

AN INTRODUCTION TO
POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY
AND ECONOMICS

STUDENT REFLECTIONS

AL: Throughout this course, we've looked at the basics of the British Government from the uncodified constitution to the difference between MP's and mayors. We've explored three key ideologies: Conservatism, Socialism and Liberalism while looking into their key thinkers Edmund Burke, Karl Marx and John Locke.

When starting this course, we were asked the question: **Is the individual more important than the group?**

In the beginning, I simply answered: 'I think collectivism is more empowering and effective than individualism.'

As a socialist, I would believe that collectivism would be morally and economically better for society. Not only will it help reduce the immense inequality between the classes, it will also instill ideas of fraternity and establish a value on empathy. We would live with common ownership, instead of being divided in the materialistic society we live in today. Where we are currently driven by harmful competition and the idea that status and success is based around ownership (of money or objects). No longer separated into the haves and have-nots, we can live in harmony where success can be re-defined.

Karl Marx believed that our social existence shapes our conscience. So, not only do we have to be educated individually but the collective, the surrounding society, must change as well (possibly, through a 'Proletarian revolution' as labourers experience the switch from having a 'false conscious' to a 'class conscience').

As a liberal, I would believe that pursuing individual self-interest must be at the centre of a functioning society. Pursuing individual 'higher and lower pleasures' while being given equality of opportunity will allow individuals to grow to their full potential. Liberals, like John Locke, believe humans are innately good, possessing reason and tolerance but are socialised by their environments. Locke argued that we are born with a 'blank slate on which experience writes' and that

educating the individual from a younger age well, will lead to a morally educated society.

Modern liberals (unlike the 'atomistic society' classical liberals believed in) trust in the 'common good' - that self-realisation is not possible without other people. So, although Modern liberals strongly believe in pursuing the development of the individual, they have softening views on this being the *only* form it may take (like the NHS).

As a conservative, I would have a more pessimistic view on the individual, arguing that we are naturally selfish, greedy and unequal, therefore needing an authoritarian society that can establish order. Much like Hobbes, most conservatives hold the view that humans are flawed and sinful (starting from the first man, Adam) and that we need to be disciplined from above, by the metaphorical 'Leviathan'. Both Traditional and One Nation Conservatives agree in the 'civil society', that the voluntary and traditional acts make us fit for freedom. With 'The New Right' came slightly different ideas, some with the influence of Modern Liberalism, that individuals should have the right (and ability) to rationally pursue their self-interest and that 'civil society' was currently corrupted by cohesion. They still feared the decline in authority and disruptive forces of liberty.

I now see different perspectives to this one, seemingly simple, question. I realised I held views within all of these ideologies, the one that has changed the most is that I thought humans were innately corrupted, often exacerbated through socialisation but slightly cured with education.

I now hold the belief that humans are capable of reason and tolerance and through proper education, we can improve. I used to think education of this 'blank slate' was the soul, easy solution but I agree with Karl Marx when he says, the environment around them must change as well. The materialistic society we live in today, it *is* harmful and creates extremes (poverty, class, opportunities...) but I can't quite imagine what a sustainable alternative is. For me, possibly

something based around the liberals 'common good' that pursues **both** the individual and the group.

Although I've learnt a lot, I feel like there are many pieces missing from this complex puzzle. I've constructed the outside border but now need to fit the pieces on the inside - I will do this through studying it at A-Level, having discussions with others (hopefully with differing opinions) and start paying more attention to the news.

AA: In this essay I would like to talk about many topics we have discussed in the course, beginning with communism. My opinion of communism is that it was a failed system because janitors could earn the same amount as petroleum engineers who are risking their lives for the benefit of the country whereas janitors sweep floors for a few hours and can get the same amount of money. The reason this was such a flawed system was that people would receive the same payment regardless of how much they worked. If you were paid more to work less would you not do it?

People knew they were getting paid regardless so what's the point of trying when I can sit at home while my money comes through with no hard work done. This would've encouraged unemployment and this affected the Soviet Union as they tried to compete in the Cold War with an ever growing US. This inevitably led to the demise of the Soviet Union.

Now I would like to talk about liberalism. Liberalists believe in freedom of choice, freedom of speech and mostly being allowed to make decisions on their own accord. A liberalist government would give the public the information they need and allow them to make decisions for themselves. Liberalists believe that the government is there to protect them from others as well as themselves. Liberalists

strive to improve the liberty of themselves and I admire this idea of equality.

