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1. Preface: introduction to Liberalism

On the 4th of November 1789, the famous Liberal and Welshman, Richard Price, gave a sermon that sparked lively political discussion; he spoke of several political ideas that attract much attention to this day.

Richard Price spoke in a meeting in London to recall 'the Glorious Revolution of 1688' and discussed his response to another Revolution at the time in France. The Glorious Revolution was a significant event in British history, and several ideas belonging to renowned thinker John Locke – such as the **social agreement**, **natural rights** and **tolerance** – reflected the new ideas of a period known as the **starting place of liberal thinking**. Richard Price intended to show how the French revolutionists were spreading and developing the liberal principles mentioned by Locke a century earlier.

Richard Price was a man of his time, with ideas reflecting the popular liberal ideas of the age, including those of well-known philosophers like Immanuel Kant. This period is called the *Age of Enlightenment*, during which several liberalism's central principles were established, such as **individualism** and **rationalism**. Much focus was also given to the potential of changing the international regime to ensure peaceful collaboration in place of war.

The 19th century involved disagreement between the different **classical and modern** liberal streams, as questions regarding **justice**, **equality** and **democracy** arose during the Industrial Revolution. Socialists such as Robert Owen questioned **classical liberalism**. At the same time, new liberal thinkers appeared and figures like John Stuart Mill became well-known. These modern socialists attempted to unify liberal individualism with more progressive social ideas such as **freedom** and **equality**. These ideas led to the social liberalism in the work of those such as T.H. Green, L.T. Hobhouse and the Welshman Henry Jones. They emphasised the role of the **liberal state**, and this political agenda was seen in the United Kingdom in the politics and policies of Lloyd George.

During the 20th century, further attempts were made to connect liberalism and equality, particularly the idea that state intervention was necessary in achieving this. The work of Isaiah Berlin, discussing **negative freedom and positive freedom**, shows some of the potential tensions created. Following the depression of the 1930s and 1940s, the ideas of liberal economists such as John Maynard Keynes came to heavily influence employment and economic policies in Wales and beyond.

At the end of the 20th century, the American John Rawls pronounced his egalitarian liberalism principles, prompting a libertarian response from Robert Nozick. Several discussions continue today on the themes introduced by Rawls and Nozick, including an attempt to redefine ideas such as rights, equality and freedom in the context of modern society. Although the Liberal Party is currently weak, in Wales and beyond, this is apparently in part due to the fact that liberalism principles are now seen across society. It can be said that they provide a framework for the political discussions of our time. And as we face new political challenges on subjects such as **citizenship**, **civic participation**, **multiculturalism** and **globalisation**, it must be remembered that these ideas and discussions originated in the liberal tradition.

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2. The roots of Liberalism

The term 'liberal' extends back to the Middle Ages and was used in several different contexts over the centuries. For example, the Latin term, *liber*, describes a class of free men – men who were not slaves. The term was more recently used to suggest generosity. Liberal can also be used to describe our social attitudes. A person is described as liberal if open to a wide variety of perspectives.

Again, although the term dates to the Middle Ages, liberalism was not used as a political label until the early 19th century. It is possible that this first occurred in Spain in 1812, when the name *Liberals* was used by a new party established in opposition to the more conservative groups supporting the king. The term was afterwards very quickly developed in politics. By around the 1840s, liberalism was a term used across Europe to describe radical political ideas.

Liberalism was not however used as a clear political label until the early 19th century. The type of ideas and principles that could be described as liberalism had gradually developed for almost 300 years previously. For example, according to John Gray – an expert in history and development of liberalism – it was in the 17th century that some of the ideas were developed that would eventually form liberalism.

There has been much discussion on how liberal ideas developed during this period – between the 1600s and 1800s. Those studying the history of political ideas have chosen to follow several different paths, addressing a number of important social and political developments. These however are the most prominent:

- The number of significant **political revolutions** that happened in England (1688), America (1776) and France (1789); they highlighted, in different ways, important liberal themes. The themes included individualism, tolerance, freedom and the need to restrict political power.
- **The Enlightenment**, namely the cultural movement seen during the 18th century. This movement questioned the traditions of religion, politics and learning, showing that people could use their ability to reason in order to understand the world.
- The development of the **modern capitalist society** of the 17th century, when a middle class was created. The members of this new social class were not willing for their economic and political freedom to be restricted, as had happened under the absolute monarchy system during previous centuries.

It is therefore apparent that a number of significant developments contributed to the development of liberal ideas. Universally, political, social and economic changes were seen between the 17th and 19th centuries and one of the outcomes that followed was liberalism.

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3. Streams of Liberalism

As in almost every other political ideology, liberalism was not a single neat body of ideas. As a result, while some have tried to argue that liberalism is a single pure doctrine, the majority believe in several streams of liberalism. The most prominent are Classical Liberalism and Modern Liberalism. As seen below, both streams share the same main liberal principles, such as individualism and freedom. However, over the years, those belonging to the two separate streams have considered these principles in a different way. This has led to a very different opinion on how society should be organised.

3.1 Classical Liberalism

Classical Liberalism is the oldest of the two streams. By the beginning of the industrial age during the first decades of the 19th century, Classical Liberalism had gained very vast support, across the Anglo-Saxon world. Indeed, as the 19th century is considered the golden age of this stream of liberalism, it is sometimes referred to as 'Liberalism of the 19th century'.

