CLASS 01 – JUSTICE in Politics and Economics: Introduction

JUSTICE = giving to (X) **what is** **<u>DUE</u>** to X (working „definition")
[please, note the connection between words "due" and "duty"]

JUSTICE may refer to: (a) character of a person that is just or acts justly, (b) state of affairs, like distribution of social goods or honours, (b) social institutions which promote just states of affairs (and – e.g. for Plato - "create" just citizens)

Main candidates for **<u>PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE</u>** (guiding the theory and practice of justice):

1. **<u>desert</u>** / contribution / merit / **<u>reciprocity</u>** "balanced" and "imbalanced" (often presumption of inequality; problem with measuring contribution; Aristotle, challenged by Adam Smith and the Utilitarians)
2. **<u>"virtue"</u>** (some "summum bonum" = "highest good" - like God's will concerning human life or Plato's "idea" (= ideal) of just person and just state – are the point of reference what kind of social arrangements are just; tendency towards presumption of inequality or social "division of labour"; in the background the "nature vs artifice" debate about the origin and justification of the "proper" social order)
3. **<u>utility</u>** / overall common good / social welfare (priority of the "good" over the "right")
4. **<u>rights</u>** (natural law; social contract; indispensable human dignity/worth; presumption of equality; rejects treating other persons as merely means to social ends; priority of the "right" over the "good"; Locke, Kant (deontology), Rawls, Nozick)
5. **<u>need(s)</u>** / capabilities (combination of the "rights" approach and "utility" approach, ignoring desert and virtue)
6. **<u>entitlement</u>** (based on the "rights" approach, but limited to basic indispensable rights, ignoring all other principles)

<u>PLURALISTIC option (</u><u>e.g. Michael Walzer's "spheres of justice" approach)</u>: various principles of justice applied in combination and/or different social contexts

How to decide which principles of justice should be adopted?:
- **<u>RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY</u>** (based on the assumption of "**RATIONAL SELF-INTEREST**" of humans), challenged by many theorists (since humans often behave irrationally, and infrequently appear not to act against their own self-interest guided by what appear to be non-egoistic motives).
- So perhaps **actual CONSENSUS** (based not solely on purely rational considerations) is the way forward (like in the "discourse ethics" of J. Habermas or – even more plausibly - in "agathological solidarism" of J. Salamon :)

FURTHER INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
This course is about social and political justice. Obviously, the term "justice" is used also in legal context and our basic definition of "justice" [**JUSTICE** = giving to (X) **what is** **<u>DUE</u>** to X] that fits both areas, which otherwise would seem to have little in common.

The basic difference between justice as administered by the system of judiciary and social justice is that the other focuses almost exclusively on judging social and political institutions and not in order to sentence them or to pardon them, but in order to reform them. Criminal justice deals with behavior of individuals or groups of individuals.

"Just" is an adjective that is so central to political theory as "true" to science, "beautiful" to aesthetics or "good" to ethics.

Social sciences – or at least their philosophical core - contain irreducible "normative" component. There is obviously an empirical component to social research (so it makes sense to say that it is TRUE that in Western Europe majority of the population supports liberal democracy), but it doesn't make sense to say that liberal democracy is TRUE. It may make sense to say that "liberal democracy" is popular, or efficient, but you have to refer to some "ideal", to certain "values" to be able to understand why people support some socio-political model as efficient in delivering particular "goods" which they regard as desirable (such as security, welfare, etc.).

Now, justice came to be used as the main term that captures this quality of the social and political arrangements which is being assessed when judging the quality of the model (or of its realization in real life).

Until recently there was a tendency to talk about justice only in the DOMESTIC context ("just war" being an exception of using the term in international context). Of course, the development of international LAW implicitly implies that there exist issues of justice and injustice in international realm.

But the new international order (The Westphalian 1648 order of **sovereign** states) made states responsible only for the social relationship within the state.

Only very recently, because of the atrocities of WWII and even more because of globalization, international or global justice becomes a prominent topic in political theory.

What is special about this course is that it focuses on **the relationship between the two: domestic justice and global justice.**

Human nature

All too often the idea of human nature is employed in a generalized and simplistic fashion, as a kind of shorthand for 'this is what people are really like'. In practice, however, to speak of 'human nature' is to make a number of important assumptions about both human beings and the societies in which they live. Although opinions may differ about the content of human nature, the concept itself has a clear and coherent meaning. Human nature refers to the essential and immutable character of all human beings. It highlights what is innate and 'natural' about human life, as opposed to what human beings have gained from education or through social experience. This does not, however, mean that those who believe that human behaviour is shaped more by society than it is by unchanging and inborn characteristics have abandoned the idea of human nature altogether. Indeed, this very assertion is based upon clear assumptions about innate human qualities, in this case, the capacity to be shaped or moulded by external factors. A limited number of political thinkers have, nevertheless, openly rejected the idea of human nature. For instance, the French existentialist philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), argued that there was no such thing as a given 'human nature', determining how people act or behave. In Sartre's view, existence comes before essence, meaning that human beings enjoy the freedom to define themselves through their own actions and deeds, in which case the assertion of any concept of human nature is an affront to that freedom.

To employ a concept of human nature is not, however, to reduce human life to a one-dimensional caricature. Most political thinkers are clearly aware that human beings are complex, multi-faceted creatures, made up of biological, physical, psychological, intellectual, social and perhaps spiritual elements. The concept of human nature does not conceal or overlook this complexity so much as attempt to impose order upon it by designating certain features as 'natural' or 'essential'. It would seem reasonable, moreover, that if any such thing as a human core exists it should be manifest in human behaviour. Human nature should therefore be reflected in behavioural patterns that are regular and distinctively human. However, this may not always be the case. Some theorists have argued that people behave in ways that deny their 'true' natures. For instance, despite abundant evidence of greedy and selfish behaviour, socialists still hold to the belief that human beings are cooperative and sociable, arguing that such behaviour is socially conditioned and not natural. In this light, it is important to remember that in no sense is human nature a descriptive or scientific concept. Even though theories of human nature may claim an empirical or scientific basis, no experiment or surgical investigation is able to uncover the human 'essence'. All models of human nature are therefore

normative: they are constructed out of philosophical and moral assumptions, and are therefore in principle untestable.