Conservatives are people who make little changes as they prefer to keep what they have and improve it. They refrain from making massive changes immediately. Tradition is also very important in the ideology of conservatism and they also believe in a free economy in which the government spends less and saves more in turn investing this money back into the country in the form of infrastructure. Conservatism essentially is the political belief which emphasizes political and economic stability.

Of these ideologies, the one that stuck with me the most is communism. I found the idea unfair, because unemployment rose but the government keeps giving out money and paying tax. In the end there will be a huge fall in the economy. At the end of the Second World War, there were many anti-communist protests against the Soviet Union. Some of these protests were very violent. I think that violence should never be justified but if it is needed because a system abuses people, then I understand this. Without riots and protests, social movements would not be as effective against ruling powers. This made me think of the recent Black lives matter protests, to some they might seem dangerous and extreme, but I think that big gestures like taking down statues makes people listen more to their ideas.

During this course, we explored many interesting questions. One I would like to talk more about is: Should individuals be as free as possible to pursue any goal they like? People of older age can start a new job and not retire if they like. People shouldn't get discriminated against because of their age as they have an ability to work so why not? There are laws that don't allow discrimination. Also they shouldn't lose their job just because they are close to their deathbed just for an opportunity for a younger person. We should all be treated the same no matter who we are. During one of my lessons, we had a debate on whether doctors should get a higher pay than footballers. What I took from this lesson is that people thought doctors were

more important and we have evidence for this as doctors are forced to work during the pandemic and are helping people survive during this whereas footballers haven't started training until last week. Also what's so important about premier league entertainment? I think that doctors should earn higher wages because their jobs are more important in society. For example, the pandemic has shown who is more important. They are, in my opinion, justified to protest for higher pay. A counterpoint, is that footballers still worked hard to get to where they are. This shouldn't be what we want. People from class even said doctors should get higher pay and it shows but from the opposition side they also said that footballers still worked hard to get where they are. People should be allowed to pursue being footballers instead of doctors despite what people say. This is because people have individual liberty and free will. They are free to pursue any goal they like.

Liberalism is the belief that we should protect individual rights to maximise freedom of choice. One of the biggest thinkers in liberal theory was John Locke. An idea that we explored during our lessons is the freedom of Individuals vs the collective/group. Is what the majority think more important than what one person wants? We live in a country with democracy where the majority votes for an elected government. I think it would be unfair for a few people to decide who will be in charge of the country.

We learnt about Thomas Hobbes and his social contract theory which suggests that individuals can lose part of their freedom in exchange for safety from a central government that can control them. In Leviathan, it says that the government should have full control over us. I agree with this as they are trying to ensure our safety and not allow violence. The government is here to protect us and rule over us. If there was no government control over individuals, this would lead to violence, crime and civil wars.

What I have learnt from this course would help me understand news and politics much better, I now feel able to talk about politics more confidently and the course gave me a good understanding of political

theory. I would really like to learn about US and North Korean politics as they have had an ongoing feud against each other and I would like to understand the details behind this.

RR: Introduction: Throughout the whole term, I took part in an elective called 'Introductions to Politics, Philosophy and Economics'. The elective is what it sounds like. The elective introduced us to politics, philosophy and economics. It taught us many things. We learn about a lot of the government, the basics of UK politics, Hobbes, how the economy should work and many more. One thing that particularly stood out to me was Hobbes' view of the government to be like a giant. The head of everything. That was really interesting as we were able to interpret many things using his ideas and how we could overcome the giant. Every week, I was able to learn new things about politics that I was unsure about at first. All the information I have gained can also help in the future as I would have enough knowledge to know many things about politics for me to vote in the elections, or even have a career in politics.

Should we value the past? One of the questions we were asked at the start of the elective was 'should we value the past?'. My opinion is that we should value the past. I believe this because the world wouldn't be how it is today if the past never happened. The past shaped our future. The world wouldn't know what is right and what is wrong and the world would be chaotic. This brings me to Hobbes' ideas of the government. He said that they were like a giant that controlled everyone. Back in the day, people thought that the government was above everything and everyone, including the law. Because of how things ran back then, nowadays no one is above the law, not the MPs, prime ministers or the queen. If you break the law, there will be consequences. A sensitive topic that has been brought back into the world right now is racism. Back then people thought black people were only used as slaves and were below white people, which is