Classical liberalism arguments have been presented in several different ways over the years, but they tend to emphasise the following:

- **Abstract individualism:** The liberal emphasis upon the individual is very apparent in the ideas of classical liberalism. This is an extreme individualism. Society is seen as no more than a collection of individuals trying to look after their different needs and wishes. They believe that people are independent and can look after themselves. Also, that the individual has no responsibility towards other individuals or society in general.
- **Negative freedom:** The Classical Liberalist's perspective of the nature of society – that is, a collection of independent individuals – influences their consideration of freedom. Their perspective has been described as negative. They believe that the individual is free if left alone to live life without intrusion, and that the individual may behave in any way he or she sees acceptable (whilst respecting the law, of course). This is described as a negative perspective as it believes that anything preventing the individual from accomplishing different tasks should be eliminated.
- **Limited state:** The idea of negative freedom, in turn, influences the Classical Liberalist's ideas on the role of state. The feelings of Classical Liberalists towards the state were seen in the words of Tom Paine describing it as 'a necessary evil' – something necessary, yet nothing to be praised. On the one hand, the state is necessary as it maintains order and therefore prevents conflict between individuals. An orderly society would be impossible without rules – pure negative freedom would mean permanent instability as individuals conflicted. But on the other hand, Classical Liberalists state that the state should not be celebrated or praised, as it is sure to lead to restricting much of everyone's freedom. So, to keep as much as possible to the idea of negative freedom, Classical Liberalists believe that the state should be substantially limited. Generally speaking, the state should not be allowed to do anything more than it must to maintain law and order and safeguard individuals and their property. Every other responsibility should belong to the independent individuals living in society. As such, Classical

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Liberalists do not believe in the concept of state intervention in important social or economic policies, such as education, health or employment.

As noted above, the first half of the 19th century was the golden age of this stream of liberalism. During this period, it became a very popular political idea. The development of the modern capitalist society made people feel that they had an opportunity to control their lives. For example, society was now more mobile, and its structure was changing. Therefore, it is understandable that political ideas limiting state intervention and emphasising individual freedom were very popular in some circles.

However, Classical Liberalism is more than just a body of political ideas belonging to the 19th century which is now of only historic interest. Although this stream of liberalism became much less popular by the early 20th century, many of the arguments and principles were seen to gain new support from around the 1970s onwards. The work of figures such as Friedreich von Hayek, Ayn Rand and Robert Nozick supported a modern form of classical liberalism. Once again, it was in the Anglo-Saxon world, and the United States and United Kingdom in particular, that these neo-liberal ideas began – especially during the era of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in Britain during the 1980s. However, following economic globalisation, they were seen to spread across the rest of the world by the early 21st century. This more recent stream of thinking is very often called ‘libertarianism’, especially during discussions between people like Nozick and egalitarian liberals such as John Rawls. But the term ‘neo-liberalism’ is now very popular in describing the ideology of Reagan and Thatcher. It has developed emphasising not only economic policies opposing state intervention and emphasising the market, but those that also give a lot of value to individualism, wealth and competition within public sectors such as health. For these reasons, neo-liberalism may be linked to the conservative tradition (the connections will be further discussed in the unit on Conservatism).

3.2 Modern Liberalism

By the 1880s, some liberalists wanted a change of direction, reconsidering some of the Classical Liberalism arguments. The backdrop was the further development of industrial capitalism during the second half of the 19th century. Some in society had successfully become wealthy due to the Industrial Revolution. At the same time, there were serious social issues. Poverty, illness, a lack of education and difficult working conditions were seen. Due to these issues, a number of liberalists struggled to defend some of the classical ideas. They began to question whether the state should intervene in fields such as education, working conditions and healthcare to help individuals. Augmenting this discussion were the socialist ideas and the connection between politics and social and economic problems.

This eventually led to a new stream of liberalism – Modern Liberalism. This development is often linked to the work of those such as T.H. Green, L.T. Hobhouse and J.A. Hobson between the 1880s and 1920s. This stream of liberalism would indeed develop into one of great importance during the 20th century, with great influence upon the social and economic policies of most western countries. Although its influence has lessened during the last decades, as neo-liberal ideas increased in popularity since the 1970s, Modern Liberalism continues to be an

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important stream of thinking in the liberal tradition. Modern Liberalists generally emphasise the following:

- **Individualism:** Modern Liberalists look at individualism in a very different way to Classical Liberalists. The social individualism of Modern Liberalists continues to focus upon the individual. This individualism however also considers the connection between people and wider units, such as family, society and even the nation. For example, T.H. Green states that society, and the friendship and dependency that can develop as a result, is very important in order to give individuals the opportunity to discover their true character and reach their potential.
- **Positive freedom:** Modern Liberalists have also given another meaning to freedom. They believe that freedom demands much more than negative action only that means eliminating obstacles and leaving the individual alone. They believe that true freedom calls for giving fair opportunity to the individual to develop their ability and understanding of the world around them in order to reach their potential as a person. To create such conditions, positive steps will need to be taken to ensure social, economic and political opportunities for the individual, allowing them to be an independent person.
- **An interventionist state:** As well as another meaning of freedom, Modern Liberalists also look differently at the role of the state. They believe it is not possible for each individual to receive the freedom to develop and reach their potential if the state is very limited, concentrating solely on keeping the peace. As a result, Modern Liberalists support a state that intervenes in social areas (e.g. the fields of education and health) and in the economy (e.g. through work creation schemes) in order to improve individual situations and social equality. This will then give the freedom to members of society to live independent lives.

Classical Liberalism	Modern Liberalism
Abstract individualism	Social individualism
Negative freedom	Positive freedom
Limited state	Interventionist state
Negative rights	Positive rights
<i>Laissez-faire</i> economy	Economic control

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4. The key elements of Liberalism

4.1 Individualism

Individualism is a completely central liberal principle. It means that liberals believe that individual welfare should come before social welfare, or the welfare of any other collective group. They believe that people are different individuals in the first place, and that this fact is important. First, each individual person is unique with their own character, taste and identity. They also believe that each person is equal in moral status, as everyone, in the first place, is an individual.

Following this, liberals want to create a society that will allow people to succeed and develop, living their lives as they wish. This means that liberals are doubtful of any political viewpoint that attempts to control too much of an individual's life, without leaving them to follow their own course in life.

However, although individualism has been a very important principle in liberal work of all kinds over the centuries, liberals have not always agreed how to define it. The American liberal, John Dewey (1931), explained that within liberalism some believe in 'abstract individualism' and others in 'social individualism'.

- **Abstract individualism:** This is the individualism closest to the classical stream of liberalism. The individual is considered a completely independent creature that 'owns' its body and its personal abilities. As a result, only the individual receives the praise for any success during their life, and they will not owe any debt or thanks to wider society. This perspective is sometimes described as an atomist one, as it considers individuals as a collection of isolated atoms without any connection to each other.
- **Social individualism:** Unlike the above, Modern Liberalists connect individualism with wider units, such as family, society and even the nation. For example, T.H. Green declared the importance of society and its inherent friendship and co-dependency in order to give individuals the opportunity to discover their true character and reach their potential.

