

**Political Ideologies Contexts, Ideas, and Practices**  
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**Lecture 08**  
**Introduction. Main Ideas with Examples**  
**30:25**

Hello everyone, this is the third in our series of NPTEL lectures on the ideologies course 2019-20. We're going to do our third topic, which is liberalism, and we'll start with the subheadings. It's quite a long topic, so there are several subheadings. Here are the subheadings, which you'll get as well. We'll start with a short introduction as sort of historical and factual background, we'll then look at the key concepts with examples wherever possible, as always.

Now the key concepts in liberalism are the individual and the concepts of rights, freedom, reason, justice, and toleration. Those are the main concepts; they lead on into the forms of the liberal state and its institutions. Those then lead on into the idea of representative government and unresolved tensions between liberalism and democracy. Well, that then leads to another main issue in liberalism, which is political pluralism.

Civil society is another main concept or subconcept, we'll then go on into the kind of economics that we would find in liberal systems, liberal economics; we'll then look at three different major forms of liberalism, that is, classical liberalism and neoliberalism and modern liberalism. We'll go on to look at multiculturalism, which is another form of liberalism or consequence of it, and will of course, look at the main problems.

For example, abandoning any substantive ideology, the right to choose, and the concept of rights, those are the main problems in liberalism and we shall cover all these subheadings as we proceed with examples throughout. So, let's start with our introduction to liberalism. Well, it is much more obviously an ideology than, say, conservatism, because liberalism embodies a range of specific ideas and these often result in very specific approaches to political life, including the organization of the state and society.

Very often liberal ideas result in a range of particular policies, and today we can look at a policy and say, yes, that inherits liberal ideas or it expresses them, and so on. But there is a significant difference between conservatism and liberalism, and this is that liberalism has often had a transformative and even revolutionary effect on societies where it has been, it has been propounded and, usually, accepted.

It's also a distinctively modern ideology. It's associated with production on a mass scale, that is, with the industrial revolution in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, and it's associated with industrial capitalism. Both of these, in Northern Europe at least, constituted decisive challenges to established feudal societies and their inherited hierarchies. Well, in English life, where liberalism started in its modern form, the term 'liberal' used to refer to attitudes and attitudes and I beg your pardon, I'll rephrase that.

In English life, the term 'liberal' used to refer to attitudes and activities among the aristocracy. But in the early nineteenth century, it came to have a much more specifically political meaning. For political usage at the time, the word 'liberal' seems to have been derived from the Spanish word *liberals*, and that word seems to have had connotations of narrowness. In Britain the Tories, now the Conservatives, still called the Tories, the Tories used the word 'liberal' to attack their main opponents, who at that time were called the Whigs, W, H, I, G, S, Whigs.

The Whigs themselves started to use the term 'liberal' or 'liberalism' to describe groups or individuals and attitudes, which involved reform without revolution and that is still very much a central issue for liberalism - reform without revolution. So, from about the second half of the nineteenth century, the term came to mean the policies and attitudes of the newly formed Liberal Party, and that was the new name for the Whigs, the Liberal Party.

The terms 'liberal', 'liberalism' or 'liberal actions', 'liberal attitudes' and so on, also came to be associated with the emerging middle or upper-middle classes that is the new business and financial classes. This was an emerging merchant and trading class, who started to use new systems of accounting, in particular, double-entry bookkeeping, which had started much earlier than that.

But they started to use these accounting systems on a much bigger scale and became, particularly as the empires, empires spread, they became a much more powerful economic class, or economic terms they became a much more powerful class. With their greater economic strength, they started to demand commensurate political changes. It is worth noting that the term 'liberalism' itself says very little about the specific arguments that are put under liberalism. For example, the English philosopher John Locke, 1632 to 74, is now described as one of the founding figures of liberalism, but in his time, he was not called a liberal and he seems not to have been widely regarded as a liberal until his political work and he was not really called a liberal until his political work came under fresh scrutiny from the middle of the twentieth century onwards.