Endless discussion has taken place about the nature of human beings. Certain debates have been nevertheless particularly relevant to political theory. Central among these is what is usually called the 'nature/nurture' debate. Are human beings the product of innate or biological factors, or are they fashioned by education and social experience? Clearly, such a question has profound implications for the relationship between the individual and society. Important questions have also been asked about the degree to which human behaviour is determined by reason, questions which bear heavily upon issues such as individual liberty and personal autonomy. Are human beings rational creatures, guided by reason, argument and calculation, or are they in some way prisoners of non-rational drives and passions? Finally, there are questions about the impulses or motivations which dominate human behaviour. In particular, are human beings naturally selfish and egoistical, or are they essentially cooperative, altruistic and sociable? Such considerations are crucial in determining the proper organization of economic and social life, including the distribution of wealth and other resources.

Nature versus nurture

The most recurrent, and perhaps most fundamental debate about human nature relates to what factors or forces shape it. Is the essential core of human nature fixed or given, fashioned by 'nature', or is it moulded or structured by the influence of social experience or 'nurture'. 'Nature', in this case, stands for biological or genetic factors, suggesting that there is an established and unchanging human core. The political significance of such a belief is considerable. In the first place, it implies that political and social theories should be constructed on the basis of a pre-established concept of human nature. Quite simply, human beings do not reflect society, society reflects human nature. Secondly, it suggests that the roots of political understanding lie in the natural sciences in general, and in biology in particular. Political arguments shall therefore be constructed on the basis of biological theories, giving such arguments a 'scientific' character. This helps to explain why biological theories of politics have grown in popularity in the twentieth century.

Without doubt, the biological theory that has had greatest impact upon political and social thought has been the theory of natural selection, developed by Charles Darwin (1809–82) in *On the Origin of Species* ([1859] 1986). Darwin's goal was to explain the almost infinite variety of species which have existed on earth. He suggested that each species develops through a series of random genetic mutations, some of which

fit the species to survive and prosper, while other less fortunate species become extinct. Although Darwin appears to have recognized that his theories had radical political implications, he chose not to develop them himself. The first attempt to advance a theory of social Darwinism was undertaken by Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) in *The Man Versus the State* ([1884] 1940). Spencer coined the term 'the survival of the fittest' to describe what he believed to be an endless struggle among human beings, through which those best fitted by nature to survive rise to the top, and those less favoured by nature sink to the bottom. Success and failure, wealth and poverty are, in this sense, biologically determined; and tampering with this process of natural selection will only serve to weaken the species. Such ideas deeply influenced classical liberalism (see p. 29), giving it biological grounds for opposing state intervention in economic and social life. Social Darwinism also helped to shape the fascist belief in an unending struggle amongst the various nations or races of the world.

In the twentieth century, political theories were increasingly influenced by biological ideas. For example, ethologists such as Konrad Lorenz and Niko Timbergen advanced theories about human behaviour on the basis of detailed studies of animal behaviour. In *On Aggression* (1966), Lorenz suggested that aggression was a natural drive found in all species, including the human species. Popularized by writers like Robert Ardrey, such ideas had considerable impact upon explanations of war and social violence by presenting such behaviour as instinctual and territorial. The emergence of sociobiology in the 1970s and the subsequent development of evolutionary psychology, which gained impetus from the so-called 'biotech revolution' and the unravelling of human DNA, has made it increasingly fashionable to explain social behaviour in terms of biological programming linked to our supposed evolutionary inheritance. One of the most influential works of sociobiology has been Richard Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene* (1989), which explains man as a 'gene machine'. Dawkins suggested that both selfishness and altruism have their origins in biology.

In most cases, these biological theories embrace universalism; they hold that human beings share a common or universal character, based upon their genetic inheritance. Other theories, however, hold that there are fundamental biological differences among human beings, and that these are of political significance. This applies in the case of racialist theories which treat the various races as if they are distinct species. Racialists suggest that there are basic genetic differences amongst the races of the world, reflected in their unequal physical, psychological and intellectual inheritance. In its most extreme version, racialism was expressed in the Nazi doctrine of Aryanism, the belief that the Germanic peoples are a 'master race'. One school of radical feminism (see p. 62), sometimes called separatist feminism, also believes that there are biological and unchange-

able differences among human beings, in this case between men and women. This theory is called 'essentialism' because it asserts that the difference between women and men is rooted in their 'essential' natures. Sexual inequality is not therefore based upon social conditioning but rather on the biological disposition of the male sex to dominate, exploit and oppress the female sex. For example, in *Against Our Will* (1975), Susan Brownmiller suggested that 'all men' are biologically programmed to dominate 'all women', and that they do so through rape or the fear of rape, a conclusion which, from a different perspective, certain theories of evolutionary psychology also support.

In marked contrast, other theories of human nature place greater emphasis upon 'nurture', the influence of the social environment or experience upon the human character. Clearly, such views play down the importance of fixed and unchanging biological factors, emphasising instead the malleable quality of human nature, or what has been called its 'plasticity'. The significance of such theories is to shift political understanding away from biology and towards sociology. Political behaviour tells us less about an immutable human essence than it does about the structure of society. Moreover, by releasing humankind from its biological chains, such theories often have optimistic, if not openly utopian, implications. When human nature is 'given', the possibility of progress and social advancement is clearly limited; however, if human nature is 'plastic', the opportunities confronting human beings immediately expand and perhaps become infinite. Evils such as poverty, social conflict, political oppression and gender inequality can be overcome precisely because their origins are social and not biological.