totally wrong. Nowadays, everyone sees each other as equal. However, ever since the cops started to act up and target black people, instead of everyone congratulating the cops, everyone is hating them, which proves that the past teaches us things as now we know that black people should not be targeted, but loved. As we can see with all the protests and all the statues of previous slave traders being thrown into the rivers. But, there are still some racist people who believe in the past, which is their opinion, but personally, I think it is wrong and one day, everyone will see each other as equals and not as 'slaves'. One final point on this subject is sexism. Back in the olden times, women were seen as just some lousy housewives who were not as good as men, which again, is totally wrong. However, after the suffragettes movement, women were able to make a stand for themselves and let their voice be heard. Nowadays, women have most rights men do, like voting, and everyone sees women and men as the same. But like with racism, there are a lot of things that can be improved, like the pay gap, which is highly unfair on women. Things like these need to still change, and once we do change, it will be written as a part of history and so future generations can look back to our times and think of us as people who made a positive impact to shape a better future.

Should individuals be as free as possible to pursue any goal they like? This question was another question that was asked at the start of the elective. Personally, I liked this question as there can be many answers and different discussions that can be led on by this. However, my opinion is that people can be free to pursue whatever they want, regardless of their race, gender, background, ethnicity, etc. I believe that as long as you work hard and put enough effort into something, you should be allowed to become what you desire, whether that be a doctor, a performer or an engineer. However, I think that you also have to be realistic in the choices you make because some things can be really difficult (like being the prime minister or the queen/king). I'd say do something that you are very interested about and passionate about. This question also links to the previous question. Back in the days, different types of people were not allowed to become certain things just because they were different.

Let's take acting for example. Black people were not allowed to take part in any plays. So, when a white person wanted to portray someone black, they would paint themselves black, which is highly racist, even today (it is usually known as 'black face'). However, acting is now a popular job and can be executed by anyone who has great acting skills and is very passionate about it. Another example is women and wars. Back then, women were seen as weak, so they would usually stay behind while all the men did the fighting. The women would have to work in factories and look after the children. However, times have changed and now women are allowed to serve their country and fight in the wars. Some of the famous army veterans are women. A goal can be set by anyone, all you need is the right mindset and the will to pursue it and have the dedication to do it.

Conclusion: To conclude, what I talked about was that the past shaped our future, and that we can change a lot of problems in society so we can shape the future of generations to come. I also talked about how everyone can pursue their goals, regardless of how unique they are. What I really want to learn about is the different types of parties that you can vote in the general election. I want to see how different the different campaigns are and what each party has to offer for our country. Right now, conservatives are the people in power, but will they always stay in power, or will another party be able to persuade us into voting for them. There are a lot of questions that can branch out and I would really like to research about it. I would like to use this learning to make sure I know what is right and what is wrong so that I can be a better person. This elective was really interesting and fun and I would highly recommend it to anyone with an interest in politics.

SK: In this course we have explored the foundations of modern day politics and the pioneers and their environment that helped construct their ideologies. The gradual change in thinking that led to the system

today, how the current government functions today and what can be improved.

The first pioneer in modern political philosophy was a man named Thomas Hobbes, born in 1588. Hobbes main topic of discussion was the position of rulers and to what extent we should obey rulers, even the bad ones, and when we should revolutionise and rebuild governments. Hobbes wrote the book *Leviathan* in 1651. In this book he evaluated why people should always obey their rulers at all times even the ones who abuse their powers to prevent violence. To understand Hobbes conservative views we have to observe the other theories about the rights of rulers and governments.

In the early 17th century political theorists began to question the power of rulers some people call this time the Age of Enlightenment. Thoughtful people began to believe the people should make rulers and that if the rulers began to displease the people they should be able to overthrow him. This theory contrasts the belief since the Middle Ages that kings are chosen by god and disobeying kings you are disobeying god. This theory was called the divine right of kings. People believed this because they were extremely superstitious and religious. Then the English civil war happened in 1642 which pitted the power of kings against parliament, this eventually led to public execution of King Charles the first, which Hobbes witnessed, but it was during this time that Hobbes started to develop the views that we know today.

So what was the *Leviathan* and its core beliefs?. In the book the *Leviathan* is used to describe the sovereign power. The core beliefs argued in *Leviathan* is that for a commonwealth to operate with peace and unity a sovereign power or *Leviathan* is needed. Hobbes believed that humans were inherently violent and chaotic and without a government the world would descend into madness. He called this the state of nature and described life in a state of nature as Nasty, brutish and short. Hobbes believed that everyone should give a bit of their power to the sovereignty and the sovereignty would bring peace and defence. This is called the social contract theory. Hobbes

thought strongly that in order to maintain peace you would have to always follow the leviathan even if it means given up certain rights.