Well, politically, liberalism has been adopted extremely widely around the world. It hasn't always been an explicit commitment but it has spread very widely. Most democracies today have procedures and institutions which embody or show liberal values. Examples would be free and fair elections with a universal franchise and secret ballots. Other examples would be laws protecting rights, laws ensuring or implementing a policy of anti discrimination legislation. Other examples would be contributory systems of unemployment benefit, where employers, employees and the state all pay into an unemployment benefit fund for people to qualify for unemployment benefits if they encounter unemployment which is not their own fault - and that's very much a liberal principle.

We'll see examples like these later on. Other examples would be state pensions we pay in while we work and gain either an occupational or a state pension further examples would be governmental attempts at broad forms of economic management, I repeat economic management, rather than economic control. Now, yes, well, it is true that liberalism or liberal principles can be found globally or almost globally.

But it's far from clear how successful the application or adoption of liberalism has been. Many of its ideas continue to be strongly disputed, and we'll look at examples of those disputes. In addition, the history of liberalism is closely associated with the spread of imperialism, and the imperialist exploitation of millions, tens, perhaps hundreds of millions around the world. Imperialism has also been associated with open statements of racial superiority by its own proponents, and such statements, including assumptions or statements that some cultures are superior to others, are occasionally still made by liberal ideologues.

Well, liberalism did arise in a specific historical and economic context, and its earliest statements, its initial statements, involved a set of ideas, which challenged established ideas of society and authority. More specifically, as a body of ideas, liberalism rejects the imposition of power and authority from above. That includes resisting the imposition of ideologies, faiths, religious faiths, moral principles, or ways of life, including occupations and social or other activities - and this goes right down to things like sexual preference, preferences and orientations.

Well, we should list the main ideas in liberalism, and we should then outline the implications for the organization of government and other institutions of state. Well, and then after that, we'll

examine the main forms of liberalism, and we shall conclude by identifying some of the problems in liberal thought and liberal politics. Well, historically liberalism has gone through two main phases. Classical liberalism is one and modern liberalism is the other.

The modern form is a modified version of the classical form, and has faced severe criticism from supporters of the older version. Such supporters, often called neoliberals, did not have much impact until the late 1970s, when politicians such as Ronald Reagan, and Margaret Thatcher claimed, at least in public, to support policies which would be consistent with classical liberalism.

This allegedly revived form came to be called neoliberalism and it too has faced renewed challenges since the global financial crash of 2007-8 or 2007-9. Various forms of modern liberalism have been put forward as alternatives, and so have other ideologies. Well, what about the key concepts of liberalism? These are - the individual and the concept of rights, freedom, reason, justice, and toleration.

We'll start with the individual and the concept of rights. For liberalism, the individual is the basic unit of society. You remember that for conservatism the family is the basic unit of society, but in liberalism, it's the individual, and the individual must be protected, according to liberalism, the individual must be protected by a range of rights and these constitute absolute limits to the powers and actions of official bodies.

Rights also involved processes, such as the rights to participate in fair and free elections, the rights to freedom from the arbitrary use of official power, and the rights to personal privacy. A range of roughly simultaneous processes seem also to have given rise to the idea of the individual as being protected by rights. In the late 18th century, feudal societies in Northern Europe began to break down because the newly industrial, newly emerging industries needed large numbers of labourers to do the new types of work which were emerging and emerging very rapidly.

What kinds of jobs were involved what kinds of occupations were involved? These were mainly routine jobs, operating machines in factories, manual jobs in extractive industries like mining, particularly coal mining, which provided fuel to power the new emerging industries. Conditions in both those types of industry were truly terrible - for something like a century and a half. They often are in many parts of the developing world. They continue to be truly terrible and we're aware of the scandals which have emerged in the media.

Until, well, mass trade unions appeared about the middle of the nineteenth century, conditions continue to be terrible. Mass labour movements, trade unions, for example, had some effect. But the millions and even tens of millions who moved from rural areas to the new cities did get year round work, which gave them some relief from the seasonal rural cycle of glut and famine or near-famine.

Millions were also thrown off the land by laws like the British enclosure acts. The country's parliament was at that time made up of mainly, mainly made up of rich aristocratic landowners, and the Parliament passed these laws between 1750 and about 1860; and by 1860, almost no common land was left. The rest had in effect, and this I quote, had in effect been stolen.

Now, that process, not just of the theft of land, but the large-scale movement of people from rural areas to the regular year-round employment that is to be found in cities and industries in and around cities, continues in the developing world, and it's a major factor in the rural-urban migration which is such a substantial factor in today's India.