The idea that human nature is 'plastic', shaped by external forces, is central to many socialist theories. For instance, in *A New View of Society* ([1816] 1972), the British socialist Robert Owen (see p. 367) advanced the simple principle that 'any general character from the best to the worst, from the ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community'. In the writings of Karl Marx (see p. 371) this idea was developed through an attempt to outline why and how the social environment conditions human behaviour. Marx proclaimed that, 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness.' Marx, and subsequent Marxists, have believed that social, political and intellectual life is conditioned by 'the mode of production of material life', the existing economic system. However, Marx did not believe human nature to be a passive reflection of its material environment. Rather, human beings are workers, *homo faber*, constantly engaged in shaping and reshaping the world in which they live. Thus, in Marx's view, human nature is formed through a dynamic or 'dialectical' relationship between humankind and

the material world. The majority of feminists also subscribe to the view that human behaviour is in most cases conditioned by social factors. For example, in her seminal work, *The Second Sex* ([1949] 1968), Simone de Beauvoir (see p. 63) declared that, 'One is not born a woman: one *becomes* a woman.' In rejecting the notion of 'essential' differences between women and men, feminists have accepted a basically androgynous, or sexless, image of human nature. Because sexism has been 'bred' through a process of social conditioning, particularly in the family, it can be challenged and eventually overthrown.

The picture of human nature as essentially malleable, shaped by social factors, has also been endorsed by behavioural psychologists, such as I.V. Pavlov, John Watson and B.F. Skinner. They argue that human behaviour is explicable simply in terms of conditioned reactions or reflexes, for which reason human nature bears the imprint of its environment. Pavlov, for instance, demonstrated how animals could learn through a strict process of conditioning, by being rewarded for exhibiting 'correct' behaviour. Such ideas became the basis of psychology in the Soviet Union, where crude behaviourism was thought to provide scientific proof for Marx's social theories. The US psychologist B.F. Skinner discounted internal processes altogether, describing the human organism as a 'black box'. In *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (1971), Skinner presented a highly deterministic picture of human nature, denied any form of free will, and entitled, Skinner suggested, to no more dignity or self-respect than Pavlov's dog. Such ideas have widely been used to support the idea of social engineering, the idea that we can 'make' the human beings we want simply by constructing the appropriate social environment.

Intellect versus instinct

The second debate centres upon the role of rationality in human life. This does not, however, come down to a choice between rationalism and irrationalism. The real issue is the degree to which the reasoning mind influences human conduct, suggesting a distinction between those who emphasize thinking, analysis and rational calculation, and those who highlight the role of impulse, instincts or other non-rational drives. To acknowledge the importance of the non-rational does not amount to turning one's back upon reason altogether. Indeed, many such theories are advanced in eminently rationalist, even scientific, terms.

Faith in the power of human reason reached its high point during the Enlightenment, the so-called Age of Reason, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During that period, philosophers and political thinkers turned away from religious dogmas and faith, and instead based their ideas upon rationalism, the belief that the workings of the physical

and social world can be explained by the exercise of reason alone. In this view, human beings are essentially rational creatures, guided by intellect and a process of argument, analysis and debate. Such an idea was expressed with particular clarity in the dualism advanced by the French philosopher, René Descartes (1596–1650). In declaring '*Cogito ergo sum* [I think, therefore I am]', Descartes in effect portrayed human beings as thinking machines, implying that the mind is quite distinct from the body. Rationalism implies that human beings possess the capacity to fashion their own lives and their own worlds. If human beings are reason-driven creatures they clearly enjoy free will and self-determination: people are what they choose to make of themselves. Rationalist theories of human nature therefore tend to underline the importance of individual freedom and autonomy. In addition, rationalism often underpins radical or revolutionary political doctrines. To the extent that human beings possess the capacity to understand their world, they have the ability also to improve or reform it.

The earliest rationalist ideas were developed by the philosophers of Ancient Greece. Plato, for example, argued that the best possible form of government would be an enlightened despotism, rule by an intellectual elite, the philosopher-kings. Rationalist ideas were also prominent in the

Plato (427–347 BCE)

Greek philosopher. Plato was born of an aristocratic family. He became a follower of Socrates, who is the principal figure in his ethical and philosophical dialogues. After Socrates' death in 399 BCE, Plato founded his Academy in order to train the new Athenian ruling class, which might be considered the first 'university'.

Plato taught that the material world consists of imperfect copies of abstract and eternal 'ideas'. His political philosophy, as expounded in *The Republic* (1955), is an attempt to describe the 'ideal state' in terms of a theory of justice. Plato's just state was decidedly authoritarian and was based upon a strict division of labour that supposedly reflected different character-types and human attributes. He argued that government should be exercised exclusively by a small collection of philosopher-kings, supported by the auxiliaries (collectively termed the 'Guardians'), whose education and communistic way of life would ensure that they ruled on the basis of wisdom. In his view, knowledge and virtue are one. In *The Laws*, he advocated a system of mixed government, but continued to emphasize the subordination of the individual to the state and law. Plato's work has exerted wide influence upon Christianity and upon European culture in general.

emergence in the nineteenth century of liberal and socialist doctrines. Liberal thinkers, such as J.S. Mill (see p. 256), largely based their theories upon the idea that human beings are rational. This, for instance, explains why Mill himself placed so much faith in individual liberty: guided by reason, individuals would be able to seek happiness and self-realization. In the same way, he argued in favour of female suffrage, on the grounds that, like men, women are rational and so are entitled to exercise political influence. In turn, socialist theories also built upon rationalist foundations. This was most evident in the writings of Marx and Engels (see p. 83), who developed what the latter referred to as 'scientific socialism'. Rather than indulging in ethical analysis and moral assertion, the province of so-called 'utopian socialism', Marx and Engels strove to uncover the dynamics of history and society through a process of scientific analysis. When they predicted the ultimate demise of capitalism, for example, this was not because they believed it to be morally 'bad', in the sense that it deserved to be overthrown, but instead because their analysis indicated that this was what was destined to happen, this was the direction in which history was moving.

This vision of human beings as thinking machines has, however, attracted growing criticism since the late nineteenth century. The Enlightenment dream of an ordered, rational and tolerant world was badly dented by the persistence of conflict and social deprivation and the emergence of powerful and seemingly non-rational forces such as nationalism and racialism. This led to growing interest in the influence which emotion, instinct and other psychological drives exert upon politics. In some respects, however, this development built upon an established tradition, found mainly among conservative thinkers, that had always disparaged the mania for rationalism. Edmund Burke (see p. 348), for example, had emphasized the intellectual imperfection of human beings, especially when they are confronted by the almost infinite complexity of social life. In short, the world is unfathomable, too intricate and too confusing for the human mind fully to unravel. Such a view has deeply conservative implications. If the rationalist theories dreamed up by liberals and socialists are unconvincing, human beings are wise to place their faith in tradition and custom, the known. Revolution and even reform are a journey into the unknown; the maps we have been given are simply unreliable.

