Australian political thought

Nicholas Barry

> **Key terms/names**
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Ideas are central to politics. Individuals and groups have different ideas about which values are most important, what kind of society we should live in, how the world works and what role the state should play. This is what political scientists often refer to when they use the term 'ideology'. Ideological disagreements often underpin disagreements over the laws and policies that should be adopted. For this reason, a full understanding of politics and public policy in Australia requires an awareness of the major ideas and ideologies held by Australian citizens, politicians and activists.

In the past, an influential line of thought held that political ideas were relatively unimportant to Australians. James Bryce, for example, noted that '[t]he matters which occupy the mind of the nation in all classes are … its material or economic interests – businesses, wages, employment, the development of the country's re-sources. These dominate politics.'[1] This picture of Australian citizens and politicians as atheoretical and practical was also present in a number of other influential early works on Australia.[2] Related views were also expressed in the postwar period, with

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1   Bryce 1921, 244.
2   See, in particular, Hancock 1930.

Loveday claiming that '[p]olitical thought in Australia has never been shaped into coherent and well-established bodies of doctrine which the parties guard, expound and apply'.[3]

A closely related, but more nuanced, view was put forward by Hugh Collins.[4] In an influential essay, he noted that politics everywhere tends to be concerned with the pursuit of interests. What is distinctive about Australia is that interests dominate 'unashamedly with little resort to ideals and ideas to clothe their naked intent'.[5] This is not because Australia is devoid of political ideas, but because a particular doctrine – utilitarianism – has been so influential. Although there are different forms of utilitarianism, it essentially holds that individuals and governments should act so as to promote 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number'. Decades earlier, this view was captured in Hancock's famous claim that 'Australian democracy has come to look upon the State as a vast public utility, whose duty it is to provide the greatest happiness for the greatest number'.[6] In other words, citizens expected the government to adopt policies that would maximise the wellbeing of the population, helping them satisfy their preferences. On Collins' interpretation, utilitarianism thereby helped to legitimise the idea that politics is essentially about the pursuit of interests.

These views of Australian political thought have been challenged by other scholars, who have suggested that they are oversimplifications of Australian political history.[7] Australian politics is not dominated solely by utilitarianism or conflict over material interests, but has been shaped by a range of ideas and ideologies, often resulting from engagement with and adaptation of the ideologies that have shaped politics in other parts of the world, particularly Europe and North America. Although there is not space in this chapter to provide an exhaustive overview, the chapter focuses on some of the dominant ideas and ideologies that have animated Australian politics, considering, in turn, conservatism, liberalism, socialism, social democracy and labourism. The sixth section of the chapter concludes by highlighting some of the exclusionary ideas about nationalism, race, gender and the environment that cut across many of the ideologies discussed in this chapter, and the ways activists and political thinkers have sought to combat these ideas by challenging and refashioning these ideologies.

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3   Loveday 1975, 2.
4   Collins 1985, 155.
5   Collins 1985, 155.
6   Hancock 1930, 72.
7   See, for example, Clark 1980 [1956]; Edwards 2012; Hirst 2001; Rowse 1978; Sawer 2003; Walter 2010.

Conservatism

Conservatism has been a major ideological influence in Australian politics. The core of conservatism is maintaining past traditions while accommodating small but gradual social change. In general, conservatives have 'an essentially pessimistic view of human nature'.[8] They tend to focus on the limits of human reason, given the complexity of the world and the impact of 'non-rational appetites'.[9] This means they believe that human beings need stability, hierarchy and tradition to thrive. They are sceptical about the desirability of rapid social change, believing instead that there is an accumulated wisdom in traditional customs and social institutions and that these beliefs and practices should generally be preserved.[10] The most famous expression of this view was Edmund Burke's critique of the French Revolution, *Reflections on the revolution in France*, which warned of the dangers of radical social and political change in the pursuit of abstract universal ideals.[11] Conservatives also tend to emphasise the importance of religion and religious authorities in guiding individual behaviour. These features of conservatism all have important implications for the role of the state, and they mean that the state may be justified in passing laws that restrict individual freedom in order to preserve traditional beliefs and practices.

