

POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES - SUMMARIES

Liberalism

Liberalism is a political ideology whose central theme is a commitment to the individual and to the construction of the society in which individuals can satisfy their interests or achieve fulfilment. The core values of liberalism are individualism, rationalism, freedom, justice and toleration. The liberal belief that human beings are, first and foremost, individuals, endowed with reason, implies that each individual should enjoy the maximum possible freedom consistent with a like freedom for all. However, although individuals are 'born equal' in the sense that they are of equal moral worth and should enjoy formal equality and equal opportunities, liberals generally stress that they should be rewarded according to their differing levels of talent or willingness to work and therefore favour the principle of meritocracy. A liberal society is characterised by diversity and pluralism and is organised politically around the twin values of consent and constitutionalism, combined to form the structures of liberal democracy.

Significant differences nevertheless exist between classical liberalism and modern liberalism. *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 an economic doctrine, classical liberalism extols the merits of a self-regulating market in which government intervention is seen as both unnecessary and damaging. Classical liberal ideas are expressed in certain natural rights theories and utilitarianism, and provide one of the cornerstones of libertarianism. *Modern* liberalism (sometimes portrayed as social or welfare liberalism) exhibits a more sympathetic attitude towards the state, born out of the belief that unregulated capitalism merely produces new forms of injustice. State intervention can therefore enlarge liberty by safeguarding individuals from the social evils that blight their existence. Whereas classical liberals understand freedom in 'negative' terms, as the absence of constraints upon the individual, modern liberals link freedom to personal development and self-realisation. This creates clear overlaps between modern liberalism and social democracy.

Liberalism has undoubtedly been the most powerful ideological force shaping the Western political tradition. Indeed, some portray liberalism as the ideology of the industrialised West, and identify it with Western civilisation in general. Liberalism was the product of the breakdown of feudalism and the growth, in its place, of a market or capitalist society. Early liberalism certainly reflected the aspirations of a rising industrial middle class, and liberalism and capitalism have been closely linked (some have argued intrinsically linked) ever since. In its earliest form, liberalism was a political doctrine. It attacked absolutism and feudal privilege, instead advocating constitutional and, later, representative government. In the nineteenth century, classical liberalism, in the form of economic liberalism, extolled the virtues of *laissez-faire* capitalism and condemned all forms of government intervention.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, however, a form of social liberalism emerged, characteristic of modern liberalism, which looked more favourably upon welfare reform and economic intervention. So-called 'end of ideology' theorists such as Francis Fukuyama (1992) argued that the twentieth century had culminated with the final, worldwide triumph of liberalism. This supposedly reflected the collapse of all viable alternatives to market capitalism as the basis of economic organisation and to liberal democracy as the basis of political organisation.

The attraction of liberalism is its unrelenting commitment to individual freedom, reasoned debate and the balance within diversity. Indeed, it has become fashionable to portray liberalism not simply as an ideology but as a 'meta-ideology', that is, as a body of rules that lays down the grounds upon which political and ideological debate can take place. This reflects the belief that liberalism gives priority to 'the right' over 'the good'. In other words, liberalism strives to establish the conditions in which people and groups can pursue the good life as each defines it, but it does not prescribe or try to promote any particular notion of what is good. Criticisms of liberalism nevertheless come from various directions. Marxists have argued that, in defending capitalism, liberalism attempts to legitimise unequal class power and so constitutes a form of bourgeois ideology. Radical feminists point to the linkage between liberalism and patriarchy, which is rooted in the tendency to construe the individual on the basis of an essentially male model of self-sufficiency, thereby encouraging women to be 'like men'. Communitarians condemn liberalism for failing to provide a moral basis for social order and collective endeavour, arguing that the liberal society is a recipe for unrestrained egoism and greed, and so is ultimately self-defeating.

