

How and to what extent, have modern liberals departed from the ideas of classical liberalism?

Like every ideology that is developed there are similarities and differences between the original and the modern ideology. Modern liberalism is no exception, it did have some links back to classical liberalism but it had to change due to the Industrial changes in the 19th/20th Century. Therefore to a large extent modern liberals did depart from classical liberalism and in a number of different ways.

Classical liberalism was the earliest liberal tradition, classical liberal ideas have taken a variety of forms but they have a number of common characteristics. These characteristics take the forms of egoistical individualism, negative freedom and the state is regarded as a 'necessary evil'. Egoistical individualism means that you view human beings as rationally self interested creatures. This means that individuals in society are self sufficient, this leads on to the classical liberals believing in minimal state intervention. The second characteristic they believe in is negative freedom. This is freedom where there is the absence of external constraints upon the individual, or in other words is left to their own devices. The third characteristic is where the state is regarded as a 'necessary evil'. It is necessary where it lays down the rules for orderly existence and evil where it limits the freedom on the individual in society. The classical liberals therefore believe in a minimal state and a self regulating market economy. Classical liberalism has different theories and doctrines they believe.

The natural rights theory came by natural rights theorist such as Locke in England and Jefferson in the USA. A right is an entitlement to act or be treated in a particular way. Locke said that the rights are 'natural' in that they are invested in human beings by nature or god. So natural rights are like human rights and thus were thought to establish essential conditions for leading a truly human existence. Locke three rights were 'life, liberty and property'. Locke thought that the government should be minimal but should protect 'life, liberty and prosperity'. These were the natural rights that the government should uphold. The rest of the classical liberal doctrines and theories included Utilitarianism, Economic Liberalism, Social Darwinism and Neoliberalism. Also these stated that the market should operate on its own and tied in to the natural rights theory that the individual should be left on his/her own to develop. Modern liberal ideas were totally different as they incorporated a new centuries thinking and changes.

Modern liberalism came later than classical liberalism. Classical liberalism was linked to emergence of industrial capitalism in the 19th Century and linked to Industrialisation; modern liberalism was linked to further Industrialisation in the 20th Century. The basis of modern liberalism was linked to the foundations of classical liberalism as they developed through industry. It would be the fate of the industry that would change the liberal ideology forever. Industrialisation had brought about massive wealth but created massive poverty, accompanied by ignorance and disease. This brought about social inequality which couldn't be ignored. The idea of economic individualism came under attack and the liberal's had to change their ideas, the minimal state intervention was not possible and they had to be prepared to advocate the development of an interventionist state. So we see that the modern liberals have changed one of the main characteristics behind classical liberalism and have created a more state intervention. This was the beginning of Modern liberalism,

the distinctive ideas of modern liberalism included individuality, positive freedom, social liberalism and economic management.

J. S. Mills's ideas have been described as 'the heart of liberalism' due to the fact that he created a bridge between the two branches of liberalism. He believed strongly in Individualism, personal self development and the ability for the individual to have complete sovereignty. His views gave individuals the ability to take control of their life's, to gain autonomy or achieve self realisation. This is ties in with the classical liberal thinking, in this way classical and modern liberal thinking merges.

In the place of the classical liberal idea of negative freedom a philosopher called T. H. Green placed the idea of positive freedom. Freedom is the ability of the individual to develop and attain Individuality, it involves the ability of the individual to realize his/her potential, attain skills and knowledge and fulfilment. It is the opposite of negative freedom as the working class would be no longer held back. Unlike negative freedom positive freedom removed the external constraints from the individual and it aims to empower the individual and safeguard the people against social evils. This is totally the opposite view to classical liberalism; this idea has departed from one of the original principles.

The twentieth century saw the increase of state intervention in the form of social welfare, this put pressure on governments in the form of electoral pressure. The modern liberals began to accept welfarism and social welfare; they defended it on the basis of equality of opportunity. During the twentieth century the liberals championed the cause for social welfare, it was a modern liberal called William Beveridge who in 1942 wrote the Beveridge report which outlined a blue print for an extended welfare state. The classical liberals had the opposite view to this as they extolled the virtues of self-help and individual responsibility, showing that another modern liberal idea went totally against the classical liberalism characteristics.

The modern liberals also believed in economic management, this was in basic terms, management of the economy in order to deliver prosperity to the people. John Maynard Keynes the thinker behind Keynesian economics put forward many ideas; he said that the governments should manage their own economies by influencing the level of demand. A free market left on its own can only lead to a downwards spiral, which Keynes saw as the cause of the Great Depression. This once again rejects classical liberal thinking as it, in particular its belief in a self-regulating free market or the doctrine of laissez faire economics

In Conclusion I do believe that the Modern liberals to a great extent have departed from the original views of the classical liberals. However there is evidence of some ideas that are still incorporated in the Modern Liberal ideology. This is no surprise as modern liberalism as some would say has smoothed the rough edges of Classical liberalism. The main reason why the modern liberals adopted these new ideas was due to development of industrialisation and the actions of this.