British conservatism, which has been a particularly important influence on Australian conservatism, was traditionally associated with a belief in the importance of maintaining the power and prestige of the monarchy and the aristocracy. Although they generally supported representative government, in the 18th century and part of the 19th century there was also conservative hostility to expanding the franchise to working-class men.[12] Many British conservatives supported a role for the parliament in restraining the power of the Crown, but this was not because of a commitment to political equality so much as a commitment to a parliament that was made up of an aristocracy whose rights would be protected against the Crown.[13] Conservative thinkers such as Burke believed that society would function best if it were ruled by a 'national aristocracy' of talented leaders, which, for the most part, overlapped with the hereditary aristocracy, although there should be opportunities for talented outsiders to join its ranks.[14] Although modern conservatives support democracy, some continue to draw attention to its drawbacks, including the tendency to neglect the long-term interests of the community, giving priority to 'the living and their immediate interests over past and future generations'.[15]

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8   Heywood 2004, 22–3.
9   Heywood 2004, 22.
10   Ball and Dagger 2004, 88–9. See also Edwards 2013, 34–5.
11   Ryan 2012b, 619–34.
12   Ball and Dagger 2004, 98–9.
13   Walter 2010, 56–7.
14   Ball and Dagger 2004, 94–5; Ryan 2012b, 629.
15   Scruton 2001, 45–8, quotation at 47.

Another strand of conservatism is concerned primarily with preserving the cultural traditions of the community. In Britain in the early 1800s, this 'cultural conservatism' was originally concerned with protecting the traditional English way of life against the Industrial Revolution and the rise of materialism, which many believed was undermining traditional cultural practices and loyalties.[16] Cultural issues, including the effect of free market capitalism on human relations, continue to concern some conservatives.[17] But greater concerns, particularly among religious conservatives in the USA, have been the movement away from the traditional heteronormative family structure, challenges to traditional gender roles, a more permissive attitude towards sex and the rise of the welfare state, all of which are perceived to have led to an erosion of personal responsibility.[18]

Transplanting conservatism to the Australian context inevitably involves some variations from the British model because of key differences between Britain and Australia. Most notably, in Australia, there were no existing *European* political institutions to preserve, prior to the British invasion (the customs and traditions of First Nations people were not understood and were violently opposed), and there was no equivalent to an aristocratic class with landed estates. Nonetheless, in the colonial period, conservative ideas were often espoused by many members of the military corps and 'free settlers', who often viewed themselves as more virtuous than members of the colonies who had been transported as convicts as a result of crimes committed in the UK. This attitude was reflected in proposals to establish an Australian aristocratic class, drawing on this group of 'respectable' settlers who would come to wield power and influence in the colonies:

> there is no time to be lost, in establishing a body of really respectable Settlers – Men of real Capital, not needy adventurers. They should have Estates of at least 10,000 acres, with reserves contiguous of equal extent. Such a body of Proprietors would in a few years become wealthy and with the support of Government powerful as an Aristocracy.[19]

Later, as the push for democracy gained momentum, some conservative opponents drew explicitly on the French Revolution to warn of the dangers of democracy and the rights of man:

> When the meeting Wednesday last was told of the 'indefeasible rights of man', a doctrine was put forth equally dangerous, untrue and revolutionary; a doctrine which if pushed to its practical consequences would unhinge the fabric of social life, subvert the foundations of religion, order and morality, and substitute for the

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16   Ball and Dagger 2004, 98.
17   For example, Scruton 2001.
18   Ball and Dagger 2004, 107–10.
19   John Macarthur, cited in Walter 2010, 40–1.

pure flame of rational freedom, the strange and unhallowed fires of a relentless and licentious anarchy … The terrible example of the French Revolution, the example of that nation which 'got drunk with blood to vomit crime', should teach all men the dangers of these monstrous doctrines.[20]

These quotations starkly illustrate the commitment to a society structured around hierarchy rather than equality and the suspicion of democracy and inalienable rights.