Conservatism

Conservatism, as a political attitude, is defined by the desire to conserve and is reflected in a resistance to, or at least suspicion of, change. However, although the desire to resist change may be the recurrent theme within conservatism, what distinguishes conservatism as an ideology from rival political creeds is the distinctive way in which this position is upheld. The central themes of conservative ideology are tradition, human imperfection, organic society, authority and property. For a conservative, tradition reflects the accumulated wisdom of the past, and institutions and practices that have been 'tested by time'; it should be preserved for the benefit of the living and for generations yet to come. Conservatives view human nature pessimistically in at least three senses. First, human beings are limited, dependent and security-seeking creatures; second, they are morally corrupt, tainted by selfishness, greed and a thirst for power; third, human rationality is unable to cope with the infinite complexity of the world (hence the conservative faith in pragmatism and their preference for describing their beliefs as an 'attitude of mind' rather than an ideology). The belief that society should be viewed as an organic whole implies that institutions and values have arisen through natural necessity and should be preserved to safeguard the fragile 'fabric of society'. Conservatives view authority as the basis for social cohesion, arguing that it gives people a sense of who they are and what is expected of them, and reflects the hierarchical nature of all social institutions. Conservatives

value property because it gives people security and a measure of independence from government, and also encourages them to respect the law and the property of others.

However, there are significant divisions within conservative thought. *Authoritarian* conservatism is starkly autocratic and reactionary, stressing that government 'from above' is the only means of establishing order, and thus contrasts with the more modest and pragmatic Anglo-American conservatism that stems from the writing of Edmund Burke (1729-97). *Paternalistic* conservatism draws upon a combination of prudence and principle in arguing both that 'reform from above' is preferable to 'revolution from below', and that the wealthy have an obligation to look after the less well-off, duty being the price of privilege. Such ideas were most influentially expressed by Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81). This tradition is most fully developed in the form of One Nation conservatism, which advocates a 'middle way' approach to state-market relations and gives qualified support to economic management and welfarism. *Libertarian* conservatism advocates the greatest possible economic liberty and the least possible government regulation of social life, echoing *laissez-faire* liberalism, but harnesses this to a belief in a more traditional, conservative social philosophy that stresses the importance of authority and duty. This tradition provided the basis for New Right theories and values.

Conservative ideas and doctrines first emerged in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. They arose as a reaction against the growing pace of economic and social change, which was in many ways symbolised by the French Revolution (1789). In trying to resist the pressures unleashed by the growth of liberalism, socialism and nationalism, conservatism stood in defence of an increasingly embattled traditional social order. Authoritarian conservatism took root in continental Europe but was increasingly marginalised by the advance of constitutionalism and democracy, and eventually collapsed with the fall of fascism, with which it had often collaborated. The Disraelian form of conservatism ultimately proved to be more successful, using Burke's notion of 'change in order to conserve', it allowed conservatism to adapt values such as tradition, hierarchy and authority to the emerging conditions of mass politics, thereby broadening its social and electoral base. Conservatism's remarkable resilience stems from its ideological caution and political flexibility, enabling it, at different times, to embrace welfarist and interventionist policies as manifestations of the One Nation ideal, and to advocate 'rolling back the state' as recommended by the New Right.

Conservative thought, however, has always been open to the charge that it amounts to nothing more than ruling class ideology. In proclaiming the need to resist change, it legitimises the status quo and defends the interests of dominant or elite groups. Other critics allege that divisions between traditional conservatism and the New Right runs so deep that the conservative tradition has become entirely incoherent. In their defence, conservatives argue that they merely advance certain enduring, if at times unpalatable, truths about human nature and the societies we live in. That human beings are morally and intellectually imperfect, and seek the security that only tradition, authority and a shared culture can offer, merely underlines the wisdom of 'travelling light' in ideological terms. Experience

and history, conservatives warn, will always provide a sounder basis for political action than will abstract principles such as freedom, equality and justice.