At the same time, conservative theorists were among the first to acknowledge the power of the non-rational. Thomas Hobbes (see p. 123), for instance, believed in the power of human reason, but only as a means to an end. In his view, human beings are driven by non-rational appetites: aversions, fears, hopes and desires, the strongest of which is the desire to exercise power over others. This essentially pessimistic view of human

nature led Hobbes to conclude that only strong, autocratic government can prevent society descending into chaos and disorder. Burke also emphasized the degree to which unreasoned sentiments and even prejudice play a role in structuring social life. While what he called 'naked reason' offers little guidance, prejudice, being born of natural instincts, provides people with security and a sense of social identity. Some modern biologists have offered a scientific explanation for such beliefs. Konrad Lorenz, in particular, argued that aggression is a form of biologically adapted behaviour which has developed through the process of evolution. Human aggression and cruelty is therefore seen as innate or 'natural', an assertion that clearly has pessimistic implications for any attempt to curb domestic violence, cure social unrest or prevent war.

Some of the most influential theories to stress the impact of non-rational drives upon human behaviour were associated with Freudian psychology, developed in the early twentieth century. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) drew attention to the distinction between the conscious mind, which carried out rational calculations and judgements, and the unconscious mind, which contained repressed memories and a range of powerful psychological drives. In particular, Freud highlighted the importance of human sexuality, represented by the *id*, the most primitive instinct within the unconscious, and *libido*, psychic energies emanating from the *id* and usually associated with sexual desire or energy. While Freud himself emphasized the therapeutic aspect of these ideas, developing a series of techniques, popularly known as psychoanalysis, others have seized upon their political significance. Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957), one of Freud's later disciples, developed an explanation of fascism based on the idea of repressed sexuality. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 10, New Left thinkers like Herbert Marcuse (see p. 280) and feminists such as Germaine Greer (1985) have drawn upon Freudian psychology in developing a politics of sexual liberation.

Competition *versus* cooperation

The third area of disagreement centres upon whether human beings are essentially self-seeking and egoistical, or naturally sociable and cooperative. This debate is of fundamental political importance because these contrasting theories of human nature support radically different forms of economic and social organization. If human beings are naturally self-interested, competition among them is an inevitable feature of social life and, in certain respects, a healthy one. Such a theory of human nature is, moreover, closely linked to individualist ideas such as natural rights and private property, and has often been used as a justification for a market or

capitalist economic order, within which, supposedly, individuals have the best opportunity to pursue their own interests.

Theories which portray human nature as self-interested or self-seeking can be found among the Ancient Greeks, expressed particularly by some of the Sophists. However, they were developed most systematically in the early modern period. In political thought this was reflected in the growth of natural rights theories, which suggested that each individual has been invested by God with a set of inalienable rights. These rights belong to the individual and to the individual alone. Utilitarianism (see p. 358), developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, attempted to provide an objective, even scientific, explanation of human selfishness. Jeremy Bentham (see p. 359) painted a picture of human beings as essentially hedonistic and pleasure-seeking creatures. In Bentham's view, pleasure or happiness are self-evidently 'good', and pain or unhappiness self-evidently 'bad'. Individuals therefore act to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, calculating each in terms of 'utility' – in its simplest sense, use-value. This view of human nature has had considerable impact upon both economic and political theories. Economics is based very largely upon the model of 'economic man', materially self-interested 'utility maximizers'. Such philosophical assumptions are used, for example, to explain the vigour and efficiency of market capitalism. They also underpin political theories ranging from the social-contract theories of the seventeenth century to 'rational choice' (see p. 246) and 'public choice' schools of modern political science.

Scientific support for human self-interestedness has usually been based upon Darwin and the idea of some kind of struggle for survival. Darwinian ideas, however, can be interpreted in very different ways. Writers such as Lorenz and Ardrey hold that each individual member of a species is biologically programmed to ensure the survival of the species itself. Such a view suggests that animals, including human beings, ultimately act 'for the good of the species', an idea reflected in the willingness of a mother to sacrifice herself in the hope of protecting her young. In other words, individuals will exhibit cooperative and sociable behaviour to the extent that they put the species before themselves. On the other hand, modern writers such as Richard Dawkins (1989) have argued that every gene, including those unique to the separate individual, has a selfish streak and seeks its own survival. Such a theory suggests that selfishness and competition amongst individuals is essentially a form of biologically programmed behaviour. This is not to say, however, that human beings are blindly selfish. Although Dawkins accepted that individuals are 'born selfish', he emphasised that such behaviour can be modified if we 'teach generosity and altruism'.

A very different image of human nature is, however, presented by the major world religions. Monotheistic religions such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism offer a picture of humankind as the product of divine creation. The human essence is therefore conceived as spiritual rather than mental or physical, and is represented in Christianity by the idea of a 'soul'. The notion that human beings are moral creatures, bound together by divine providence, has had considerable influence upon socialist doctrines which stress the importance of compassion, natural sympathy and a common humanity. Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism lay considerable emphasis upon the oneness of all forms of life, contributing once again to the idea of a common humanity, as well as a philosophy of non-violence. It is little surprise, therefore, that religious doctrines have often underpinned the theories of ethical socialism. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that all religious theories have socialist implications. For instance, the Protestant belief in individual salvation and its stress upon the moral value of personal striving and hard work, often called the 'Protestant ethic', is more clearly linked to the ideas of self-help and the free market than it is to socialist compassion. In addition, the Christian doctrine of original sin has generated a pessimistic view of humanity which, in turn, has considerable impact upon social and political thought. This can be seen in the writings of St Augustine (see p. 91) and Martin Luther.