Liberalists have looked at individualism in very different ways over the years. Despite these differences, each liberal agrees nevertheless on the general point, that priority should be given to individual welfare. In other words, the individual is the starting point for every liberal – the most important unit.

4.2 Freedom

Alongside individualism, Liberalism (as the name suggests) considers freedom a key principle. This emphasis on freedom is a natural result of the belief that society should be organised to allow the individual to live their life as they wish. In order to be able to do that, the individual must have freedom.

Liberals nevertheless see that absolute freedom for individuals is not practical. Absolute freedom would be able to create a situation where some individuals could use their freedom to harm others. As a result, although freedom is among the basic liberal principles, they are willing to limit that freedom for everyone to be able to live together. They believe that everyone should have as much freedom as possible without impacting the freedom of others. In the words of

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John Rawls (1971): '*that everyone is entitled to the widest possible liberty consistent with a like liberty for all*'.

But although liberals agree that freedom is a basic principle, they have not always agreed how that freedom can be practically ensured. In his famous writing *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958), Isaiah Berlin mentions two types of freedom seen in the work of liberals, which are 'negative freedom' and 'positive freedom'.

- **Negative freedom:** This is the type of freedom in which Classical Liberals believe. The idea behind negative freedom is that an individual is free if left alone to live their life without intervention, and that they may behave as they wish. This freedom is described as *negative* as it believes that any obstacles that could prevent the individual from achievement should be eliminated.
- **Positive freedom:** Unlike the above, Modern Liberals believe that freedom calls for much more than merely eliminating obstacles and leaving the individual alone. They rather believe that true freedom calls for creating conditions giving the individual a fair opportunity to develop their abilities and understanding of the world and, therefore, they will be able to reach their potential as a person. In order to do that, they believe that *positive* steps need to be taken to ensure that the individual gets the opportunity socially, economically and politically to be an independent person.

It is not only their consideration of freedom that has prompted discussion among liberals. They also have very different ideas with regards to how to organise a political society, and the role of the state.

4.3 Rights

The concept of rights is currently very important in political discussions. It is also an idea which is central to the liberal view of the world. Indeed, the importance of rights now reflects how key liberal ideas have become an important part of society.

A right is simply a provision allowing an individual or group of people to behave or be treated in a way and which, at the same time, places a duty upon others to keep to this regime. Early liberals from the 17th and 18th centuries, such as John Locke and Thomas Jefferson, argued that everyone has natural rights – namely God-given rights which are common to all, whoever they are and whatever their background. Indeed, according to Jefferson (who happened to be a friend of the Welshman Richard Price and influenced by some of his ideas) these are inalienable rights, as people acquire them only for being human; so they must be accepted and followed. It was said that these natural rights are wholly necessary in order to live a meaningful life. Locke believed that the individual had three natural rights, the right to 'life, liberty and property'. Jefferson was of a slightly different viewpoint, regarding whether property could be treated as a natural God-given right. As a result, he described our natural rights as the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Liberals do not now very often refer to natural rights. The idea of human rights has become more common. The principle behind both ideas however – that every individual, no matter who they are, has basic rights – is very similar. The main difference is that today's liberals, in discussing human rights, consider them as rights agreed upon by our ability to reason, and not God-given rights.

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Due to this emphasis placed by liberals upon the individual, and as they also wish for freedom for each individual to live life as they wish, it is understandable why liberals like the idea that everyone has basic rights. These rights have been sometimes used to obstruct the power of the state. As an example, Locke emphasised that the main role of state is to ensure that members of society have their natural rights. If this happens, he stated that people ought to keep to the law. However, Locke stated (and it must be remembered that this was a person living during the 17th century) that it would be right for people to rebel against the government should it not safeguard their natural rights.

Society and politics have changed significantly since the days of Locke and Jefferson. Nevertheless, their arguments continue to be very relevant to liberals. For that reason, liberals are often very critical when states operate in ways that endanger individual human rights, for example by limiting the rights of people to freedom of expression, freedom of conscience or the freedom to gather in a crowd. For liberals, this is a sign of a state stepping in too far and preventing individuals from living free lives as they wish.

4.4 Rationalism

The development of liberalism followed the Enlightenment – a movement during the 18th century questioning traditional ideas on religion, politics and learning through the belief that people can use their ability to reason in order to understand the world. As a result, the influence of the Enlightenment and emphasis on rationalism has influenced liberalism in several ways.

First, liberals want freedom for everyone partly as they believe that people are reasonable and considerate, and that they can think for themselves, and decide which path to follow during their lives. This does not mean that liberals believe people are incapable of making mistakes. It however means that liberals do not believe in paternal ideas, which tell people how they should live their lives.

Secondly, the emphasis on rationalism means that liberals believe in progress. They believe that the increase in knowledge over the last centuries, the scientific revolution, means that people have a better understanding of the nature of their world. Also, as we can reason, people can try to organise the world for the better. It is also expected that each generation, in its turn, adds to the store of knowledge, to achieve further progress in the future.

Thirdly, the emphasis on reason means that liberals believe in discussion. They accept that conflict – for example about how to share or how to use scarce resources – will happen in any society. Nevertheless, when this happens, liberals believe that open discussion is the only way to overcome this. They believe that this will succeed, as people are reasonable. And in discussion they will see that conflict is pointless and it could lead to violence or unfortunately war.

4.5 Justice and equality

Justice can generally be defined as a matter of making a moral decision on how to share opportunities or resources among members of society, in the fairest way. Liberals have three different definitions of equality.

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The first definition, **basic equality**, believes in basic equality for all. This means that liberals believe that the life of everyone is of equal value. Basic equality, in turn, leads liberals to believe in **formal equality**. It means that everyone should get the same formal status in society, and that each person, no matter their background, has the same rights. Liberals oppose any regime that gives opportunity to some but not others, because of gender, skin colour, religion or social class. The most common examples of formal equality are 'legal equality' and 'political equality'. The first requires equal treatment by the legal regime for all members of society, regardless of any other social factors (race, gender, class). The second requires equal treatment for all by the political regime, for example by giving the same voting rights to all and ensuring that all votes are of equal value.