Nonetheless, it is important to remember that conservatives during the colonial period did support the need for checks on the power of the unelected governors who ruled the colonies. In fact, John Macarthur led the 'Rum Rebellion', which saw the overthrow of a 'tyrant', New South Wales Governor Bligh, in 1809.[21] Most conservatives came to support the principle of responsible government, but many remained sceptical of democracy, supporting a number of measures that were designed to limit the democratic character of the system. Property restrictions on the franchise were one example of this – they were designed to restrict voting rights to those with property. There was also another proposal to establish an Australian nobility – derided as a 'bunyip aristocracy' by its critics – who would be the only candidates eligible to run for election to the upper house.[22]

Some have also argued that a kind of Burkean conservatism shaped the attitudes of many of the delegates attending the 1890s Federation conventions that designed Australia's Constitution.[23] Although many of the delegates may have rejected the label of 'conservative', the debates in which they engaged demonstrated 'a strong ideological predisposition … to see that institutions should evolve out of existing arrangements rather than being manufactured or constructed, a crucial Burkean argument'.[24] Broadly speaking, this was associated with the idea that Australia's constitutional arrangements should be closely aligned to the British model, which was believed to be characterised by flexibility rather than rigidity, but with pragmatic institutional adaptations to reflect Australian conditions.

Conservatism has continued be a significant ideological force in Australian politics since Federation. In parliament, the Liberal Party and its predecessors have often been strongly influenced by conservative ideas (although, as its name suggests, liberalism is also an ideological influence on the party, as will be discussed in more detail in the next section). Liberal Prime Minister John Howard was a staunch monarchist and drew on the ideas of Edmund Burke to argue against Australia becoming a republic:

I take an unashamedly Burkean view. I do not support change because I am unconvinced that a better system can be delivered … Changing the Constitution

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20   Editorial, *Australian*, 22 February 1842, cited in Walter 2010, 47.
21   Walter 2010, 40.
22   Walter 2010, 48–9.
23   See, for example, Chavura and Melleuish 2015.
24   Chavura and Melleuish 2015, 516.

in such a fundamental way is not a play-thing of the ordinary cut-and-thrust of Australian politics. We are dealing here with institutions affecting the long-term political health and stability of the nation.[25]

More generally, the desire to preserve political and cultural ties to Britain has been one of the abiding features of Australian conservatism.[26] For example, one of the most controversial decisions made by Tony Abbott during his prime ministership was the decision to introduce knighthoods in Australia and to award one of these knighthoods to Prince Philip.[27] This decision reflected a conservative desire to reintroduce an honours system based on the British model; a belief in the value of hierarchy, apparent in the desire to establish a system of titles; and a conservative attachment to the Crown, seen in bestowing the award on a member of the royal family.

Conservative ideas have also figured prominently in debates over a range of social issues and policies. For example, until the final decades of the 20th century, Australia had a particularly strict censorship regime that aimed to place limits on the literature and films that citizens were able to access to protect 'Anglo-Saxon standards'.[28] The conservative viewpoint also came through strongly in debates over the introduction of no-fault divorce and the decriminalisation of homosexuality. More recently, the major opposition to marriage equality came from conservative politicians and religious organisations. For example, former Prime Minister Tony Abbott advocated a 'no' vote in the 2017 marriage equality plebiscite on the grounds that it was '[t]he best way of standing up for traditional values, the best way of saying you don't like the direction our country is heading in right now'.[29] Since the late 1990s, conservative ideas have also been central to the 'culture wars', with conservatives opposing a variety of trends that they believe are undermining the dominance of Christian values in Australia, particularly multiculturalism, cultural engagement with Asia, and more critical accounts of Australian history that draw attention to the violence of colonialism and its ongoing effects. The idea that it is important to preserve Christian values in Australia was reflected in former Liberal–National Coalition Prime Minister John Howard's comment that 'the life and example [of Jesus Christ] has given us a value system which remains the greatest force for good in our community'.[30]