Socialism

Socialism is an ideology that is defined by its opposition to capitalism and its attempt to provide a more humane and socially worthwhile alternative. The core of socialism is a vision of human beings as social creatures united by their common humanity; as the poet John Donne put it, 'No man is an Island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main'. This highlights the degree to which individual identity is fashioned by social interaction and the membership of social groups and collective bodies. Socialists therefore prefer cooperation to competition, and favour collectivism over individualism. The central, and some would say defining, value of socialism is equality, socialism sometimes being portrayed as a form of egalitarianism. Socialists believe that a measure of social equality is the essential guarantee of social stability and cohesion, and that it promotes freedom in the sense that it satisfies material needs and provides the basis for personal development. The socialist movement has traditionally articulated the interests of the industrial working class, seen as systematically oppressed or structurally disadvantaged within the capitalist system. The goal of socialism is thus to reduce or abolish class divisions.

Socialism, however, contains a bewildering variety of divisions and rival traditions. *Utopian* socialism, or ethical socialism, advances an essentially moral critique of capitalism. In short, socialism is portrayed as morally superior to capitalism because human beings are ethical creatures, bound to one another by the ties of love, sympathy and compassion. *Scientific* socialism, undertakes a scientific analysis of historical and social development, which, in the form of Marxism, suggests not that socialism 'should' replace capitalism, but predicts that it inevitably 'would' replace capitalism. A second distinction is about the 'means' of achieving socialism, namely the difference between revolution and reform. *Revolutionary* socialism, most clearly reflected in the communist tradition, holds that socialism can only be introduced by the revolutionary overthrow of the existing political and social system, usually based upon the belief that the existing state structures are irredeemably linked to capitalism and the interests of the ruling class. *Reformist* socialism (sometimes termed evolutionary, parliamentary or democratic socialism), on the other hand, believes in 'socialism through the ballot box', and thus accepts basic liberal democratic principles such as consent, constitutionalism and party competition. Finally, there are profound divisions over the 'end' of socialism, that is, the nature of the socialist project. *Fundamentalist* socialism aims to abolish and replace the capitalist system, viewing socialism as qualitatively different from capitalism. Fundamentalist socialists, such as Marxists and communists, generally equate socialism with common ownership of some form. *Revisionist* socialism aims not to abolish capitalism but to reform it, looking to reach an accommodation between the efficiency of the market and the enduring moral vision of socialism. This is most clearly expressed in social democracy.

Socialism arose as a reaction against the social and economic conditions generated in Europe by the growth of industrial capitalism. The birth of socialist ideas was closely linked to the development of a new but growing class of industrial workers, who suffered the poverty and degradation that are so often a feature of early industrialisation. For over two hundred years, socialism has constituted the principal oppositional force within capitalist societies, and has articulated the interests of oppressed and disadvantaged peoples in many parts of the world. The principal impact of socialism has been in the form of the twentieth-century communist and social-democratic movements. However, in the late twentieth century, socialism suffered a number of spectacular reverses, leading some to proclaim the 'death of socialism'. The most spectacular of these reverses was the collapse of communism in the Eastern European Revolutions of 1989-91. Partly in response to this, and partly as a result of globalisation and changing social structures, parliamentary socialist parties in many parts of the world re-examined, and sometime rejected, traditional socialist principles.

The moral strength of socialism derives not from its concern with what people are like, but with what they have the capacity to become. This has led socialists to develop utopian visions of a better society in which human beings can achieve genuine emancipation and fulfilment as members of a community. In that sense, despite its late-twentieth century setbacks, socialism is destined to survive if only because it serves as a reminder that human development can extend beyond market individualism. Critics of socialism nevertheless advance one of two lines of argument. The first is that socialism is irrevocably tainted by its association with statism. The emphasis upon collectivism leads to an endorsement of the state as the embodiment of the public interest. Both communism and social democracy are in that sense 'top-down' versions of socialism, meaning that socialism amounts to an extension of state control and a restriction of freedom. The second line of argument highlights the incoherence and confusion inherent in modern socialist theory. In this view, socialism was only ever meaningful as a critique of, or alternative to, capitalism. The acceptance by socialists of market principles therefore demonstrates either that socialism itself is flawed or that their analysis is no longer rooted in genuinely socialist ideas and theories.