Thirdly, liberals emphasise **equal opportunities**, namely that everyone should get the same opportunity to succeed within society. This does not mean that liberals believe in absolute equality – that is, they do not believe that life outcomes should be the same for all and that there should not be any difference in standard of living or wealth. But the starting point should be the same for all, accepting thereafter that individuals will go in different directions during their lives. Liberals are doubtful of the idea of absolute equality, as we are all individuals with different talents and different personalities and not everyone wishes to climb in society.

The three above types of equality have been central to liberals in deciding how to achieve justice for all in society. Classical and Modern Liberalists however define equality differently. Both types of liberals agree with the definition of basic equality and formal equality. But things are quite different when discussing equal opportunities.

Classical Liberals believe that only very small steps need to be taken to give equal opportunities to members of society. They believe that if there are arrangements for ensuring formal equality, and that the legal and political arrangements do not give any group an unfair advantage (e.g. that some jobs are given to men only or that education is available to white people only), it can be said that equal opportunity exists for all. In other words, for Classical Liberals, equal opportunity means the removal of every formal obstacle to progress in society. In comparison, Modern Liberals believe that much more needs to be done. For these liberals, not only does the lack of any formal legal or political obstacles need to be ensured, but also that no other social factors will impede them. So Modern Liberals believe that ensuring real equal opportunities requires the state to provide education and healthcare for all. They believe that a level playing field can only be achieved through the giving of social support, with equal opportunities to climb in society.

4.6 Tolerance and pluralism

As there are many different individuals in society, there is a wide range of moral, cultural and political ideas and practices. Liberals strongly believe in tolerance of diversity. They believe that different individuals can only live free lives if people are willing to accept that others will, perhaps, choose to think or behave in a manner with which they do not agree. The emphasis on tolerance and the connection between that and individual freedom goes back a long way in the history of liberalism. It received much attention in the work of early liberals such as John Locke (1689) and specifically in his defence of religious freedom. In his famous writing, *A Letter*

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Concerning Toleration (1689), Locke stated that state intervention was not right in the task of 'looking after the souls of men'.

But some liberals believed that society is more than something to be tolerated, that includes moral, cultural and political diversity. They believe that social pluralism should be considered as positive and that it should be celebrated and promoted. For example, in his famous volume, *On Liberty* (1859), J.S. Mill argued for a society that allows many different ideas and that discusses them openly. He believed that this would promote discussion, learning and social progress.

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5. The foundations of a liberal state

Although liberals emphasise the freedom of everyone, they accept that no peaceful, tolerant society with equality for all would be possible with absolute freedom. Without any political or legal regime for keeping order, individuals could use their freedom to abuse or gain advantage over others. This would cause a situation where each member of society would be able to threaten others or be threatened by others. It is therefore apparent that all our freedom depends on ensuring that individuals will not threaten each other. For this reason, liberals accept that a state needs to be created for everyone to have a fair chance.

5.1 Social covenant

Liberals defend the need for a state stating that a social covenant (agreement) is needed. Two of the earliest liberal thinkers mentioned this during the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Despite an important difference between the political arguments of Hobbes and Locke, both of their work imagined life in the early stages when no government existed – they described this as the 'natural state'. A striking description of the nature of this life was given by Hobbes. Although there would be no formal obstacles to individual freedom in the natural state, day-to-day life would be very uncertain without a body to keep order, and there would always be conflict. In the words of Hobbes, such a life would be 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.' The picture painted by Locke of life in the natural state was much less dark. Nevertheless, he stated that there would be permanent uncertainty and without any higher authority, it would be impossible to resolve any disagreement between individuals. Due to this insecurity, Hobbes and Locke agreed that reasonable individuals would want a social covenant that would lead to establishing a state to keep order. Everyone would accept that they would have to give up a little freedom to create a political and legal regime, which would be able to safeguard their rights and property.

Hobbes and Locke are not the only liberals who mentioned the social covenant. There is a similar theme in the work of Immanuel Kant during the 18th century and more recently in the work of John Rawls during the last decades of the 20th century. The social covenant covers two points central to the way in which liberals of every kind have interpreted the nature of the state.

First, this idea suggests that individuals have created the state for themselves and that its purpose is to safeguard their welfare and needs. The state is therefore an agreement between members of society. As a result, liberals believe that the authority of the state arises from the people – from the bottom up. Liberals therefore believe that individuals do not have to obey the state laws absolutely every time. As Locke stated, as the state has been established through people's agreement, those people can protest and refuse to comply. They can do this if they feel that the state has gone too far and is taking too much of their basic rights and freedom.

Secondly, in emphasising that the state is a legal agreement among the people, a social covenant is considered an entity fair to all. Liberals have consequently refused the Marxist argument, namely that the state operates for the benefit of some advantaged classes within society. Liberals rather consider the state to be an entity for maintaining order and ensuring that all within society behave within the law and treat each other fairly. Simply, the state is as a referee in a game of football.

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5.2 Composition

While liberals accept that a state is a necessity, they also know that modern states are very powerful. Liberals therefore want to ensure that the power of the state is not abused in order to interfere too much with individual freedom. Liberals therefore argue for having political and legal arrangements that will lessen the power of the state – this is the idea of composition.

A composition is a collection of rules noting duties and power of different institutions which are part of the state. One important factor in a liberal composition is that a country's composition clearly states how laws lessen the power of state. This means having a written composition that clearly notes the role of state, but also notes where the state should not have power. The first example of a composition was the Composition of the United States of America (USA) written in 1787. Following that, many written compositions were established in liberal-democratic states.

Only Israel, New Zealand and the United Kingdom are now without written composition. Written compositions usually state where the state should not intervene, through several basic rights. For example, the Bill of Rights in America, namely the first ten clauses of that state's composition.

A liberal composition not only limits the state but wishes to ensure that different bodies share political power. The Frenchman from the 18th century, Montesquieu, argues for 'sharing power'. He believed there should be clear divisions between the operational, legislative and judicial functions within any regime. This would make sure that political power is kept from the hands of an individual or small group of people. Once again, the United States of America are a good example of Montesquieu's argument, with a definite division between President, Congress and High Court. Another way of sharing political power in liberal-democratic states is through devolution or federal arrangements. Power is shared between different layers of government representing areas within the state, with every layer of government responsible for designated fields.

