

-isms

Ethics in a Time of Polarization

Osher Course

John Hooker, study leader

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Public policy issues

- Grounded in ethics, but different.
 - *Public policies are usually implemented by **governments**.*
 - *Governments have **coercive power**.*
 - *Autonomy principle allows coercion to prevent unethical action, but **no more**.*
 - *Unclear that autonomy principle allows **imprisonment, fines, even taxation**.*

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- Legitimacy of government
 - *When can a government **legitimately** coerce its citizens?*
 - *This is a question of **political philosophy**, on which there is absolutely no consensus.*

Public policy issues

- Political philosophy
 - *Usually takes the form of an **ideology**.*
 - *An ideology is a **system** that claims to have **all the answers**.*
 - *Different from **ethics**, which operates on a **working hypothesis** (e.g., agency is rational choice) and admits that many questions are **unresolved**.*

Public policy issues

- Political philosophy
 - *Usually takes the form of an **ideology**.*
 - *An ideology is a **system** that claims to have **all the answers**.*
 - *Different from **ethics**, which operates on a **working hypothesis** (e.g., agency is rational choice) and admits that many questions are **unresolved**.*
- Moral development
 - *Ideology is a state of moral development in which one **buys into** a thought system – an “**ism**.”*
 - *Developers of ideologies **did not intend this**.*

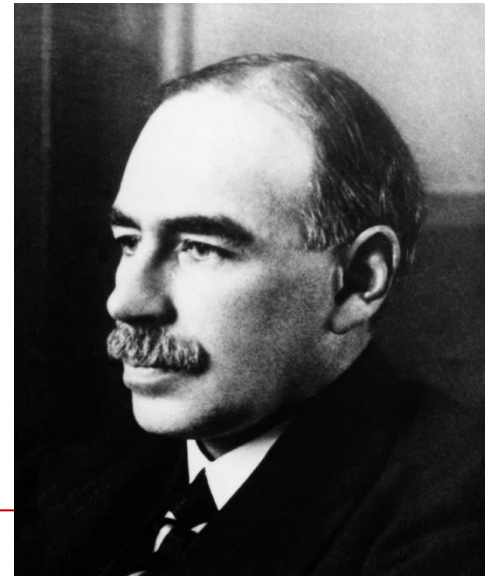
Why study -isms?

“The ideas of economists and political philosophers... are more powerful than is commonly understood.

Indeed, the world is ruled by little else.

Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually slaves of some defunct economist.”

– *John Maynard Keynes*



Defining -isms

- It is almost impossible to define an ideology...
 - *...without taking a **position** on it.*
 - Those who believe it make it sound appealing.
 - Those who reject it make it sound horrible.
 - *Here, **pros and cons** are pointed out.*
- We will not resolve any issues.
 - *Only describe them.*



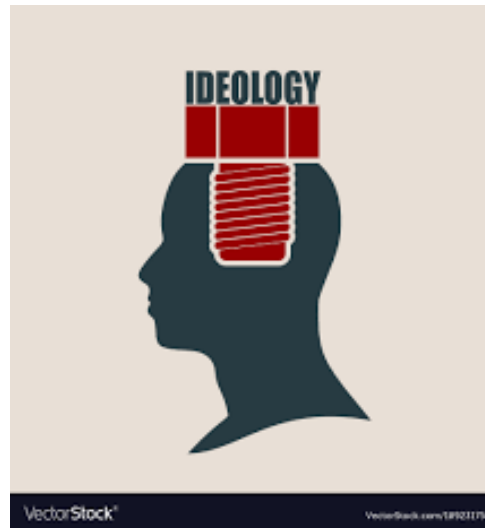
Defining -isms

- Most ideologies are associated with several strands of thought.
 - *As well as being vaguely defined in any of them.*
 - *Here, what appear to be the main motivating ideas are summarized.*



What to do with -isms

- The goal should not be to buy into a single ideology...
 - *...but to learn from all of them.*



Topics

- Capitalism
- Communism
- Socialism
- Social democracy
- Democracy
- Worker capitalism
- Liberalism
- Neoliberalism
- Libertarianism
- Social liberalism
- Marxism
- Anarchism
- Fascism
- Populism
- Progressivism

Capitalism

- Definition
 - *An economic system in which **capital** is raised **privately** for the most part, and economic activity is controlled primarily by private owners.*