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25   Howard, cited in Irving 2004, 95.
26   Melleuish 2015.
27   Safi 2015.
28   Moore, cited in Errington and Miragliotta 2011, 121.
29   Abbott, cited in Karp 2017.
30   Howard, cited in Johnson 2007, 199.

Liberalism

Liberal ideas have also been highly influential in Australia. In fact, liberalism has sometimes been viewed as the dominant ideology in Australian politics.[31] There are major differences between varieties of liberalism, but they are all committed 'to individualism, a belief in the supreme importance of the human individual, implying strong support for individual freedom'.[32] Linked to this, liberals are opposed to the ideas of hereditary aristocracy and natural hierarchy that have often been associated with conservatism. Rather, the liberal view is that citizens have an equal moral status, meaning they are entitled to an equal set of rights.

A variety of implications flow from this core idea. First, liberals are opposed to absolutism.[33] The authority of the state – its right to exercise coercive power – is not natural or the result of religious decree but only justified to the extent that it has beneficial consequences for the lives of citizens. This idea, which most famously found expression in John Locke's *Two treatises of government* (1689), means that state power is only justified to the extent that it 'enable[s] the society to achieve those limited goals that a political order enables us to achieve – the security of life, property and the pursuit of happiness'.[34] In the liberal tradition, this view has often been explained with reference to the idea that there is a (hypothetical) social contract between citizens and the state. Although the idea of the social contract has taken a variety of forms, it is usually understood to be a thought experiment that begins by imagining what life would be like in the state of nature – a world without the state apparatus. A flourishing and orderly society is assumed not to be possible in the state of nature; hence liberals believe that individuals would agree to give up their absolute freedom in the state of nature and establish the institution of government (what we would now refer to as the state). This establishes the basis for citizens' agreement to respect the state's authority. In return, the state is obliged to maintain order and protect citizens. However, under liberal forms of the social contract, there are limits to the state's authority: it must respect the core rights of citizens, and, if it fails to do so, it loses its legitimacy and revolution may be justified.[35]

Linked to this is another core liberal idea: opposition to theocracy and support for the concept of freedom of conscience.[36] Throughout history, religious and political authority have often been closely entwined, and it has been considered legitimate for the state to force individuals to follow particular religious beliefs and practices. Liberals are opposed to this idea, drawing a distinction between church and state and emphasising the importance of freedom of conscience.[37] This is often

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31   For example, Rowse 1978.
32   Heywood 2004, 29.
33   Ryan 2012a, 28–30.
34   Ryan 2012a, 28–9.
35   Ryan 2012b, 488–91.
36   Ryan 2012a, 30–3.
37   Ryan 2012a, 31.

linked to the concept of toleration, which holds that one should not interfere 'with beliefs, actions or practices that one considers to be wrong but still "tolerable" such that they should not be prohibited or constrained'.[38] For example, the majority of people in a community might regard a particular individual's religious beliefs as wrong and offensive. However, that individual should be free to practise their religion without interference from the majority.

Although early liberals such as Locke defended relatively limited notions of toleration by contemporary standards, subsequent liberal thinkers expanded the scope of this principle. Most famously, in *On liberty* (1859), John Stuart Mill went beyond freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, arguing for a more expansive understanding of freedom of speech and freedom of action that was encapsulated by the 'harm principle'. This principle held that '[t]he only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others'.[39] In the 20th century, liberals further developed these ideas to argue against a raft of laws that were designed to enforce customary morality in areas such as sexuality and censorship.[40] As a result, contemporary liberals generally think that a much wider range of practices should be tolerated.