5.3 Liberalism and democracy

Democracy simply means 'control by the people'. By now the principle that ordinary people should be able to shape the political regime impacting their day-to-day lives is accepted by every political party, including the liberals.

But during the first half of the 18th century, many liberals questioned the new democratic ideas that were gaining popularity. Some of the period's liberal thinkers, such as the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, were concerned that these ideas could impact upon individual freedom. As democracy follows the opinion of the majority, in times of conflict the democratic way of dealing with the problem is asking for the majority's opinion and then following that path. But perhaps the majority would not choose to follow the liberal path every time. As a result, de Tocqueville worried about the risk that the majority could go against individual freedom and minority group rights.

By the late 19th century and early 20th century, liberals were of a much more positive viewpoint with regards to democracy. To begin with, several liberals had started to connect democracy to the idea of a social covenant of early liberals like John Locke. Also, modern liberals connected

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democracy to the arguments of J.S. Mill, namely that it is a good thing for people to have an opportunity to publicly discuss the political direction of society.

However, as liberals became much more positive towards democracy, it is important to understand that it was a *liberal* democracy that they supported. Democratic-liberal systems are ones that merge 'control by the people' with the liberal idea of limiting government. Such a system would:

1. hold regular elections and give the right to vote to each individual.
2. place formal restrictions upon government, usually through written constitution, and ensure that basic individual freedom is safeguarded by legal rights.

Democratic-liberal systems can generally be described as ones where most day-to-day matters can be discussed openly, and a decision made based on a simple majority. But there are also some things so important to some individuals' welfare that they should not be interfered with, even if the majority so wishes. For example, in a democratic-liberal system, even if the majority wanted to have one official religion across the state, the law would warrant freedom for every individual to worship as they wished, therefore the state would not be able to grant the majority's wish.

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6. Liberalism, the state and equality

6.1 *Liberalism and equality*

Liberals believe that three elements of equality belong to social equality, namely:

- **Basic equality:** Liberals believe that each person should have the right to basic equality and that the lives of all individuals have the same moral value.
- **Formal equality:** Liberals believe that each person should have the same formal status within society, and that everyone, regardless of background, should have the same rights and privileges. They believe society should not consider any differences between people and ensure equal opportunities for all regardless of gender, skin colour, religion or social class. This is seen with 'legal equality' (the same treatment for all under the legal system) and 'political equality' (the same treatment for all under the political system).
- **Equal opportunity:** Liberals believe that each person should have the same opportunity to develop and succeed within society. This does not mean that liberals believe in absolute equality – that is, they do not believe that life outcomes should be the same for all and that there should not be any difference in standard of living or wealth. But the starting point should be the same for all, accepting thereafter that individuals will go in different directions during their lives. Liberals are dubious of the idea of absolute equality, as we are all individuals with different talents and different personalities and not everyone wants to climb within society.

According to liberals, it is the three kinds of equality above that will ensure justice for all within society. But as with several other perspectives, Classical Liberals and Modern Liberals do not agree on how exactly equal opportunities can be created for all. They do not agree upon the role of state in ensuring equality.

6.2 *The role of state in ensuring equality*

In this section, the role of state in ensuring equality is studied, addressing the difference of opinion between Classic Liberals and Modern Liberals in this regard.

Basic equality is not addressed here, as that is a moral principle and covered with the principle of formal equality, in considering the role of the state.

With regards to formal equality, it is seen that Classical Liberals and Modern Liberals agree upon its meaning and that the state should take steps to ensure this. Overall, both kinds of liberals agree that the state should be willing to take steps to ensure a lack of formal obstacles preventing some groups from being able to make the most of important opportunities; for example, that some opportunities are not available to people due to skin colour, religion or social class. Both kinds of liberal agree that the state should have laws to ensure this (e.g. by introducing acts in the composition) preventing open prejudice. Here are examples of laws attempting to achieve this:

- Acts ensuring that some social groups (e.g. girls) are not prevented from voting in elections.

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- Acts ensuring that some social groups (e.g. people who are not landowners) are not prevented from being candidates in elections.
- Acts ensuring that employers cannot state that some jobs are only open to specific groups of people (e.g. white people only).
- Acts ensuring that individuals renting out houses/flats cannot state that they are unwilling to accept some people as possible tenants (e.g. ethnic minorities)
- Acts stating that schools or universities cannot refuse to accept students from different backgrounds (e.g. black students).

These are examples of laws created by liberal states across the world in order to ensure formal equality.

While Classical Liberals and Modern Liberals agree upon the idea of formal equality and how the state should ensure this, that is not at all true of equal opportunities. Classical Liberals believe that only very small steps need to be taken by the state to give equal opportunities to each member of society. They believe that, if the state has taken steps to ensure formal equality, for instance by creating laws like the above, that there is equal opportunity for all.

Conversely, Modern Liberals believe that much larger steps must be taken in order to ensure equal opportunities. As well as ensuring a lack of formal obstacles or prejudices, these liberals wish to ensure that no other factors will prevent them. They believe that as much as possible should be done to ensure that factors beyond their control do not prevent individuals from developing and succeeding during their lives. These factors include someone that happens to come from a poor family which means that it is hard to go to university; or someone born with an illness which requires constant care; or someone who happened to lose their job and is short of money. As a result, Modern Liberals argue that ensuring equal opportunities means that the state must be proactive, intervening in order to lessen the impact of social disadvantage. This means that liberal states must have systems and policies similar to these below:

- **Education:** the use of taxes to raise funds to create an education system open to all, where the level of education given to the individual does not depend on how rich they or their family are.
- **Health:** the use of taxes to raise funds to create a health care system open to all, where the care given to the individual does not depend on how rich they are and their ability to pay for different treatments.
- **Benefits:** the use of taxes to raise funds to create a financial fund to which everyone can turn for help during hard times, for example if they are out of work and trying to live without a regular wage; have had an accident or serious illness leaving them unable to work for a long period of time.

These are examples of social policy programmes in which Modern Liberals believe to ensure equal opportunity for all. It was between the 1930s and 1970s, when the ideas of Classical Liberals were at their most popular, that similar programmes were seen to develop, for instance across North America and Western Europe. But since the 1970s, these ideas have been criticised and the ideas of Classical Liberals and neo-liberalism have grown in popularity.

