

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
AND  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**POSC 105**

**AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE: GENERAL-WELFARE LIBERALISM**

- I. THIS MORNING:
  - A. Political culture and the public philosophy
    - 1. General-welfare liberalism
      - a. Classical liberalism
      - b. Public welfare
  - B. Reading: see below
- II. THE POWER OF IDEAS:
  - A. Major proposition: the differences between liberals and conservatives are overstated.
    - 1. There really is no **major** liberal party in this country and most conservatives are not true conservatives.
  - B. Major proposition: a single “public philosophy” (ideology) dominates politics in the United States.
    - 1. This philosophy, general-welfare liberalism, consists of a set of ideas, beliefs, values, and attitudes that controls public policy making.
      - a. It crowds out competing ideas to the detriment of political discourse and enlightened understanding.
  - C. The public philosophy has several consequences:
    - 1. Understanding this philosophy is essential for understanding American government.
    - 2. It determines what kinds of policies will and will not be pursued.
    - 3. It “favors” some segments of society to the detriment of others.
    - 4. It limits American democracy and political capacity
  - D. “General-welfare liberalism” consists of two strands, “classical” liberalism and mixed feelings about active government.
- III. THE LIBERALISM COMPONENT:
  - A. Humans have natural, inalienable rights that can be known through reason
    - 1. “Divine” interpretation not necessary
  - B. Classical liberalism stresses individual rights
    - 1. **Liberal democracy**
    - 2. The individual is the center of the “political universe.”
    - 3. Political freedoms
    - 4. Property
  - C. Individualism and optimism and belief in progress
    - 1. The American dream

- 2. Optimism about the future
- 3. Belief in economic growth
- 4. Belief in the power of education and mobility
- 5. Rationality
- 6. Faith in science technology
- D. Limited government and distrust of politics
  - 1. Suspicious of politicians and parties
  - 2. Distrust of power
    - a. Misunderstanding of the difference between private and public power.
  - 3. State, local government preferable to Washington
  - 4. Private solutions to collective problems.
- E. Pragmatism and practical politics
- F. Consequences:
  - 1. Distrust of poor and welfare programs

#### IV. THE GENERAL-WELFARE PART:

- A. There is consensus that the national government manage the economy to lessen, if not eliminate, depressions, recessions and inflation.
  - 1. When push comes to shove hardly any one in either party wants the government to stand idly by in times of economic turbulence.
- B. But more is involved than making life bearable for the average citizen.
  - 1. There is a very specific way the U.S. government and private economic actors, especially large ones, work together to attempt to achieve growth with social harmony
- C. Proposition: policy making in is dominated by corporate-government partnership.
- D. Goals of this partnership:
  - 1. Promote economic growth but not redistribute wealth.
  - 2. Maintain social peace, especially by managing
    - a. Labor-management conflict
    - b. Corporate-citizen conflict
  - 3. Legitimize the economic and social order.
- E. \*KEY POINT: a crisis in government may be looming because of government's inability to finance and enforce these goals

#### V. MANIFESTATIONS OF GENERAL-WELFARE LIBERALISM:

- A. Macroeconomic policy: fiscal and monetary policy
  - 1. The Federal Reserve (national) Bank
- B. Regulation: frequently regulation promotes business interests.
  - 1. What seems to be a regulation sometimes turns out differently
    - a. Warning labels often protect industries from lawsuits and other government action.
      - \* Tobacco and now television "warning labels"
  - 2. Some examples of the economic uses of regulation:

- a. Transportation, communications
- C. Direct and indirect support of business
  - 1. Subsidies and direct aid to specific industries
  - 2. Industrial policies
    - a. Research and development
    - b. "Infrastructure" (e.g., roads, harbors, airports)
    - c. Protection (tariffs)
  - 3. "Human capital" (schools, health, job training)
    - a. Functions:
      - \* Supply of trained, "disciplined" labor to enhance productivity
      - \* Legitimation
      - \* Stabilize economy and create a stable market for goods and services
- D. Social harmony
  - 1. Alleviate hardship and suffering by providing social welfare programs, thus making society "safe for capitalism."
    - a. The effect is to defuse social tension, anger, conflict.
    - b. Example: urban "riots"

#### VI. SUMMARY:

- A. Conflict between liberalism and the general-welfare is what is at the heart of the debate in Congress over the role of government.
- B. Manifestations of liberalism
  - 1. Term-limits, balanced budget amendment
- C. Manifestation of general-welfare
  - 1. The budget politics

#### VII. NEXT TIME:

- A. The Constitution
- B. Reading:
  - 1. Start (for next time) Patterson of *We the People*, Chapter 3.
  - 2. The Declaration of Independence (on web site under "Documents").
  - 3. Web site: **American government**→**political philosophy**→essays: "Introduction," "The concept of a Public Philosophy," Laissez-faire," "Main Ideas," and "General-welfare in Practice"
  - 4. You should print a copy of the constitution or use the copy in Patterson.

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