Capitalism

- Pros
 - *A growth engine*
 - *Opportunities for entrepreneurship*
- Cons
 - *Instability*
 - *Inequality*
 - *Environmentally unsustainable*

Socialism

- Definition
 - *An economic/political system in which a large fraction of capital is raised, and economic activity controlled, by **society as a whole** (usually through **government**).*

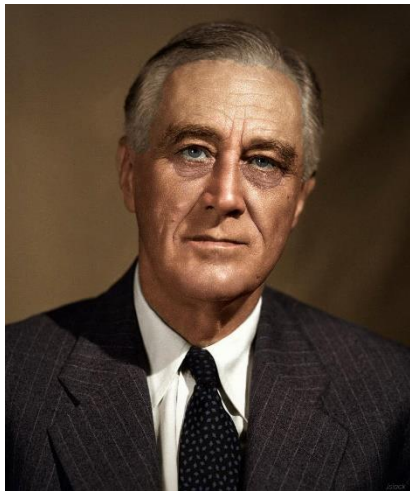


Socialism

- Pros
 - *Greater economic justice*
 - *Provides essential services to all (medical care, etc.)*
- Cons
 - *Fewer opportunities for entrepreneurship*
 - *Less total wealth creation*

Social democracy

- Definition
 - *An economic/political system in which **government intervenes** to provide public services and promote social justice in a **largely capitalist economy**.*



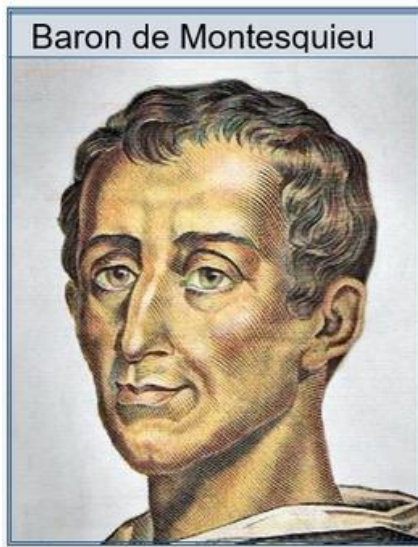
Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1882-1945

Social democracy

- Pros
 - *Provides essential services to all (medical care, etc.)*
 - *Tends to promote greater social justice.*
- Cons
 - *Higher taxes.*
 - *Some industries off limits to private business.*
 - *Less effective at addressing problems of capitalism than socialism.*

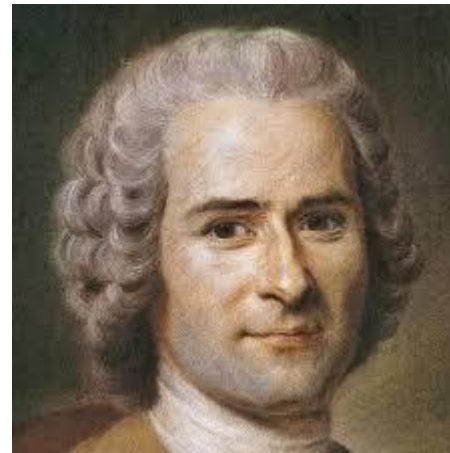
Democracy

- Definition
 - *A political system in which **the people** at large are **sovereign** and normally govern through elected representatives.*



Baron de Montesquieu

1689-1755



Jean-Jacques Rousseau

1712-1778

Democracy

- Pros
 - *Greater personal freedom*
 - *Protection from tyranny, assuming “eternal vigilance”*
 - *Can legitimize government through a social contract.*
 - *The worst political system, except for all the others*
- Cons
 - *Chaotic, unable to make needed decisions.*
 - *Vulnerable to demagoguery, ignorance, and misinformation.*
 - *“Majority rule” does not implement democracy or the social contract.*
 - *How to determine Rousseau’s volonté générale?*

Worker capitalism

- Definition
 - *A capitalism system in which **workers** own and in many cases direct the enterprises in which they work.*