Hobbes was the first pioneer but the person to affect modern politics the most would be John Locke. Locke came little after Hobbes and had similar views on government. Locke recognised the 3 big issues at the time that still affect us today , religious freedom, education and who should rule over us and because of this he is seen as the father of liberalism.

John Locke was one of the first people to advocate that people should be free to believe in whatever they want. At the time there was debate that there should be total control over religion. Locke completely disagreed and wrote the book , a letter concerning toleration in 1689. In this he promoted 3 reasons behind religious freedom. 1st " earthly judges, the state in particular and human beings in general, cannot dependably evaluate the truth claims of competing religious standpoints". 2nd " even if they could enforce a single religion, true religion would not work, because you cannot be compelled to belief ". 3rd " conforming religious uniformity leads to far more social disorder than allowing diversity ". He argued that the responsibility of the state was to provide leisure and comfort for the people and it was this that led to abandoning punishment over faith.

Similar to Thomas Hobbes, John Locke went on to disprove the idea of power coming from god in the second book the two treatises of government. He then went on to challenge Hobbes views on rulers and state of nature. Unlike Hobbes's , Locke disagreed that the state of nature was entirely chaotic. He thought people should be able to overthrow a tyrannical government and by taking away that right the purpose of a government is gone. This theory is most predominant in the American amendments. Where it says there should be no law prohibiting freedom of religion and citizens have the right to bear arms in order to protect them against a tyrannical government.

Locke also expressed his views on education in his book, an essay concerning human understanding where he says that humans are

born with blank minds or tabula rasa as he says. In this he says knowledge is gained through experience and self reflection. This is why he emphasised an importance in education as when we are young we are vulnerable to our environment. He said " the little and almost insensible impressions on our tender infants have very important and lasting consequences' ' this theory is evident in today's society. We can see examples of this in many aspects of life. Kids from different backgrounds will perform differently and act differently in later life due to the way they have been brought up and educated. Hobbes theory may be able to explain why people of certain backgrounds are more likely to commit crimes.

One of the most controversial political philosophers would be Karl Marx and his communist ideology. The communist/socialist ideology challenges the most common Economic system. Capitalism. A lot of people look negatively at Karl Marx because of his thoughts on capitalism but his ideas are essential to understand how imperfect capitalism is, because it is. He criticised capitalism's impact on modern work, the treatment of workers and the effect it has on people's desires.

Marx thought work can be man's greatest source of joy and capitalism makes work too specialised removing the personal aspect of work, therefore alienating work. When someone works on something for pleasure and cares for their work it will project on the quality. Workers in factories and offices have no connection to their work. Another criticism of capitalism's effect on work was that it makes the worker expendable, treating them as if they have no value in order to save money and increase profit margins. We see happening right now in the COVID 19 situation where people are losing jobs left right and centre, we see happen in factories. People being replaced by machines in order to make profit. Capitalism allows workers to be exploited as much as possible in order to make profit. Marx believed that profit was simply theft.

Another aspect of Marx's theory was on how wealth should be distributed. Marx believed that the money made by big corporations

should be evenly distributed amongst people. Creating a sort of ideal world where everyone is equal and everyone is happy. It was the fact that there was enough money and resources to give everyone basic essentials like housing, education and food.

He also proclaimed that capitalism led to people putting economic growth ahead of everything. People put money above everything and because of that it led them to not fulfill their own desires. This still applies today in things like love or work. There are people today that would opt out of a relationship or even get out of a marriage due to financial instability. A lot of people give upon their dreams due to the fact that it won't pay as much as another job. It is this materialistic thinking that Marx thought communism would eliminate.

On paper communism sounds perfect but in practise the imperfection of communism/socialism is highlighted. In places like Russia and China more like a nightmare than an ideal state. This is because Karl Marx was only able to show that capitalism has major flaws and was unable to provide a solid solution to solve the problems brought by capitalism. The problem with Marxism is that it can easily be ruined by a bad government. Marxism relies on a good government to distribute wealth equally and due to this it can easily be exploited.

So what is the solution to society's problems? The solution to problems in society can not be answered by just one political philosophy. We all should be conservatives, liberals and socialist as in order to achieve an ideal society. As they are all flawed. we can see examples of their imperfections in history and today. In places with a capitalist system like the uk where people from poorer backgrounds have less opportunities in life, Donald trump was elected due to liberalism and Russia and china are ruled by dictators due to communism. The only way to build a better world is to look to make our own solutions to today's problem by looking at the flaws of the past. As Karl Marx said himself "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it".