Anarchism

Anarchism is an ideology that is defined by the central belief that political authority in all its form, and especially in the form of the state, is both evil and unnecessary (anarchy literally means 'without rule'). Anarchists believe that the state is evil because, as a repository of sovereign, compulsory and coercive authority, it is an offence against the principles of freedom and equality, the core value of anarchism being unrestricted personal autonomy. The state and the accompanying institutions of government and law are therefore rejected as corrupt and corrupting. However, the belief that the state is unnecessary is no less important to anarchism. Anarchists reject 'political' order but have considerable faith in 'natural' order and spontaneous social harmony, ultimately underpinned by optimistic assumptions about human nature. Government, in other words, is not the solution to the problem of order, but its cause.

Nevertheless, the anarchist preference for a stateless society in which free individuals manage their own affairs through voluntary agreement and cooperation has been developed on the basis of two rival traditions: socialist communitarianism and liberal individualism. Anarchism can thus be thought of as a point of intersection between socialism and liberalism: a form of both 'ultra-socialism' and 'ultra-liberalism'. This is reflected in two rival anarchist traditions, collectivist anarchism and individualist anarchism. *Collectivist* anarchism, or classical anarchism, is rooted in the idea of social solidarity or what Peter Kropotkin (1842-1912) called 'mutual aid', the belief that the natural and proper relationship amongst people is one of sympathy, affection and harmony. Collectivist anarchists have typically stressed the importance of social equality and common ownership, supporting Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's (1809-69) famous assertion that 'Property is theft', most radically expressed in the form of anarcho-communism. *Individualist* anarchism is based upon the idea of the sovereign individual, the belief that individual conscience and the pursuit of self-interest should not be constrained by any collective body or public authority. Individualist anarchism overlaps with libertarianism and is usually linked to a strong belief in the market as a self-regulating mechanism, most obviously manifest in the form of anarcho-capitalism.

Anarchism is unusual amongst political ideologies in that it has never succeeded in winning power, at least at a national level. As no society or nation has been re-modelled according to anarchist principles, it is tempting to regard anarchism as an ideology of lesser significance. As a political movement, anarchism has suffered from three major drawbacks. First, its goal, the overthrow of the state and all forms of political authority, is often considered to be simply unrealistic. The most common criticism of anarchism is that it is an example of utopianism in its negative sense, in that it places excessive faith in 'human goodness' or in the capacity of social institutions, such as the market or social ownership, to maintain order and stability. Second, in viewing government as corrupt and corrupting, anarchists have rejected the conventional means of political activism, such as forming political parties, standing for elections and seeking public office, and have had to rely instead upon the capacity of the masses to engage in spontaneous rebellion. Third, anarchism does not constitute a single, coherent set of political ideas, apart from anti-statism, anarchists disagree profoundly about the nature of an anarchic society and particularly about property rights and economic organisation.

However, the significance of anarchism is perhaps less that it has provided an ideological basis for acquiring and retaining political power, and more that it has challenged, and thereby fertilised, other political creeds. Anarchists have highlighted the coercive and destructive nature of political power, and in so doing have countered statist tendencies within other ideologies, notably liberalism, socialism and conservatism. In this sense, anarchism has had growing influence upon modern political thought. Both the New Left and New Right, for instance, have exhibited libertarian tendencies, which bear the imprint of anarchist ideas. Indeed, the continuing importance of anarchism is perhaps merely concealed by its increasingly diverse character. In addition to, and in some ways in place of, established political and class struggles, anarchists have come to address issues such as ecology, transport, urban development, consumerism, new technology and sexual relations. To argue that anarchism is irrelevant because it has long since lost the potential to become a mass movement

maybe misses the point. As the world becomes increasingly complex and fragmented, it may be that it is mass politics itself that is dead.