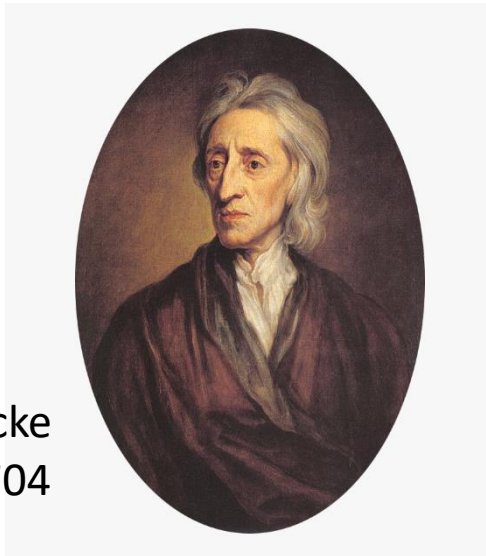


Worker capitalism

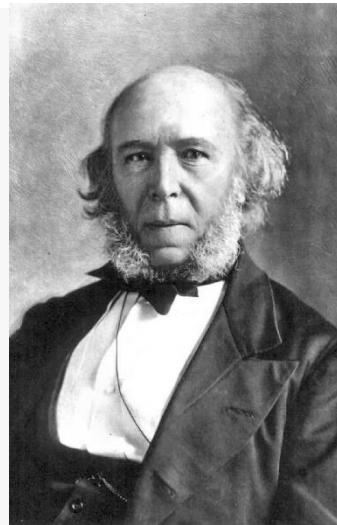
- Pros
 - *Workplace democracy*
 - *Workers share in wealth derived from capital*
 - *Possible solution to technological unemployment*
- Cons
 - *Unclear how workers can raise capital while retaining autonomous control of the company*

Classical liberalism

- Definition
 - *A political philosophy that emphasizes liberty, free markets, private property, limited government, individual rights, and a capitalist economy.*
 - **Not the same as liberalism in the U.S.!**



John Locke
1632-1704



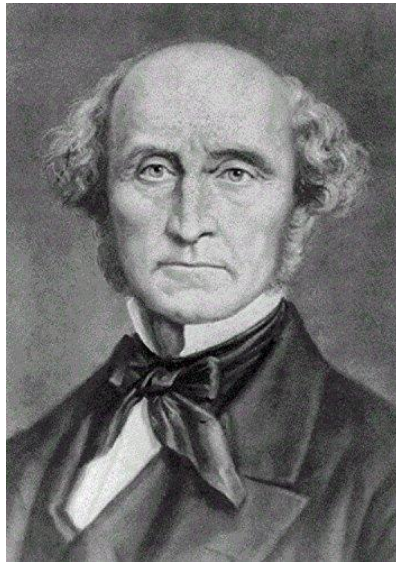
Herbert Spencer
1820-1903

Classical liberalism

- Pros
 - *Personal freedom*
 - *Rule of law*
 - *Economic freedom*
- Cons
 - *Does not address the problems of capitalism, such as:*
 - *Domination by big business*
 - *Economic instability*

Social liberalism

- Definition
 - *Advocates state intervention, but friendlier to big business and private finance than social democracy.*
 - **Known simply as liberalism in the U.S.**
 - Similar to Liberal Democrats in UK



John Stuart Mill
1806-1873



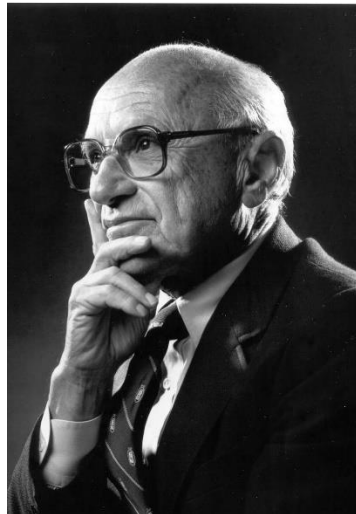
David Lloyd George
1863-1945

Social liberalism

- Pros
 - *Augments classical liberalism with social services*
 - *Defends civil rights*
- Cons
 - *Allows domination by big business and finance*
 - *Does not tame economic instability*

Neoliberalism

- Definition
 - A recent variant of *classical liberalism* that emphasizes *privatization, individualism, international free trade, and deregulation of business and finance.*
 - **Very different from U.S. liberalism.**



Milton Friedman
1912-2006



Margaret Thatcher
1925-2013

Neoliberalism

- Pros
 - *Robust international trade and economic development*
 - *International institutions (World Bank, IMF, WTO, World Economic Forum, Washington Consensus)*
- Cons
 - *International exploitation and wealth disparity*
 - *Financialization of the economy*
 - *“Market fundamentalism”*