Although most liberals endorse human rights and individual freedom, there is great diversity in how different liberals understand these concepts. One of the major distinctions is between classical liberalism and social liberalism.[41] Classical liberalism is generally associated with a belief in rights to life, liberty and property. There should also be minimal government intervention in the economy, with the emphasis instead on freeing up the market forces of supply and demand. This means that the state should, for the most part, let producers and consumers make their own economic decisions without the restrictions associated with heavy government regulation, taxation, tariffs or other forms of interference. Key liberal thinkers such as John Locke and Adam Smith are often viewed as falling within the classical liberal tradition.[42]

In the 19th century, a different form of liberalism began to emerge, described variously as 'social liberalism', 'new liberalism' or 'modern liberalism'.[43] Associated with the work of J.S. Mill, L.T. Hobhouse and T.H. Green, social liberals drew attention to the problem of poverty and argued that the state was justified in assuming a more expansive role in the economy, intervening to provide more benefits and services for citizens to help ensure that they are able to obtain the basic necessities of life and to bring about equality of opportunity. This was justified with reference to the liberal commitment to individualism and individual freedom. The idea was that for individual freedom to be meaningful, individuals needed more

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38   Forst 2017.
39   Mill 1978 [1859], 9.
40   For example, Hart 1963; Dworkin 1977.
41   Heywood 2004, 29–30; Ryan 2012a, 23–6; Sawer 2003, 9–30.
42   Ryan 2012a, 24.
43   Edwards 2013, 42–6; Heywood 2004, 29–30; Ryan 2012a, 25–6; Sawer 2003, 9–30.

than the absence of external interference with their actions; they needed a certain level of material wellbeing to give them autonomy (i.e. control over their lives) and the means to fully develop their capacities. This form of freedom has been described as positive freedom, in contrast to the negative freedom (i.e. freedom as non-interference) that was associated with classical liberalism,[44] and it provided a justification for the emergence of the welfare state.

In the second half of the 20th century, another strand of liberalism emerged that became known as 'neoclassical liberalism' (or 'neoliberalism'). Linked to the work of F.A. Hayek and Milton Friedman, among others, this approach argues against the growing size of the welfare state on the grounds that it is undermining self-reliance and individual responsibility, as well as distorting the market.[45] Rejecting the positive account of freedom associated with social liberalism, neoliberals argue that liberals should return to their classical roots, advocating minimal government and the free market.

These strands of liberalism have all had – and continue to have – a major impact on Australian politics. During the colonial era, there was support for liberal ideas, particularly in urban areas and among emancipists. Liberals often worked alongside radicals, including those involved in the Chartist movement, to oppose conservative proposals for the 'bunyip aristocracy' (see above) and push democratisation through measures such as universal manhood suffrage.[46] Liberal ideas of equal citizenship were drawn upon in these debates. For example, as Daniel Deniehy put it, 'a just law no more recognises the supremacy of a class than it does the predominance of a creed … [T]he elective principle is the only basis upon which sound government could be built.'[47]

The division between different types of liberalism was also important in the development of the Australian party system in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The two largest 'parties' (or perhaps more accurately, 'groupings', given their relatively loose organisational structures) in the first federal parliament were the Protectionists and the Free Traders. As their name suggests, the Free Traders, led by George Reid, were strongly influenced by the free market ideas of classical liberalism.[48] Reid associated free market liberalism with the idea of individual freedom. He thought the free market was essential to economic and social progress because it encouraged competition: 'the great destiny of humanity lies in allowing the genius for competition, for striving, for excelling, for acquiring, to reach its uttermost latitude consistent with the due rights of others.'[49]

In contrast, the Protectionists held that the federal government should put tariffs on goods being imported into Australia in order to protect local industries,