Nationalism

Nationalism can broadly be defined as the belief that the nation is the central principle of political organisation. As such, it is based upon two core assumptions: first, that humankind is naturally divided into distinct nations, and second, that the nation is a political community in the sense that it is the most appropriate, and perhaps only legitimate, unit of political rule. There is, nevertheless, disagreement about whether nationalism is a doctrine or an ideology. The doctrine of nationalism, or what is seen as 'classical' political nationalism, is the belief that all nations are entitled to independent statehood, suggesting that the world should consist of a collection of nation-states. This doctrine may, in turn, be reworked or reinterpreted when it is absorbed into one of a number of political ideologies. However, if nationalism is regarded as an ideology in its own right, it is seen to encompass a diverse range of forms, political, cultural and ethnic. *Political* nationalism includes any attempt to use the nation ideal to further specifically political ends, which may be highly diverse, as explained below. *Cultural* nationalism emphasises the regeneration of the nation as a distinctive civilisation, and thus stresses the need to defend or strengthen a national language, religion, or way of life rather than achieve overt political ends. *Ethnic* nationalism overlaps with cultural nationalism, but as ethnic groups are seen, correctly or incorrectly, to have descended from common ancestors, it implies a stronger and perhaps more intense sense of distinctiveness and exclusivity.

Political nationalism is a complex and diverse phenomenon. Its major forms are liberal nationalism, conservative nationalism, expansionist nationalism and anticolonial nationalism. *Liberal* nationalism assigns to the nation a moral status similar to that of the individual, meaning that nations have rights, in particular the right to self-determination. As liberal nationalism holds that all nations are equal, it proclaims that the nation-state ideal is universally applicable. *Conservative* nationalism is concerned less with the principled nationalism of self-determination and more with the promise of social cohesion and public order embodied in the sentiment of national patriotism. From this perspective, patriotic loyalty and a consciousness of nationhood is largely rooted in the idea of a shared past, turning nationalism into a defence of traditional values and institutions that have been endorsed by history. *Expansionist* nationalism is an aggressive and militaristic form of nationalism that is invariably associated with chauvinistic beliefs and doctrines, which tends to blur the distinction between nationalism and racialism. In its extreme form, sometimes referred to as 'integral' nationalism, it arises from a sentiment of intense, even hysterical nationalist enthusiasm. *Anticolonial* nationalism links the struggle for 'national liberation' in Africa and Asia in particular to the desire for social development, and was typically expressed through socialist doctrines, most commonly through the vehicle of revolutionary Marxism. However, developing-world nationalism has since the 1970s assumed a postcolonial character, which has been expressed most clearly through religious fundamentalism.

It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of nationalism to modern politics. For over two hundred years, nationalism has helped to shape and re-shape history in all parts of the world, making it perhaps the most successful of political creeds. The rising tide of nationalism re-drew the map of Europe in the nineteenth century as autocratic and multinational empires crumbled in the face of liberal and nationalist pressures. This process was continued in the twentieth century through the Treaty of Versailles (1919) and culminated in 1991 with the collapse of the political successor to the Russian Empire, the USSR. Both the First and Second World Wars were arguably the result of an upsurge in aggressive nationalism, and most regional and international conflicts are to some extent fuelled by nationalism. The political face of the developing world has been transformed since 1945 by the rise of anticolonialism and a subsequent postcolonial process of 'nation building', both of which are essentially manifestations of nationalism. On the other hand, there have been claims since the late twentieth century that nationalism is becoming an anachronism. These claims are variously based upon the fact that nationalism has achieved its aim in that the world is now mainly composed of nation-states; that nation-states are themselves losing authority as a result of globalisation and the growth of supranationalism; and that ethnic and regional political identities are displacing national ones.