Libertarianism

- Definition
 - *An extreme laissez-faire philosophy that advocates minimal state intervention in lives of citizens.*
 - **Left-leaning libertarianism is related to anarchism.**



Ayn Rand, 1905-1982



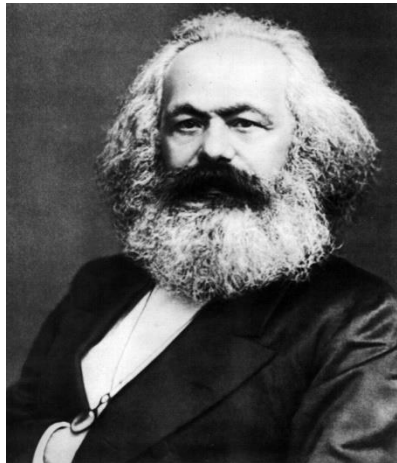
Ron Paul, 1935-

Libertarianism

- Pros
 - *Deep respect for individual liberty and autonomy*
 - *Promotes entrepreneurship and innovation.*
- Cons
 - *No protection for those disadvantaged through no fault of their own*
 - *A simplistic, one-dimensional solution*

Marxism

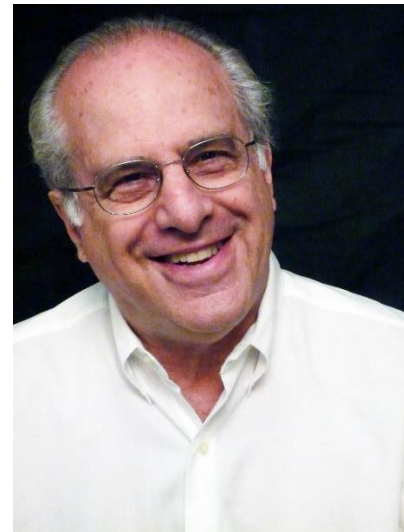
- Definition
 - *A method of socioeconomic analysis that focuses on exposing weakness in capitalism and improving the welfare of workers.*
 - **Many varieties.**



Karl Marx, 1818-1883



Antonio Gramsci
1891-1937



Richard Wolff, 1942-

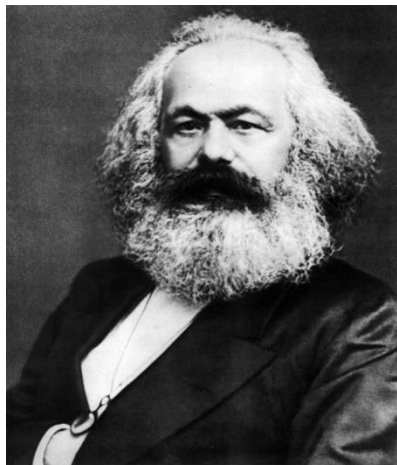
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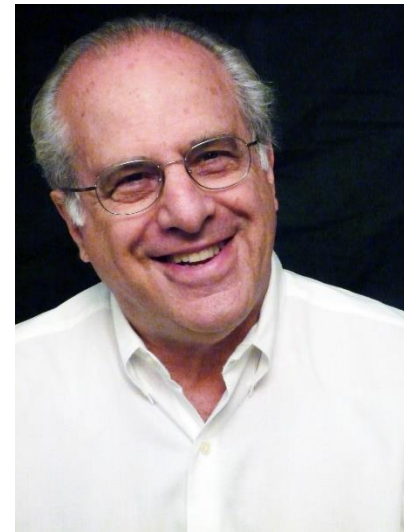
Interesting connection to our culture wars and Pete Buttigieg



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Marxism

- Pros
 - *Exposes weaknesses and internal “contradictions” in capitalism that are relevant today.*
 - *Attempts to set ideology aside when analyzing socioeconomic systems.*
- Cons
 - *Historically, proposed no viable alternative to capitalism.*
 - Inspired some spectacular failures
 - Recent Marxists often favor worker ownership.

Anarchism

- Definition
 - *A critique of the legitimacy of government coercion and unjust hierarchy that advocates replacing the state with free associations.*
 - Historically associated with **syndicalism** (ownership of the means of production by labor unions).