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Why do Classical Liberals argue against these public education, health and benefit systems? Because they believe in individualism and freedom, they do not like the idea of social state intervention, and especially so if it means fund raising through general taxes. As already stated, Classical Liberals consider the individual as completely independent and as 'owning' their body and personal ability. As a result, only the individual should receive praise for success during their life. And only they will own any wealth they have successfully amassed during their life – they owe no debt or thanks to society. So, the Classical Liberals believe that individual freedom means that others, including the state, should not interfere in their life and affect their ability to amass wealth as they wish. This has included arguing that the individual should not be forced to pay money to the state in order to help to maintain public services. It was argued that forcing the individual to do this would rob them of their freedom and property, as the state would not be letting them live their life according to their wishes. This perspective is seen in the words of the American philosopher Robert Nozick, '*Taxation of earnings from employment is on a par with forced labour*' (1974: 169).

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7. Liberalism and the economy

Each liberal believes that a free market economy is important. Liberals however have different viewpoints with regards to how many steps the state should take to try to regulate and steer the economy. The answer of different liberals to this question depends on whether they are classical or modern liberals.

7.1 *Laissez-faire* ideas

Classical Liberals have argued for the *laissez-faire* perspective that states that the state should not intervene at all in the economy. This means that classical liberals, over the years, have opposed state measures to regulate the economy, for instance:

- Measures restricting the length of the working day.
- Measures giving a minimum wage to each worker.
- Measures giving health and safety standards that each employer should observe.
- Measures giving environmental standards that companies and industries should observe.

The work of 18th century classical economists, like Adam Smith and David Ricardo, had influenced this viewpoint. Smith's most famous book, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), is still read by people today. It uses some of the basic principles of classical liberalism, such as negative freedom and limited state, for the economy. Smith wrote in a time when states would regulate the economy quite a bit. For instance, through the 15th and 17th centuries, many believed that states should intervene in the economy to increase the quantity of goods exported, but at the same time, decrease the quantity of good imported. One main reason for Smith's economic writing was his desire to attack this idea and show that it would be much better if the state refrained altogether from intervening in the economy. To begin with, Smith argued that if the state intervened in the economy, it limited people's freedom, for instance the freedom of company owners to decide which goods to produce, to whom they would sell them and for what price; the freedom of workers to decide for whom they would work, for how much of a wage and for how much time every week; and the freedom of customers to decide which goods they would like to buy. Also, as well as giving more economic freedom to individuals, Smith believed that the economy would be much more flexible and effective, if the state refrained from intervention. Smith believed that the economy should be considered as a market that can organise and regulate itself. As a result, the state should not intervene, for instance in cases of unemployment or inflation, leaving the 'mysterious hand' of the market to deal with them.

Similar arguments to Smith's occurred more recently by some of the New Right's neo-liberal thinkers, like Fredrich von Hayek and Milton Freedman. It could be argued that these and the politicians following their ideas, like the former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, had placed even more emphasis upon free market matters and individualism and consumerism than Smith had centuries beforehand. Smith emphasised the moral value of the market and its contribution to society, while neo-liberals like Thatcher questioned the whole idea of society and collaboration for universal benefit. This is the viewpoint of the American philosopher, Robert Nozick – who states that we are a collection of individuals who choose to work together with others or not, and for personal reasons only. Another of the present neo-liberals' most important ideas is the belief that the market is efficient, and it will always be better than political

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management of the state. For instance, Hayek said that state planning and regulation is slow and ineffective, not only with traditional economic matters, but also with social policy. This is what is behind the idea of introducing market principles in offering important services such as health. It is believed that this will lead to a more dynamic service that will better respond to 'customer' expectations.

7.2 Economic control

In opposition to the *laissez-faire* perspective, modern liberals believe that the state should be willing to play a more active role in the economy. The work of the economist John Maynard Keynes, and his book *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936) believes this. Keynes questioned whether the market could self-regulate, and deal with economic problems such as unemployment, without state intervention.

Keynes believed that the most important factor for a successful economy, and the jobs that would follow, is the general 'demand' within the economy. He argued that the state could take steps to steer the economy by increasing the level of demand. This could be achieved either by a decision to raise the level of public spending or cut taxes. Therefore, in difficult economic times, where unemployment is on the rise, one possible option would be for the state to invest in projects to build new schools, hospitals or roads. Keynes believed that using public money in this way would improve the economy in several different ways. First, other sectors of the economy would benefit, as many different materials would need to be bought for the new construction projects. Also new workers would need to be employed (e.g. engineers, builders, tradesmen) and these people would earn wages and would then spend the money in the economy. If the state intervened financially, therefore, the economy in general would grow.

Keynes' ideas were very influential for a long period of time in the 20th century, especially between the 1930s and 1970s, and especially across North America and Western Europe. But, as several western states weathered a difficult financial period during the 1970s, more attention was given to the ideas of neo-liberals like Hayek and Friedman and the emphasis on *laissez-faire* policies. But several the western states returned to some of Keynes' principles, and especially his argument for using public spending to boost the economy for a period of time following great international financial problems in 2008.

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8 Liberalism in Welsh politics

8.1 *The origin of the Liberal Party*

Whilst elements of liberalism have influenced state politics throughout the 18th century, official political Liberalism did not occur in the United Kingdom until the election of 1868, when the Liberal Party was formed. But aspects of liberalism had greatly influenced the state before that.

The election of 1868 was the first election following the passing of the Reform Act in 1867, that gave the vote to men owning a house or paying rent of £10 in the boroughs. The number of voters was seen to treble, reaching over a million men for the first time.

Three groups came together – the Whigs, Peelites and Radicals – to form the Liberal Party.

The Whigs dated back to the 17th century. Unlike the opposition – the Tories – they believed that Parliament was a higher body than the Monarchy. The Peelites were a small group of Conservatives supporting Robert Peel, the party leader in 1846. Free trade was their main interest. The Radicals were a group emphasising the need to give more the people the vote, and they believed in freedom of press and supporting the poor.