The normative character of nationalism is notoriously difficult to judge. This is because nationalism has a schizophrenic political character. At different times, nationalism has been progressive and reactionary, democratic and authoritarian, rational and irrational, and left-wing and right-wing. Nationalists argue that a 'higher' loyalty and deeper political significance attaches to the nation than to any other social group or collective body because nations are natural political communities. Nationalism is merely the recognition of this fact given ideological form. Supporters of nationalism, moreover, view nationalism as a means of enlarging freedom and defending democracy, since it is grounded in the idea of self-government. Such a defence of nationalism is most easily developed in relation to liberal nationalism and anticolonial nationalism. However, opponents of nationalism argue that it is implicitly and sometimes explicitly oppressive, and that it is invariably linked to intolerance, suspicion and conflict. Nationalism is oppressive both in the sense that it submerges individual identity and conscience within that of the national whole, and because of the potential it gives political leaders and elites to manipulate and control the masses. The argument that nationalism is inherently divisive stems from the fact that it highlights difference amongst humankind and legitimises an identification with, and preference for, one's own people or nation; in short, it breeds tribalism. This may be implicit in conservative nationalism and explicit in expansionist nationalism, but all forms of nationalism may harbour a darker face that is essentially chauvinistic and potentially aggressive.

Fascism

Fascism is a political ideology whose core theme is the idea of an organically unified national community, embodied in a belief in 'strength through unity'. The individual, in a literal sense, is nothing; individual identity must be entirely absorbed into the community or social group. The fascist

ideal is that of the 'new man', a hero, motivated by duty, honour and self-sacrifice, prepared to dedicate his life to the glory of his nation or race, and to give unquestioning obedience to a supreme leader. In many respects, fascism constitutes a revolt against the ideas and values that dominated Western political thought from the French Revolution onwards; in the words of the Italian Fascist slogan: '1789 is Dead'. Values such as rationalism, progress, freedom and equality were thus overturned in the name of struggle, leadership, power, heroism and war. In this sense, fascism has an 'anti-character'. It is defined largely by what it opposes: it is anti-rational, anti-liberal, anti-conservative, anti-capitalist, anti-bourgeois, anti-communist and so on. Fascism represents the darker side of the Western political tradition, the central values of which it transformed rather than abandoned. For fascists, freedom means complete submission, democracy is equated with dictatorship, progress implies constant struggle and war, and creation is identified with destruction.

Fascism has nevertheless been a complex historical phenomenon, and it is difficult to identify its core principles or a 'fascist minimum'. For instance, although most commentators treat Mussolini's Fascist dictatorship in Italy and Hitler's Nazi dictatorship in Germany as the two principal manifestations of fascism, others regard Fascism and Nazism as distinct ideological traditions. Italian Fascism was essentially an extreme form of statism that was based upon unquestioning respect and absolute loyalty towards a 'totalitarian' state. As the Fascist philosopher Gentile (1875-1944) put it, 'everything for the state; nothing against the state; nothing outside the state'. German Nazism, on the other hand, was constructed largely on the basis of racialism. Its two core theories were Aryanism (the belief that the German people constitute a 'master race' and are destined for world domination) and a virulent form of anti-Semitism that portrayed the Jews as inherently evil and aimed at their eradication. Neo-fascism or 'democratic fascism' claims to have distanced itself from principles such as charismatic leadership, totalitarianism and overt racialism. It is a form of fascism that is often linked to anti-immigration campaigns and is associated with the growth of insular, ethnically or racially based forms of nationalism that have sprung up as a reaction against globalisation and supranationalism.

Although the major ideas and doctrines of fascism can be traced back to the nineteenth century, they were fused together and shaped by the First World War and its aftermath, in particular by a potent mixture of war and revolution. Fascism emerged most dramatically in Italy and Germany, manifest respectively in the Mussolini regime (1922-43) and the Hitler regime (1933-45). Some historians regard fascism as a specifically inter-war phenomenon, linked to a historically unique set of circumstances. These circumstances included the First World War's legacy of disruption, lingering militarism and frustrated nationalism; the fact that in many parts of Europe democratic values had yet to replace older, autocratic ones; the threat to the lower middle classes of the growing might of big business and organised labour; the fears generated amongst propertied classes generally and elite groups in particular by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia; and the economic insecurity of the 1920s which deepened into a full-scale world economic crisis in the early 1930s. According to this view, fascism died in 1945 with the final collapse of the Hitler and Mussolini regimes, and it has been suppressed ever since by a combination of political stability and economic security. The late twentieth century nevertheless witnessed a revival of fascism in the form of neo-fascism. Neo-fascism has been