Well, in addition to these economy-driven movements of people to find work in the new industries, new financial and business classes were emerging. These new classes devised credit-based ways of funding manufacturing industries, which could make use of the many inventions that were also emerging at the time. Things like the spinning wheel, various ways of powering industries by using watermills and so on, were emerging, and various ways of increasing productivity by producing machines once made of wood, such as power driven looms or wheel-treadle driven looms and so on, were emerging and these were expensive to build. So, the people trying to get into the new industries devised credit systems so that they could fund manufacturing industries in the expectation of future profits. Now, as it happened, their wealth increased rapidly, and these emerging classes began to seek more political power - and therefore they challenged the existing hierarchies of inherited wealth and privilege and power.

Now, their claim to increased power involved the idea that individuals have their own unique talents and capacities and therefore, they wanted changes to the traditional hierarchies - which prevented individuals from developing their own capacities. This emerging merchant or mercantile or trading class also held that the inheritance of occupations, the tradition of inherited occupations, allowed individuals to develop only certain capacities or perhaps prevented them from finding out what they were best at.

So, according to the new class, individuals must be free to develop their own capacities, and therefore to advance themselves in life; in Latin the word *liber*, the root of the word 'liberal', means 'free'. Liberal theorists also argued that everyone has a right to develop their own talents, irrespective of the social class or status which they inherit, and therefore such a right must be protected against interference or restrictions.

For liberalism, human individuals have these rights because they are human and nothing else. Such theories have been called natural rights theories, and in everyday discourse the rights involved are often called human rights. Well, they have their consequences. Such theories have their consequences. One is that if we accept them, if we accept natural rights theories, then we must not interfere with human beings' freely made decisions and furthermore, we must not exploit people or use them as instruments for our own purposes.

This idea that people are ends, I beg your pardon. I'll start again. This idea that people are ends in themselves and not means to others ends was most famously stated by the philosopher Immanuel Kant in the 1780s. What did he say? He concluded that people, because we are willing beings and reasoning beings, are self contained ends in ourselves, and therefore, we must not be used as means to other people's ends.

Well within liberal theory, rights are not meant to protect us so that we all attain equal status in life, or achieve the same things, or even the same kinds of things. Instead, liberalism requires that we are protected against interference or restriction in the choice of our activities, and our pursuit of those activities. This has often been called negative freedom, and that is a phrase created by the philosopher Isaiah Berlin.

Many the rights created in modern democracies, such as those found in anti-discrimination law, express or embody the idea of negative freedom. That is that idea negative freedom is also, also shown in other kinds of procedural rights, such as the right to a fair trial, rights to free and fair elections and so on. These rights involve protections against interference, but they make no claim that we have a right to autonomy, that is a right to be in control of our own lives. Berlin calls that kind of right to be in control of our own lives. positive freedom - he called it a right to positive freedom.

Well, in fact liberalism relies very strongly on the primacy of the individual and of individual, rights. That then means that we must not impose a moral or political system or an ideology on individuals, or a religious faith or whatever. It also means that we must not state any substantive

theory of human nature. Many liberal theorists have brought forward strong and even very strong critiques of the terrible consequences that have followed when ideologies or substantive theories of human nature have been imposed, and then often defended at all costs.

Historically, liberals can adduce a great deal of evidence to support their position. Nazi Germany would be one example, and other examples could easily be found in, for example, those colonial conquests which were inspired by religious motives, such as the Iberian colonization of central and Latin America, and among examples of the imposition of ideologically driven systems would be the history of the Soviet Union and China under hardline communism, and the neoliberal financial doctrines, which have dominated economic policy almost worldwide since 1980 and have often being forced by major governments and international financial institutions on a range of countries across the world.

Well, what about freedom, the second main concept in liberalism? The idea of the individual is of course conceptually related to the idea of freedom in liberalism. According to liberalism, we are all unique individuals, and our individuality is so to speak sacrosanct. We therefore have an inherent right to choose our activities, our directions in life, and almost anything else freely and without restriction.

