass as much property and wealth as possible. Individual actors are guided by enlightened self-interest, and the overall economy is structured by the "invisible hand" of the market and free trade. There are only a few circumstances where the state should act to constrain this freedom of economic action.

**Equality** Equality before the law (equality of opportunity) is important, but government should not attempt to create material equality (equality of outcomes). People pursue their interests in different ways and with different levels of success. Even in situations of hardship, government action is undesirable because it undermines individual initiative and independence. Thus, government should have no significant role in addressing inequalities.

Among the many political thinkers associated with classical liberalism, in addition to John Locke and Adam Smith, are Jeremy Bentham (1748–1831) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). More contemporary advocates of classical liberalism (some of whom are labeled "neoconservatives") include economists F. A. Hayek (1899–1992) and Milton Friedman (1912–2006) and political commentator William F. Buckley (1925–2008). At Burger King, Byron was most aligned with this perspective. Many contemporary political regimes are powerfully influenced by classical liberalism. Its emphases on limited government, individual liberty, and *laissez-faire* economics are among the central themes in many ongoing debates about public policy and government action.

*A brief aside:* If you are an American, you might be confused by these characteristics of liberalism because, in the United States, a "liberal" is someone who supports substantial government intervention and public policies that increase

equality of outcomes. This confusion of terminology emerged during Franklin Delano Roosevelt's tenure as U.S. president (1933–1945). Faced with a devastating economic depression, Roosevelt argued for a "New Deal" in which the national government had a clear duty and responsibility to assist actively in economic recovery and in social action. This expanded government would regulate business, create jobs, and distribute extensive welfare services to the citizens, including cash payments and increased public provision of education, housing, health care, and so on. Roosevelt's political opponents labeled his policies "socialism." He knew this was a very negative label in the United States, so he called himself and his policies "liberal," contrasting them with the "conservative" policies of others (mainly Republicans, such as the previous president, Herbert Hoover) who emphasized limited government, laissez-faire economics, and individual freedom. Notice that, in the general language of political ideologies, what Roosevelt was calling conservatism was mostly classical liberalism, and what he was proposing as liberalism was a very modest version of democratic socialism (described below). Roosevelt's meanings of liberals versus conservatives were adopted in the United States, but not in most other countries. In this text, the traditional ideology of liberalism will be called classical liberalism to distinguish it from the American understanding of liberalism as an ideology of extensive government and reduced inequality.

### **Socialism**

For **socialism**, *the most important goal is to provide high-quality, relatively equal conditions of life for everyone, with an active state assisting in the achievement of this goal.* Many people were still impoverished and exploited in the 19th-century world, despite the emergence of industrialization and democracy. Socialism evolved as a distinctive ideology among theorists concerned about the plight of people who had relatively little economic, social, or political power. They were dissatisfied that neither conservatism nor classical liberalism revealed much concern for improving the conditions of these groups. Socialism articulated a vision through which economic and political power could be directed to benefit all groups in society.

**The Individual** In the socialist perspective, people are social and caring by nature. They are not innately selfish and aggressive, although negative social conditions can produce such behavior. Every individual's attitudes and behaviors are largely determined by the environment of family, community, and work. Thus, it is crucial to create an environment that encourages individuals to place the highest value on cooperation and sharing and to act in ways that increase the collective good of all.

**Individual, State, and Society** Because the good of the society as a whole is the most important goal, some of an individual's interests must be subordinated to, or at least coordinated with, the overall interests and needs of everyone in the society. All groups, from national organizations (e.g., trade unions) to local organizations (e.g., workplaces, social clubs) to the family, must encourage everyone to act in ways that result in cooperation and service to the common good. The state has a crucial role, both through policies that provide every citizen with good material living conditions and through education and civic training. Thus, government

must take an expansive role in society, ensuring that every citizen has access to high-quality education, shelter, health care, and jobs, as well as financial security against economic uncertainty. The state is also much more active in controlling powerful actors and self-interested groups whose behavior will harm the collective good of the society, and thus it engages in extensive regulation of both the economic sphere and the social sphere. When everyone enjoys comfortable material conditions, there is much greater willingness to work for the common good and to subordinate one's acquisitiveness and greed.

**Equality** Both the organic, hierarchical world of conservatism and the individualistic, self-serving world of classical liberalism result in societies with huge disparities of material conditions, wealth, status, and power. From the socialist perspective, these disparities and inequalities cause misery, deep alienation, and pervasive conflict in the society. Thus, the ideology of socialism centers in a deep commitment to use the power and policies of the state to increase the material, social, and political equality of all its members. It is assumed that such equality transforms people into fulfilled, happy citizens and creates a society in which alienation and conflict are greatly reduced.

There are significant variations within the ideology of socialism. Among these, two major variations should be distinguished: Marxist-Leninist socialism and democratic socialism.

**Marxist-Leninist Socialism** Marxist-Leninist socialism is a variant of socialist ideology that begins with three assumptions regarding the *forceful actions necessary to produce equality and social justice*. First, the entrenched socioeconomic elite, supported by the state that it controls, will resist change by every means available, and thus change will require violent overthrow of the existing order. Second, the transformation to socialism will be complex and face many obstacles in the existing system. Thus, a powerful government must be established and allowed total control of the process of change. Among the government's most important tasks is the restructuring of the economic system, with public ownership of all the major resources in the society and the production and distribution of goods and services for human need. And third, a small, dictatorial leadership group must be empowered to manage the government and to effect the complex changes in the economy and society. Once relative equality is achieved, both this leadership group and the powerful government supporting it can be eliminated. They will, in the words of Marx, "wither away" and be replaced by decentralized, citizen-run politics and an efficient administration.