Secular theories have also attempted to draw attention to the 'social essence' of human nature. These have traditionally stressed the importance of social being, drawing attention to the fact that individuals both live and work collectively, as members of a community. Selfishness and competition are in no way 'natural'; rather, they have been cultivated by a capitalist society that rewards and encourages self-striving. The human essence is sociable, gregarious and cooperative, a theory which clearly lends itself to either the communist goal of collective ownership, or the more modest socialist ideal of a welfare state. One of the few attempts to develop a scientific theory of human nature along the lines of sociability and cooperativeness was undertaken by Peter Kropotkin (see p. 26). Kropotkin accepted the evolutionary ideas that had dominated biology since Darwin, but had no sympathy for the doctrine of 'the survival of the fittest'. In *Mutual Aid* ([1897] 1902), he developed an evolutionary theory that fundamentally challenged Darwinism. Instead of accepting that survival is the result of struggle or competition, Kropotkin suggested that what distinguishes the human species from less successful species is its highly developed capacity for cooperation or 'mutual aid'. Cooperation is therefore not merely an ethical or religious ideal, it is a practical necessity which the evolutionary process has made an essential part of human

Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921)

Russian geographer and anarchist theorist. The son of a noble family who first entered the service of Tsar Alexander II, Kropotkin encountered anarchist ideas while working in the Jura region on the French–Swiss border. On returning to Russia he became involved in revolutionary activity through the Populist movement, leading to his imprisonment in St Petersburg, 1874–6. After a spectacular escape from prison he remained in exile in Western Europe, returning to Russia after the 1917 Revolution.

Kropotkin's anarchism was shaped by both his Russian experience, and particularly his admiration for the popular self-management that he believe to operate in the traditional Russian peasant commune, and by the desire to give his work a secure rational foundation grounded in the scientific spirit. His scientific anarchism, outlined in his most famous book, *Mutual Aid* ([1897]1902), amounted to a reworking of the Darwinian theory of evolution, in which cooperation and social solidarity, rather than competition and struggle, were portrayed as the principal means of human and animal development. Kropotkin was a powerful advocate of anarcho-communism, regarding capitalism and the state as interlinked obstacles to humankind's natural sociability. In works such as *Fields, Factories and Workshops* ([1901]1912) and *The Conquest of Bread* ([1906]1926), he envisaged an anarchic society consisting of a collection of largely self-sufficient communes, and also addressed problems such as how crime and laziness would be contained within such a society.

nature. On this basis, Kropotkin argued in favour of both a communist society, in which wealth would be owned in common by all, and a form of anarchism in which human beings could manage their own affairs cooperatively and peacefully.

The individual

The term 'the individual' is so widely used in everyday language that its implications and political significance are often ignored. In the most obvious sense, an individual is a single human being. Nevertheless, the concept suggests rather more. First of all, it implies that the single human being is an independent and meaningful entity, possessing an identity in himself or herself. In other words, to talk of people as individuals is to suggest that they are autonomous creatures, acting according to personal choice rather than as members of a social group or collective body. Second, individuals are not merely independent but they are also distinct, even

unique. This is what is implied, for example, by the term 'individuality', which refers to what is particular and original about each and every human being. To see society as a collection of individuals is therefore to understand human beings in personal terms and to judge them according to their particular qualities, such as character, personality, talents, skills and so on. Each individual has a personal identity. Third, to understand human beings as individuals is usually to believe in universalism, to accept that human beings everywhere share certain fundamental characteristics. In that sense, individuals are not defined by social background, race, religion, gender or any other 'accident of birth', but by what they share with people everywhere: their moral worth, their personal identity and their uniqueness.

The concept of the individual is one of the cornerstones of Western political culture. Although the term itself has been used since the seventeenth century, it has now become so familiar that it is invariably taken for granted. And yet, the concept of the individual has also provoked philosophical debate and deep ideological divisions. For instance, what does it mean to believe in the individual, to be committed to individualism? Does individualism imply a clear and distinctive style of political thought, or can it be used to support a wide range of positions and policies? Moreover, no political thinker sees the individual as entirely self-reliant; all acknowledge that, to some degree, social factors sustain and influence the individual. But where does the balance between the individual and the community lie, and where should it lie? Finally, how significant are individuals in political life? Is politics, in reality, shaped by the decisions and actions of separate individuals, or do only social groups, organizations and institutions matter? In short, can the individual make a difference?

Individualism

Individualism does not simply imply a belief in the existence of individuals. Rather, it refers to a belief in the primacy of the individual over any social group or collective body, suggesting that the individual is central to any political theory or social explanation. However, individualism does not have a clear political character. Although it has often been linked to the classical liberal tradition, and ideas such as limited government and the free market, it has also been used to justify state intervention and has, at times, been embraced by socialists. For example, some thinkers see individualism and collectivism as polar opposites, representing the traditional battle lines between capitalism and socialism; others, however, believe that the two are complementary, even inseparable: individual goals can only be fulfilled through collective action. The problem is that there is no agreement about the nature of the 'individual'. The various forms

which individualism has taken therefore reflect the range of views about the content of human nature.

All individualist doctrines extol the intrinsic value of the individual, emphasising the dignity, personal worth, even sacredness, of each human being. What they disagree about, however, is how these qualities can best be realised. Early liberals expressed their individualism in the doctrine of natural rights, which held that the purpose of social organization was to protect the inalienable rights of the individual. Social contract theory can, for instance, be seen as a form of political individualism. Government is seen to arise out of the consent of individual citizens, and its role is limited to the protection of their rights. However, if this form of individualism is pushed to its logical extreme, it can have libertarian and even anarchist implications. For example, nineteenth-century American individualists such as Henry David Thoreau (1817–62) and Benjamin Tucker (1854–1939) believed that no individual should sacrifice his or her conscience to the judgement of politicians, elected or otherwise, a position which denies that government can ever exercise rightful authority over the individual.

This anti-statist individualist tradition has also been closely linked to the defence of market capitalism. Such individualism has usually been based upon the assumption that individual human beings are self-reliant and self-interested. C.B. Macpherson (1973) termed this 'possessive individualism', which he defined as 'a conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them'. If individuals are essentially egoistical, placing their own interests before those of fellow human beings or society, economic individualism is clearly linked to the right of private property, the freedom to acquire, use and dispose of property however the individual may choose. As such, individualism became, in the UK and the USA in particular, an article of faith for those who revered *laissez-faire* capitalism. Laws which regulate economic and social life – by stipulating wage levels, the length of the working day, interfering with working conditions or introducing benefits and pensions – are, from this point of view, a threat to individualism.