particularly influential in eastern Europe, where it has sought to revive national rivalries and racial hatreds, and has taken advantage of the political instability that resulted from the collapse of communism. However, it is questionable whether fascism can meaningfully adopt a 'democratic' face, since this implies an accommodation with principles such as pluralism, toleration and individualism.

Feminism

Feminism is a political movement and ideology that aims to advance the social role of women. Feminists have highlighted what they see as the political relationship between the sexes: the supremacy of men and the subjection of women in most, if not all, societies. Feminist ideology is therefore characterised by two basic beliefs. First, women and men are treated differently because of their sex, and second, that unequal treatment can and should be overturned. Although most feminists therefore embrace the goal of gender equality, it is misleading to define feminism in terms of this goal as some feminists distinguish between liberation and equality, arguing that the latter implies that women should be 'like men'. The central concept in feminist analysis is patriarchy, which draws attention to the totality of oppression and exploitation to which women are subject. This, in turn, highlights the political importance of gender, understood to refer to socially imposed rather than biological differences between women and men. Most feminists view gender as a political construct, usually based upon stereotypes of 'feminine' and 'masculine' behaviour and social roles.

Feminist theory and practice is highly diverse, however. Distinctive liberal, socialist/Marxist and radical forms of feminism are conventionally identified. *Liberal* feminism reflects a commitment to individualism and formal equality, and is characterised by the quest for equal rights and opportunities in 'public' and political life. *Socialist* feminism, largely derived from Marxism, highlights links between female subordination and the capitalist mode of production, drawing attention to the economic significance of women being confined to the family or domestic life. *Radical* feminism goes beyond the perspectives of established political traditions in portraying gender divisions as the most fundamental and politically significant cleavages in society, and in calling for the radical, even revolutionary, restructuring of personal, domestic and family life. Radical feminists proclaim that 'the personal is the political'. However, the breakdown of feminism into three traditions – liberal, socialist and radical – has become increasingly redundant since the 1970s as feminism has become yet more sophisticated and diverse. Amongst its more recent forms have been black feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, eco-feminism and postmodern feminism.

The so-called 'first wave' of feminism was closely associated with the women's suffrage movement, which emerged in the 1840s and 1850s. The achievement of female suffrage in most Western countries in the early twentieth century meant that the campaign for legal and civil rights assumed a lower profile and deprived the women's movement of a unifying focus. The 'second wave' of feminism arose during the 1960s and expressed, in addition to the established concern with equal rights, the more radical and revolutionary demands of the growing Women's Liberation Movement. Since the

early 1970s, feminism has undergone a process of de-radicalisation, leading some to proclaim the emergence of post-feminism. This was undoubtedly linked to a growing backlash against feminism, associated with the rise of the New Right, but it also reflects the emergence of more individualised and conventionalised forms of feminism, characterised by an unwillingness any longer to view women as 'victims'.

The major strength of feminist ideology is that it has exposed and challenged the gender biases that pervade society and which have been ignored by conventional political thought. As such, feminism has gained growing respectability as a distinctive school of political thought. It has shed new light upon established concepts such as power, domination and equality, but also introduced a new sensitivity and language into politics related to ideas such as connection, voice and difference. Feminism has nevertheless been criticised on the grounds that its internal divisions are now so sharp that feminist theory has lost all coherence and unity. Postmodern feminists, for example, even question whether 'woman' is a meaningful category. Others suggest that feminism has become disengaged from a society that is increasingly post-feminist, in that, largely thanks to the women's movement, the domestic, professional and public roles of women, at least in developed societies, have undergone a major transformation.