The core elements of this version of socialism are the theories of Karl Marx and its modified practical applications by V. I. Lenin in the Soviet Union and by Mao Zedong in China. These variations of socialism are often called communism, Marxism, or revolutionary socialism as well as Marxist-Leninist socialism. In the last 70 years, this version of socialism has been attempted in more than 60 countries, ranging from A (Albania, Angola, Algeria) to Z (Zimbabwe). Most of the major regimes that implemented Marxist-Leninist socialism have since abandoned it. Some conclude that the Marxist ideology of communism has been totally discredited.

**Democratic Socialism** The other major variation within socialist ideology is **democratic socialism**. This variant also *treats egalitarianism as its primary goal, and assumes that the changes can be effected by a government that comes to power and rules by democratic means*. It rejects the idea that a society based on justice and equality can be created only through violence and repression. This government's authority is democratic, derived from consent of the governed in fair elections. In democratic socialism, the state's policies emphasize the substantial reduction of inequalities in material conditions, power, and status, but the state does not attempt to achieve complete equality of material conditions. The approach to change is gradual, placing continued importance on the protection of individual rights and freedoms, even as it transforms the socioeconomic order. The government might own some of the major economic resources in the society and it strongly regulates much of the economy, but it does not attempt to plan and control all aspects of the economic system (Przeworski 1985, 1993).

The ideology of democratic socialism is rooted in utopian socialists such as Thomas More (1478–1535), Robert Owen (1771–1856), and Claude-Henri St. Simon (1760–1825), who envisioned voluntaristic communities based on cooperation. Twentieth-century variations include the Fabian socialists such as George Bernard Shaw, Sydney Webb, and Beatrice Webb, who were convinced that the people would elect democratic governments that gradually created socialist societies, and the revisionist Marxists such as Karl Kautsky, who argued that violence and repression by the state was not a legitimate means for achieving lasting change. At Burger King, Julie was probably the person closest to this ideology.

One vision of democratic socialism was articulated by the British economist Sir William Beveridge in a major policy statement commissioned by the British government in 1941. This statement was prompted by the dismay among British leaders regarding the very poor education and health of many young British working-class men who were drafted for World War II (hence, another British example of political ideas shaped by socioeconomic conditions). In response to these circumstances, Beveridge argued that in a society operating according to the tenets of classical liberalism, there are five tragic effects on some people. Thus, the government should act as a **"welfare state"** (Castles 2004), implementing policies to overcome each of these five effects:

1. **Disease:** to be combated by public provision of subsidized or free health care services, including doctors, treatment, hospitals, and medicines.
2. **Want:** to be eliminated by public provision of sufficient money and other services to raise people above poverty.
3. **Squalor:** to be reduced by state provision of publicly owned and subsidized housing affordable to all.
4. **Ignorance:** to be eliminated by universal, free public education.
5. **Idleness:** to be overcome by government policies that ensure meaningful work for every person.

The principles of democratic socialism have substantially shaped the current governance, social life, and material conditions in some contemporary social market

systems present in countries such as Denmark, Germany, and Sweden. This socialist ideology is also advocated by some of the **political elites** in the postcommunist countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

### Some Further Points About “Isms”

To advance your knowledge regarding particular belief systems, you might take a course in political theory, political ideology, or world cultures, or pursue the “ism” of interest at the library or via the Internet. The preceding section identified three major political ideologies that influence the political belief systems of many citizens in Western countries. There are many other significant political ideologies in the contemporary political world, at least some of which are “isms.” Table 1 briefly characterizes the essence of some of the political “isms” that you might encounter. Broader systems of religious-social beliefs also have great political importance, including Christian fundamentalism, Islamic fundamentalism, Confucianism, and Hinduism. It is almost impossible to understand politics in the contemporary world without considering the influence of these religious “isms” on beliefs and actions.

**TABLE 1**

#### **A Brief Primer on Political “Isms”**

In politics and political theory, there are many “isms”—systems of beliefs that address how societies should function, how people should live and what they should value, and how political systems should operate. Entire books are devoted to each of the “isms” below, but here they are characterized in 40 words or less to give you an orienting (dangerously simplified?) idea about the core vision regarding any “ism” with which you are unfamiliar.

**Anarchism**—a moral-political ideal of a society that is untouched by relationships of power and domination among human beings; there is an absence of organized government.

**Authoritarianism**—a system in which the political rights and interests of individuals are subordinated, usually by coercion, to the interests of the state.

**Capitalism**—linking politics to the political economy, it is a system dominated by a (laissez-faire) market economy in which economic actors are generally free from state constraints.

**Collectivism**—a doctrine holding that the individual’s actions should benefit some kind of collective organization such as the state, a tribe, or the like, rather than the individual.

**Communism**—based on the theories of Karl Marx, the essential goal of this system is the socialization of societal resources with the state owning land, labor, and capital and using them to promote the equal welfare of all citizens.

*(Continued)*