Very different implications, however, have sometimes been drawn from the doctrine of individualism. For example, modern liberals, such as T.H. Green (see p. 30) and L.T. Hobhouse (1864–1929), used individualism to construct arguments in favour of social welfare and state intervention. They saw the individual not as narrowly self-interested, but as socially responsible, capable of an altruistic concern for fellow human beings. Their principal goal was what J.S. Mill had termed 'individuality', the capacity of each individual to achieve fulfilment and realize whatever potential he or she may possess. Individualism was therefore transformed from a doctrine of individual greed to a philosophy of individual
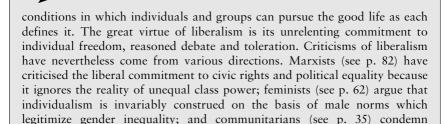
Liberalism

Liberal ideas resulted from the breakdown of feudalism in Europe and the growth, in its place, of a market capitalist society. In its earliest form, liberalism was a political doctrine, which attacked absolutism (see p. 164) and feudal privilege, instead advocating constitutional and, later, representative government. By the nineteenth century, a distinctively liberal political creed had developed that extolled the virtues of *laissez-faire* capitalism and condemned all forms of economic and social intervention. This became the centrepiece of classical, or nineteenth-century, liberalism. From the late nineteenth century onwards, however, a form of social liberalism emerged which looked more favourably on welfare reform and economic management. This became the characteristic theme of modern, or twentieth-century, liberalism.

Liberal thought is characterised by a commitment to individualism, a belief in the supreme importance of the human individual, implying strong support for individual freedom. From the liberal viewpoint, individuals are rational creatures who are entitled to the greatest possible freedom consistent with a like freedom for fellow citizens. Classical liberalism is distinguished by a belief in a 'minimal' state, whose function is limited to the maintenance of domestic order and personal security. Classical liberals emphasise that human beings are essentially self-interested and largely self-sufficient; as far as possible, people should be responsible for their own lives and circumstances. As a result, liberals look towards the creation of a meritocratic society in which rewards are distributed according to individual talent and hard work. As an economic doctrine, classical liberalism extols the merits of a self-regulating market in which government intervention is both unnecessary and damaging. Classical liberal ideas are expressed in certain natural rights theories and utilitarianism (see p. 358), and provide a cornerstone of the libertarian political tradition (see p. 337).

Modern liberalism, however, exhibits a more sympathetic attitude towards the state. This shift was born out of the recognition that industrial capitalism had merely generated new forms of injustice and left the mass of the population subject to the vagaries of the market. This view provided the basis for social or welfare liberalism, which is characterised by the recognition that state intervention can enlarge liberty by safeguarding individuals from the social evils that blight their existence. The theoretical basis for the transition from classical to modern liberalism was provided by the development of a 'positive' view of freedom. Whereas classical liberals had understood freedom in 'negative' terms, as the absence of external constraints upon the individual, modern liberals linked freedom to personal development and self-realisation. This created clear overlaps between modern liberalism and social democracy (see p. 308).

Liberalism has undoubtedly been the most important element in Western political tradition. Indeed, some identify liberalism with Western civilization in general. One of the implications of this is that liberalism strives not to prescribe any particular conception of the good life, but to establish

→

→

conditions in which individuals and groups can pursue the good life as each defines it. The great virtue of liberalism is its unrelenting commitment to individual freedom, reasoned debate and toleration. Criticisms of liberalism have nevertheless come from various directions. Marxists (see p. 82) have criticised the liberal commitment to civic rights and political equality because it ignores the reality of unequal class power; feminists (see p. 62) argue that individualism is invariably construed on the basis of male norms which legitimize gender inequality; and communitarians (see p. 35) condemn liberalism for portraying the self as asocial and acultural and for failing to provide a moral basis for social order and collective endeavour.

Key figures

John Locke (see p. 268) Locke championed the cornerstone liberal idea that government arises out of the agreement, or consent, of the governed, outlined in social-contract theory. In this view, the purpose of government is to protect natural rights (for Locke, the rights to life, liberty and property), but when the government breaks the terms of its contract its legitimacy evaporates and the people have the right of rebellion. Lockian liberalism laid down the basis for limited government, representation and constitutionalism, and greatly influenced the American Revolution.

John Stuart Mill (see p. 256)   Mill's importance to liberalism rests largely upon his construction of a liberal theory squarely based upon the virtues of liberty, as opposed to earlier ideas such as natural rights and utilitarianism. His conception of 'man as a progressive being' led him to recoil from interventionism, but encouraged him to develop a notion of individuality that stresses the prospects for human development and provides an important foundation for modern liberal thought.

Thomas Hill Green (**1836-82**)   A UK philosopher and social theorist, Green highlighted the limitations of early liberal doctrines and particularly *laissez-faire*. By drawing upon Kant (see p. 117) and Hegel (see p. 59), he highlighted the limitations of the doctrine of 'negative' freedom, and developed a pioneering defence of 'positive' freedom which helped liberalism to reach an accommodation with welfarism and social justice. Green was an important influence upon the development in Britain of 'new liberalism'. His chief works include *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* (1879–80) and *Prolegomena to Ethics* (1883).

Isaiah Berlin (see p. 261)   Berlin developed a form of pluralist liberalism that is based upon the anti-perfectionist belief that conflicts of value are an intrinsic, irremovable element in human life. Political arrangements should therefore attempt to secure the greatest scope to allow people to pursue their differing ends. Berlin supported 'negative' liberty over 'positive' liberty, on the grounds that the latter has monistic and authoritarian implications.

→

⟶

John Rawls (see p. 298)   Rawls was the most important liberal philosopher of the second half of the twentieth century. His theory of 'justice as fairness' not only condemns racial, sexual and religious discrimination, but also rejects many forms of social and economic inequality. Rawls' egalitarian form of liberalism has had a profound effect upon political philosophy generally, and has made a significant contribution to both the modern liberal and social-democratic political traditions.