During that time Wales did not have much representation, as landowners had all the influence, and many wanted to see change. It was no surprise, then, to see the nation become liberal by the end of the century, particularly after the reform act in 1884, that gave the vote to men owning a home or paying £10 in rent in the counties, also. In 1832, there were 32 seats in Wales, and 14 of them were held by Tories, 18 by the Whigs. By 1868, the Liberal Party had officially formed and had won 23 of 33 seats, and by 1885 they had won 29 of 33 seats.

8.2 *Early Welsh radicalism*

Once again, Richard Price is a central figure as he is connected to the radicals, the group most relevant to the situation in Wales. Although the Welsh were unfamiliar with his ideas during his lifetime (1723-1791), the values for which he stood were apparent in Welsh liberalism in the 19th century.

His emphasis on freedom of press, giving the vote to more people and ensuring an accountable government laid the foundation for the kind of politics towards which the Welsh were working. Williams Jones, Llangadfan lived in the same era, and he stayed in Wales. He was well-known for supporting the French Revolution and encouraged the Welsh to move to the United States to free themselves from the grip of the British commonwealth.

Early radicalism was an academic and popular movement which developed in the 19th century as it was linked to causes such as Chartism, which asked for the vote to be given to more people. Radicalism was very popular in South Wales as it was an industrial area.

Movements such as the 'Scotch Cattle' were more militant and would punish workers if they were unwilling to support industrial action. Also, the Rebecca Riots occurred in the 30s and 40s of the century, where the farmers of rural Wales attacked tollgates that collected tolls for use of roads.

8.3 *Nonconformity and Liberalism*

The growth and influence of liberalism in Wales cannot be understood without also



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understanding the religious changes that had altered the nation during the first half of the 19th century.

This is the age were Nonconformity, or *Ymneilltuaeth* in Wales, were seen to grow. They were Christian sects wishing to break away from the Church of England and hold different services in chapels rather than Churches. One of these sects was the Unitarians, and they did not believe in the idea of the Trinity. Richard Price was a member of the Unitarians and had been very prominently for radicalism.

As well as the Congregationalists and Baptists (denominations begun in the 17th century) the Methodists were the new, powerful sect connected with the transformation of Wales into a nation of nonconformists. A Methodist 'reformation' occurred in the 18th century under the leadership of Howell Harris and William Williams Pantycelyn. Although originally part of the Church of England, by the beginning of the 19th century they had left and were giving new vigour to the nonconformist movement.

Behind this movement was a desire to improve the lives of the majority of the Welsh population, the working class and middle class. By the early 20th century, the 'social gospel' was apparent asking for social justice in the name of God.

This social, religious energy was linked by the movement leaders to the Liberal Party. That party could benefit from all the social changes and radicalism when the voting system was reformed in 1867. Wales was essentially already a 'liberal' nation due to its religion, politics and social beliefs. Between the elections of 1868 and 1888 (when the vote was given to yet more people), the nonconformist nation became also a liberal nation.

8.4 A Liberal Wales

Several the era's well-known people were part of these developments, one being Henry Richard, who became Merthyr Tydfil's member of parliament in 1868. He believed in democracy, he supported pacifism and he spoke for the farmers of rural Wales. Pacifism was part of the liberal-nonconformist agenda. There was a new interest in politics in Wales during this period – '*The Rebirth of a Nation*', according to the historian K.O. Morgan. The Sunday Closing (Wales) Act of 1881 was the first act to be passed by Westminster Parliament for Wales only since the Acts of Union with England back in 1542. This happened due to the influence of nonconformity, and the Temperance movement. Then the Wales Intermediate Education Act was passed in 1889, funding intermediate schools for Wales. This was the result of years of campaigning, following the successful establishment of Aberystwyth, Bangor and Cardiff Universities.

During the second half of the century, other figures became famous, and several them, like Michael D. Jones, T.E. Ellis and the young Lloyd George, unifying their liberal ideas with nationalism also. Michael D. Jones was very critical of the British State and its impact upon the Welsh language and culture. For that reason, therefore, he was very supportive of the plan to establish a Colony in Patagonia. T.E. Ellis and Lloyd George joined *Cymru Fydd*, a movement formed in 1886 by some of the London Welsh originally, and they wanted to see self-government in Wales. Although there was much excitement and interest, the movement came

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to an end, partly due to disagreement between members in the South and North – but more likely due to the movement's lack of deep roots and mass appeal.

Lloyd George went on to become Chancellor and Prime Minister in a Liberal government. During this period, politics was transformed. In 1910, the 'People's Budget' was passed, placing significant taxes on the upper class and their land in order to fund a social welfare programme.

The ideas of Lloyd George and Welsh liberalism from this period can be seen in the work of Sir Henry Jones, a member of the 'British Idealists' movement. The ideas of this group were the basis for modern liberalism. T.E. Green was the most famous of them. He emphasised the fact that the individual depended upon the state and society and that care was needed 'from cradle to grave'. He considered the role of government as an intervening one, to ensure individual development. This was the group that challenged classical liberalism, emphasising ideas such as 'positive freedom'.

In Welsh writings by Henry Jones, *Dinasyddiaeth Bur* ('Pure Citizenship') (1911), the difference is also apparent between liberalism and the new political movement of Socialism gaining popularity in Wales. Jones asks his readers, namely the quarrymen of North Wales, not to follow revolutionary ideas that placed the needs of the working class above others. He believed that every social class needs to work together for the universal good, and that this is pure citizenship.

8.5 The death of Liberalism in Wales

The early 20th century was indeed the golden age of Liberalism as a political party in Wales, but it was also the beginning of the end for liberal influence. Socialism was a great influence in the industrial areas, of course, and the Party faced problems with Ireland and the Suffragette movement.

Then came the First World War which was a huge shock, and by the end of the 1920s, the Labour Party was the progressive party in British politics. Several famous figures went on to work for other causes, such as David Davies who worked for peace, but the Party's influence as a parliamentary party continued in agricultural areas like Ceredigion and Powys.

Indeed, in 2017 the Party failed to return any members of parliament to Westminster for the first time in over a century. There remains one Assembly Member, Kirsty Williams, who is in coalition with the Labour Party and she holds the office of Minister for Education.