This can only be achieved in a certain kind of society. Liberalism therefore requires that we organize society so that individual rights and freedoms are protected; then we can develop our capacities freely. This can create problems, especially when our free action restricts others' freedoms or freedoms. This can occur frequently in everyday matters as well as larger issues. For example, if we throw our rubbish anywhere we like, we are despoiling somebody else's surroundings, even our own as well.

If we play very loud music late at night, or drive vehicles in any manner we like, we are limiting other, other people's freedoms and potentially - often actually - also harming them. Most liberal thinkers, therefore, reject the idea of unlimited freedom, and instead, they favour keeping restrictions to a minimum. For example, John Stuart Mill argues for limitations only to prevent harm to others, and some contemporary libertarians, who go further than liberals, advocate the freedom to harm oneself, for example, by taking addictive or harmful substances.

John Rawls tried to reach a sort of compromise position which would give us liberties which would be consistent with similar liberties for all. Well, liberals have wrestled with the question of

limitations or justifiable limitations for a very long time, and those issues continue within contemporary liberal debates, as we have seen.

What about reason? For liberalism, reason is an essential element in our capacity to make free decisions for ourselves. Historically, forms of liberalism have derived some of their weight from the enormous social and political changes which are broadly known as the enlightenment. This involves the progressively widening recognition that we can reason about things that once seemed to be unchangeable features of life, such as established political or religious authority, or natural disasters, outbreaks of disease, and so on.

Politically, the enlightenment may have started in the city states of mediaeval Italy, particularly Florence. These states wrote their own constitutions and were involved in often confrontational relations with the Church in Rome. But in other respects, the enlightenment has derived very great energy and momentum from advances in the natural sciences. These have enabled us to explain, predict, and control many apparently uncontrollable natural phenomena, such as floods, diseases and the like.

Now, this ties up with a liberal view of individuals' capacity to reason. It was largely reasoning that led to the enormous spread of new knowledge and new conceptions about society and new knowledge about the natural world, the physical world, and therefore for liberalism, individuals' capacity to reason is central to being human. It also makes individuals the best judges of what is best for themselves.

Therefore, education is essential if individuals are to be liberated from superstition, ignorance, and submission to unquestioned authority. The capacity to reason is spread by the process of education, and it enables us to reach agreement without resorting to violence. For liberalism violence is at most the last resort.

So, what then about justice? In liberal thought justice has to do with the distribution of rewards and punishments. In what is called modern liberalism, justice can include material benefits as a form of social justice. The liberal idea of justice is derived from the principle of foundational equality; according to that principle, we are all of equal moral worth. Therefore, we must have formal equality in respect of opportunities and procedures, and the law must be applied equally to all of us.

We must also have a fair distribution of rewards and entitlements. That in turn means that liberal theorists oppose things like arbitrary discrimination, for example, discrimination on the grounds



of gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and so on. Rights therefore include the right to fair procedure. Laws against arbitrary - that is, unjustifiable and random discrimination are typically liberal in form, or they express liberal values.

This does not have to mean equality of outcome, or equality of achieved social status. Liberalism can accept inequality, if it results from a fair process, and the idea of a meritocratic society is typically liberal one, because it implies reward in proportion to our talents allied to our efforts.

Well this then leads on to the idea of toleration. Liberal theorists require that we do not impose ideologies or way of life or beliefs on people. That means we have to tolerate wide or even very wide diversity in society. Even if we do not like people's decisions, choices, or preferences. We may find those choices and preferences unsettling, disturbing, or offensive, but liberalism places a duty of tolerance upon us as a complement to the right to choose our way or ways of life. In liberalism, we have a duty to tolerate others' ways, just as we have a right to tolerance of our ways.

So, in practice, well, most liberals accept some limits to toleration, especially where harm is caused by anyone's conduct, but the controversies which result are often very fierce. One very important point here is that toleration can require us to recognize mutual dependence. For example, workers and employers may have conflicting interests, and organized bodies such as trade unions may act very forcefully in any disputes, but liberal theory recognizes that each side needs the other. Most contemporary democracies have laws on the conduct of such disputes, and they have procedures regulating the relevant dealings. These laws of course do not specify the outcomes. They specify the types of procedures that have to be followed, and such laws are characteristically liberal in form precisely because they specify procedures - they try to ensure fair procedures, but they don't specify the outcomes or the substance of the outcomes.