Further reading

Arblaster, A. *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984.
Gray, J. *Liberalism*, 2nd edn. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1995.
Rosenblum, N. (ed.) *Liberalism and the Moral Life*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

self-development; egotistical individualism gave way to developmental individualism. As a result, modern liberals have been prepared to support government action designed to promote equality of opportunity and protect individuals from the social evils that blight their lives, such as unemployment, poverty and ignorance. Some socialist thinkers have embraced the notion of individualism for the same reason. If human beings are, as socialists argue, naturally sociable and gregarious, individualism stands not for possessiveness and self-interest but for fraternal cooperation and, perhaps, communal living. This is why the French socialist Jean Jaurès (1859–1914) could proclaim, 'socialism is the logical completion of individualism'. Modern 'third way' thinkers, such as Anthony Giddens (1994), have attempted a similar reconciliation in embracing the idea of 'new' individualism, which stresses that autonomous individuals operate within a context of interdependence and reciprocity.

Individualism is not, however, only of importance as a normative principle; it has also been widely used as a methodological device. In other words, social or political theories have been constructed on the basis of a pre-established model of the human individual, taking account of whatever needs, drives, aspirations and so forth the individual is thought to possess. Such 'methodological individualism' was employed in the seventeenth century to construct social-contract theories and in the twentieth century has become the basis for rational-choice models of political science. The individualist method underpinned classical and neo-classical economic theories, and has been championed in the modern period by writers such as Hayek (see p. 338). In each case, conclusions have been drawn from assumptions about a 'fixed' or 'given' human nature, usually highlighting the capacity for rationally self-interested behaviour. However, the

drawback of any form of methodological individualism is that it is both asocial and ahistorical. By building political theories on the basis of a pre-established model of human nature, individualists ignore the fact that human behaviour varies from society to society, and from one historical period to the next. If historical and social factors shape the content of human nature, as advocates of 'nurture' theories suggest, the human individual should be seen as a product of society, not the other way around.

Individual and community

Support for individualism has not, however, been universal. Political thought is deeply divided about the relationship between the individual and the community: should the individual be encouraged to be independent and self-reliant, or will this make social solidarity impossible and leave individuals isolated and insecure? Advocates of the former position have normally subscribed to a particular Anglo-American tradition of individualism, described by US President Herbert Hoover as 'rugged individualism'. This tradition can be thought of as an extreme form of individualism, its roots being found in classical liberalism. It sees the individual as almost entirely separate from society, and so discounts or downgrades the importance of community. It is based upon the belief that individuals not only possess the capacity for self-reliance and hard work, but also that individual effort is the source of moral and personal development. Not only *can* individuals look after themselves, but they *should* do.

The bible of this individualist tradition is Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* ([1859] 1986), which proclaimed that, 'The spirit of self-help is the root of all genuine growth in the individual'. Smiles (1812–1904) extolled the Victorian virtues of enterprise, application and perseverance, underpinned by the belief that 'energy accomplishes more than genius'. While self-help promotes the mental and moral development of the individual, and through promoting the entrepreneurial spirit benefits the entire nation, 'help from without', by which Smiles meant social welfare, enfeebles the individual by removing the incentive, or even need, to work. Such ideas found their highest expression in the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer and his followers. For them, individualism had a biological basis in the form of a struggle for survival among all individuals. Those fitted by nature to survive should succeed; the weak and lazy should go to the wall.

Such ideas have had considerable impact upon New Right thinking, and in particular upon its attitude towards the welfare state. Advanced most stridently in the 1980s through Reaganism in the USA and Thatcherism in the UK, the New Right attacked the 'dependency culture' which over-generous welfare support had supposedly created. The poor,

disadvantaged and unemployed had been turned into 'welfare junkies', robbed of the desire to work and denied dignity and self-respect. From this perspective, the solution is to bring about a shift from social responsibility to individual responsibility, encouraging people to 'stand on their own two feet'. This has been reflected since the 1980s in the reshaping of the US and UK benefits systems, through, for instance, reductions in benefit levels, a greater emphasis upon means-testing rather than universal benefits, and attempts to make the receipt of benefits conditional upon a willingness to undertake training or carry out work. Critics of such policies, however, point out that so long as social inequality and deprivation continue to exist, it is difficult to see how individuals can be held to be entirely responsible for their own circumstances. This line of argument shifts attention away from the individual and towards the community.

A wide range of political thinkers – socialists, conservatives, nationalists and, most emphatically, fascists – have, at different times, styled themselves as anti-individualists. In most cases, anti-individualism is based upon a commitment to the importance of community and the belief that self-help and individual responsibility are a threat to social solidarity. 'Community' may refer, very loosely, to a collection of people in a given location, as when the populations of a particular town, city or nation are described as a community. However, in social and political thought the term usually has deeper implications, suggesting a social group, a neighbourhood, town, region, group of workers or whatever, within which there are strong ties and a collective identity. A genuine community is therefore distinguished by the bonds of comradeship, loyalty and duty. In that sense, community refers to the social roots of individual identity.

Among contemporary critics of liberal individualism have been communitarian theorists who stress the importance of common or collective interests. In that view, there is no such thing as an unencumbered self; the self is always constituted through the community. Not surprisingly, socialists have also taken up the cause of community, seeing it as a means of strengthening social responsibility and harnessing collective energies. This is why socialists have often rejected individualism, especially when it is narrowly linked to self-interest and self-reliance. Although modern social democrats acknowledge the importance of individual enterprise and market competition, they nevertheless seek to balance these against the cooperation and altruism which only a sense of community can foster. Individualism has also been regarded with suspicion by many conservative theorists. From their point of view, unrestrained individualism is destructive of the social fabric. Individuals are timid and insecure creatures, who seek the rootedness and stability which only a community identity can provide. If individualism promotes a philosophy of 'each for his own' it will simply lead to 'atomism', and produce a society of vulnerable and

isolated individuals. This has, for example, encouraged neo-conservatives, such as Irving Kristol (see p. 140) in the USA and Roger Scruton in the UK, to distance themselves from the free-market enthusiasms of the liberal New Right.