And once again, although the party has slowly declined to having hardly any influence (at the same time as the Chapels declined) the truth is that Liberalism values are an important part of Wales as a nation. It can be said that the Party declined so much as 'liberal' ideas had succeeded in becoming central in society.

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9 Liberalism and global politics

9.1 *The context of Liberalism and Realism*

Although liberalism is a very central perspective in today's politics, the situation is very different internationally. In some parts of the world, liberal ideas are harshly criticised. This is the *realist* perspective, which considers the international system as one in a state of anarchy.

This is a situation without one power keeping everyone in order. This is a school of thought that refuses the need for state and believes that people's lives would be better organised under an improved, devolved regime.

Internationally, the traditional situation of nation-states is described as 'anarchic' as there is no state or similar power keeping all of them in order. Competition and conflict are seen in international politics, and politicians should therefore emphasise safety and prepare for competition and the possibility of war.

Liberalism opposes this aspect, in the hope that we can move on from conflict, towards an international regime of collaboration and perhaps justice.

9.2 *The tradition of International Liberalism*

To see when this idea began, we look back at the age of Richard Price, referring to his work and the work of Immanuel Kant from Prussia. Like others in the Age of Enlightenment, they believed that people are capable of reasoning and they both offered ideas for establishing a federal international regime (such as the European Union but on a global scale).

Under the regime, countries of the world would have a legal, friendly relationship with each other, and they would work together to ensure permanent peace. This is similar to the present United Nations situation, but that governing body would have much more power. This law would be much more powerful, and the powerful countries of the world would have to keep to it. This is different for instance to when the United States, Britain and other countries went to war in Iraq, against the wishes of the United Nations.

9.3 *Liberalism and Empire*

To a large extent, today's international regime reflects the historic relationship between countries, when some countries controlled others. Today's structure is similar to the age of the Empire with its heyday in the 19th century. This was an age when the European countries of white people (and by then, countries like the United States where white people controlled the indigenous people) controlled vast parts of the world.

The mainstream liberalism of this period did not oppose this regime, and they did not question the justice of the situation. They believed that an Empire was a good power that could bring justice to other countries. The famous Liberal and Welshman, Henry Richard, although questioning elements of the international regime and strongly disagreeing with the violence used by western forces, did not raise questions regarding the inequality of power between countries. Henry Jones, who reflected several liberal ideas in the early 20th century, again continued to see the Empire as a good force, and one that could improve the circumstances of the world's uncivilized people.

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Here is a version of the 'white man's burden' idea (as mentioned by Rudyard Kipling in his poem). It is the idea that white people have a duty to control the world's other people to help them develop and to help them culturally, economically and socially. This is what the missionaries believed of course, as they travelled the world to spread Christianity and 'save' souls. Although their purpose was moral and religious, it is hard to look back without criticising this aspect, especially recalling that the colonization used force to control, and in economic exploitation, and used violence based on pure racism.

This international 'progressive' perspective is seen clearly in the work of another Welshman, the Baron David Davies. He was one of a number of thinkers called the 'Idealists'. They responded to the Second World War by emphasising the liberal idea of having a global legal regime and the hope for peace (today David Davies' 'Temple of Peace' is in Cardiff city centre). Once more, the influence of the empire is in the regime suggested by Davies, which ultimately gives the responsibility and power to the white countries of the west.

9.4 Contemporary International Liberalism

It can be argued that this perspective has continued into the second half of the 20th century. But following the Second World War, there were ideas that went beyond the perspective of the west and gave more emphasis to people throughout the world.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights reflected this change. There was an attempt to bring ideas together reflecting the needs of everyone throughout the world. This was a more radical liberal perspective, asking for more justice to those parts of the worlds that had suffered under the empirical system.

A number of these perspectives appeared in the work of thinkers trying to use the idea of 'social justice' by Modern Liberals in the international situation. A few them followed the ideas of the American John Rawls, and his ideas on redistributing resources between countries.

For instance, Charles Beitz, and later Thomas Pogge, argued that the redistribution of wealth could be justified from the world's wealthy countries to its poor ones. This 'cosmopolitan' perspective asks for safeguarding our status as individuals, wherever we live in the world, and that the international regime should be changed to ensure basic rights for every individual.

Alongside the argument, the international regime now requires so much collaboration that it is reasonable to consider it similar to the state regime. As the redistribution of wealth is not only possible, but to be expected from a moral perspective. This moves very far away from the realist idea of international politics as a state of anarchy, conflict and war – towards a vision of the world as one society in collaboration.

Rawls himself supported this but saw more value and importance in the traditional role of the state. His ideas did not go so far; he believed that the poor countries of the world should create more powerful and stable political institutions to ensure their just governance in the long term. His 'duty of support' questioned the value of redistributing too much money and resources because, to him, it was the ability to use resources that was important.

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Although Rawls' 'communitarian' perspective was more conservative than the 'cosmopolitan' perspective, both believe in the liberal idea of moving towards a peaceful and just regime, and indeed Rawls states that Kant was his main influence.

The economic aspects of the classical liberal tradition often completely oppose the perspectives of Rawls, Beitz and other modern liberals especially in relation to development studies. Here is a subject that looks at how to improve the social, economic and political state of less 'developed' states in the majority world. This perspective is seen in the 'Washington Accord' developed in the 1990s, and that weighed on less developed countries to lessen the state's influence, copying the neo-liberal agenda of Thatcher and others, and allowing much more influence for markets and the private sectors. It soon became apparent that other measures were needed such as robust state structures to support the market, and fairer global economy terms, that would change structures favouring the historic advantage of the European countries and North America. The history of the economist Jeffrey Sachs shows these developments. He was responsible for the 'shock therapy' in Poland in the 1990s and for pushing neo-liberal policies, but by the new millennium he had changed his mind and believed strongly in intervention and financial support by the majority world.

The discussion on 'global justice' is now wider. It sees that the liberal perspective needs to connect more directly to perspectives of the majority world, beyond Europe and white people. (The terms 'majority world' and 'Global South' are used instead of the term 'third world' which was used in the second half of the Twentieth century. Some believe that liberalism can change and adapt due to these perspectives – for instance, perspectives that put more emphasis on the relationship with the environment and respect towards nature. But others believe that liberalism cannot adapt beyond its historic development, which is such a central part of the white man's attitude and power.