Mikhail Bakunin
1814-1876



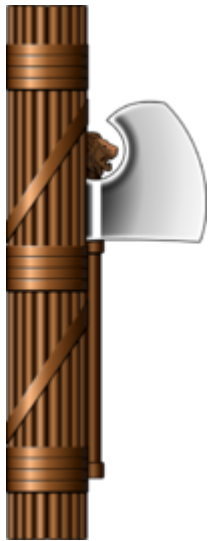
Noam Chomsky
1928-

Anarchism

- Pros
 - *Encourages cooperation through community and voluntary associations.*
 - *Advocates developing consensus on behavior norms rather than state enforcement (compare with Kant).*
 - *Insists that governments defend their legitimacy.*
- Cons
 - *How to implement it? Crypto anarchism? (e.g. Bitcoin)*
 - *May require cultural homogeneity (e.g., Denmark)*

Fascism

- Definition
 - *An extreme form of nationalism (generally combined with racism and xenophobia) that advocates **autocratic government** headed by a dictator.*



Fasci Italiani di combattimento
= Italian fighting leagues (literally, bundles)

Benito Mussolini
1883-1945



Adolf Hitler
1889-1945

Fascism

- Pros
 - *The trains run on time?*
- Cons
 - *Political oppression*
 - *Racism*
 - *The system self-destructs*

Populism

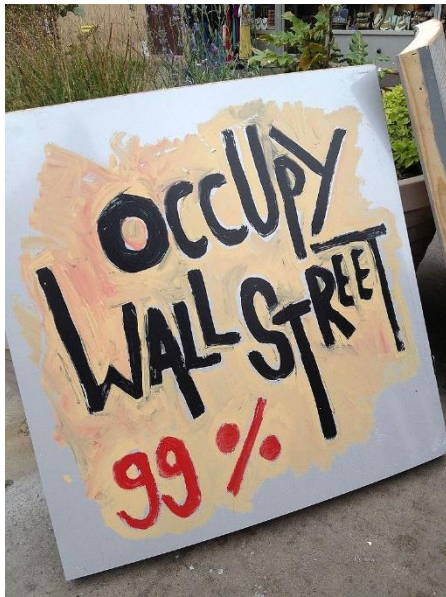
- Definition
 - *A political strategy (from the left or the right) of appealing to **ordinary people** who feel that **elites** are neglecting them.*



Huey Long
1889-1945

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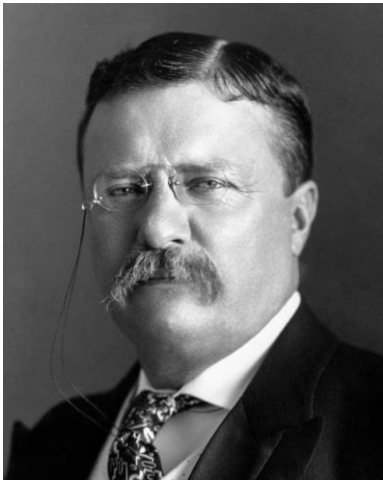
↑ ↗
These people agree on something!

Populism

- Pros
 - *Exposes self-serving and out-of-touch elites.*
 - *Can force the state to improve social justice.*
- Cons
 - *Populist leaders may be self-serving elites themselves.*
 - *Can be a cover for authoritarian or fascist agenda.*
 - *Can offer unsustainable, short-term solutions.*

Progressivism

- Definition
 - *A political philosophy that advocates **social reform** to benefit ordinary people, primarily through **government action**.*



Theodore
Roosevelt
1858-1919



Jane Addams
1860-1935



W.E.B. Du Bois
1868-1963



Alexandria
Ocasio-Cortez
1989-

Progressivism

- Pros
 - *Advocate for ordinary people*
 - *Opposes inequality, corporate domination*
 - *Based on Enlightenment ideals*
- Cons
 - *Gives central government too much power*
 - *Compromises individual freedom*
 - *The Enlightenment was a failure*

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Is deontological ethics
based on a failure?

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Is deontological ethics
based on a failure?

We have tried to show
that ethics **can** be
rationality-based.

How about deontological ethics?

- Something for everyone:
- Progressive
 - *Based on Enlightenment ideals, due to grounding in rational analysis*
 - *Seeks a just society that benefits everyone*
- Conservative/libertarian
 - *Aligns with many traditional cultural and religious values*
 - *Ultimately seeks a society of self-regulating autonomous agents with no need for government coercion*