Socialist and conservative concepts of community have been influenced at several points by academic sociology. Sociologists have distinguished between the forms of community life which develop within traditional or rural societies, and those found in modern urban societies. The most influential such theory was that developed by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1939), who distinguished between what he called *Gemeinschaft* or 'community', and *Gesellschaft* or 'association'. Tönnies suggested that *Gemeinschaft*-relationships, typically found in rural communities, are based upon the strong bonds of natural affection and mutual respect. This traditional sense of 'community' was, however, threatened by the spread of industrialization and urbanization, both of which encouraged a growth of egoism and competition. The *Gesellschaft*-relationships which develop in urban societies are, by contrast, artificial and contractual; they reflect the desire for personal gain rather than any meaningful social loyalty. The French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) also contributed to the understanding of community by developing the concept of 'anomie' to denote a condition in which the framework of social codes and norms breaks down entirely. In *Suicide* ([1897] 1951), Durkheim argued that, since human desires are unlimited, the breakdown of community, weakening social and moral norms about which forms of behaviour are acceptable and which are not, is likely to lead to greater unhappiness and, ultimately, more suicides. Once again, community rather than individualism was seen as the basis for social stability and individual happiness.

On the other hand, it is clear that a stress upon community rather than the individual may also entail dangers. In particular, it can lead to individual rights and liberties being violated in the name of the community or collective body. This was most graphically demonstrated through the experience of fascist rule. In many ways, fascism is the antithesis of individualism: in its German form it proclaimed the supreme importance of the *Völksgemeinschaft* or 'national community', and aimed to dissolve individuality, and indeed personal existence, within the social whole. This goal, distinctive to fascism, was expressed in the Nazi slogan 'Strength through Unity'. The method used to achieve this end in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy was totalitarian terror: a police state employing repression, persecution and widespread brutality. Although the fascist conception of community may be little more than a grotesque misrepresentation of the socialist idea of voluntary cooperation, extreme individualists have sometimes warned that any stress upon the collective has oppressive implications since it threatens to downgrade the importance of the individual.

Communitarianism

The communitarian tradition has its origins in the nineteenth-century socialist utopianism of thinkers such as Robert Owen and Peter Kropotkin. Indeed, a concern with community can be seen as one of the enduring themes in modern political thought, expressed variously in the socialist stress upon fraternity and cooperation, the Marxist (see p. 82) belief in a classless communist society, the conservative (see p. 138) view of society as an organic whole, bound together by mutual obligations, and even in the fascist commitment to an indivisible national community. However, communitarianism as a school of thought articulating a particular political philosophy emerged only in the 1980s and 1990s. It developed specifically as a critique of liberalism, highlighting the damage done to the public culture of liberal societies by their emphasis upon individual rights and liberties over the needs of the community. This resulted in the so-called liberal–communitarian debate. 'High' and 'low' forms of communitarianism are sometimes identified: the former engages primarily in philosophical debate, while the latter, whose best-known figure is Amitai Etzioni, is more concerned with issues of public policy.

From the communitarian perspective, the central defect of liberalism is its view of the individual as an asocial, atomized, 'unencumbered self'. Such a view is evident in the utilitarian (see p. 358) assumption that human beings are rationally self-seeking creatures. Communitarians emphasize, by contrast, that the self is embedded in the community, in the sense that each individual is a kind of embodiment of the society that has shaped his or her desires, values and purposes. This draws attention not merely to the process of socialization, but also to the conceptual impossibility of separating an individual's experiences and beliefs from the social context that assigns them meaning. The communitarian stance has particular implications for our understanding of justice. Liberal theories of justice tend to be based upon assumptions about personal choice and individual behaviour that, communitarians argue, make no sense because they apply to a disembodied subject. Universalist theories of justice must therefore give way to ones that are strictly local and particular, a position similar to that advanced by postmodern theories (see p. 7).

Communitarians argue that their aim is to rectify an imbalance in modern society and political thought in which individuals, unconstrained by social duty and moral responsibility, have been allowed or encouraged to take account only of their own interests and their own rights. In this moral vacuum, society, quite literally, disintegrates. The communitarian project thus attempts to restore to society its moral voice and, in a tradition that can be traced back to Aristotle (see p. 69), to construct a 'politics of the common good'. Critics of communitarianism, however, allege that it has both conservative and authoritarian implications. Communitarianism has a conservative disposition in that it amounts to a defence of *existing* social structures and moral codes. Feminists, for example, have criticized communitarianism for attempting to bolster traditional sex roles under

→

⟶

the guise of defending the family. The authoritarian features of communitarianism stem from its tendency to emphasise the duties and responsibilities of the individual over his or her rights and entitlements.

Key figures

Alasdair MacIntyre (1929–)   A Scottish-born moral philosopher, MacIntyre has developed a neoclassical and anti-liberal communitarian philosophy. In his view, liberalism preaches moral relativism and so is unable to provide a moral basis for social order. He argues that notions of justice and virtue are specific to particular intellectual traditions, and has developed a model of the good life that is rooted in Aristotle and the Christian tradition of Augustine (see p. 91) and St Thomas Aquinas (see p. 158). MacIntyre's major works include *After Virtue* (1981), *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988) and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990).

Michael Walzer (1935–)   A US political theorist, Walzer has developed a form of communalist and pluralistic liberalism. He rejects as misguided the quest for a universal theory of justice, arguing instead for the principle of 'complex equality', according to which different rules should apply to the distribution of different social goods, thereby establishing separate 'spheres' of justice. He nevertheless evinces sympathy for a form of democratic socialism. Walzer's major works include *Spheres of Justice* (1983) and *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (1987).

Michael Sandel (1953–)   A US political theorist, Sandel has fiercely criticised individualism, the notion of the 'unencumbered self'. He argues for conceptions of moral and social life that are firmly embedded in distinctive communities, and emphasises that individual choice and identity are structured by the 'moral ties' of the community. Sandel has also warned that a lack of embeddedness means that democracy may not long endure, and supports 'civic republicanism' (see p. 205), which he associates with the US political tradition. Sandel's most influential works include *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982) and *Democracy's Discontent* (1996).

Further reading

Avineri, S. and De-Shalit, A. (eds) *Communitarianism and Individualism*. Oxford University Press, 1992.

Miller, F. D. and Paul, J. (eds) *The Communitarian Challenge to Liberalism*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Tam, H. *Communitarianism: A New Agenda for Politics and Citizenship*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998.