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44   Berlin 1969.
45   Friedman and Friedman 1980; Hayek 2001 [1944]; Heywood 2004, 211–2.
46   Walter 2010, 44–54.
47   Cited in Walter 2010, 45.
48   Edwards 2013, 63–4; Walter 2010, 24, 97–9.
49   Reid, cited in Walter 2010, 98.

giving them an advantage over international competitors. This went alongside support for a range of other forms of government intervention in the economy that were designed to prevent poverty and improve the lives of citizens.[50] As the most influential figure in the Protectionists, Alfred Deakin, put it:

> Liberalism would now inculcate a new teaching with regard to the poorest in the community, that all should have what was their due. By fixing a minimum rate of wages and wise factory legislation, wealth would be prevented from taking unfair advantage of the needy, and the latter would be saved from living wretched and imperfect lives.[51]

Ultimately, the position advocated by the Protectionists won out. With the support of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), tariffs were introduced, along with a range of other policies, including compulsory wage arbitration, which ultimately meant that workers' wages were relatively high compared to other countries. These policies (along with other measures such as the White Australia policy, discussed below) later became known as 'the Australian Settlement' and remained in place for much of the 20th century.[52] There were still major disagreements between political actors over the extent of government intervention in the economy, and in the postwar period some critics argued that the Australian welfare state was relatively underdeveloped, having fallen behind other countries. Nonetheless, the broadly interventionist approach associated with Deakin's social liberalism had become institutionalised, going on 'to dominate Australian society and politics for the first 70 years after Federation'.[53]

By the 1970s, this approach came under challenge as neoliberal ideas became increasingly influential in Australia. A variety of think tanks argued that the welfare state had become too large and that there was a need to reduce government intervention in the economy through tariff cuts, financial deregulation, industrial relations deregulation, tax cuts and privatisation.[54] The Australian economy was perceived to be underperforming as it faced problems with stagflation (the combination of stagnant economic growth and high inflation). The interventionist economic ideas embedded in the existing framework, reflecting social liberalism, were seen to have failed, and a broadly neoliberal approach was believed to offer the solution.[55] These ideas did not fully reshape public policy in Australia until

50 Edwards 2013, 68–9.
51 Deakin, cited in Walter 2010, 100.
52 Kelly 1992. Although the idea of 'the Australian Settlement' has been highly influential in both academic and popular discussions of Australian politics and public policy, the existence of such a settlement, and Kelly's presentation of its content, has also been challenged. See, for example, Stokes 2004.
53 Cook 1999, 180.
54 Bell 1993; Pusey 1991.
55 Painter 1996.

the Hawke–Keating Labor government held office (1983–96), bringing in a range of policies that were heavily influenced by neoliberal ideas. It moved to phase out tariffs, open the economy up to market forces by deregulating the financial system and privatise major government assets. During this period, the Liberal Party, which was in opposition, was racked by internal division between social liberals (known as 'the wets') and neoliberals (known as 'the dries') over the ideological direction of the party. Ultimately, the dries won out on economic questions;[56] the vast majority of Liberal Party MPs now subscribe to a broadly neoliberal approach to the economy.

Beyond the economy, liberal ideas have also been important in a range of other domains. In particular, a number of the major social reforms that occurred in Australia in the postwar period, including the introduction of no-fault divorce, the decriminalisation of homosexuality and a loosening of the highly restrictive censorship regime, were influenced by Mill's ideas about individual freedom. The political system has also been shaped by liberal ideas about limited government, with a variety of mechanisms – including an entrenched Constitution, judicial review, strong bicameralism and federalism – in place to disperse the government's power and reduce the risk that it will infringe citizens' rights.

Socialism and social democracy

Socialist ideas have also been important in Australia. Socialism is a particularly difficult ideology to define because of the many different types of socialism that exist; nonetheless, most accounts of socialism reflect a commitment to principles of egalitarianism and community.[57] The socialist commitment to egalitarianism involves a more radical understanding of equality than the idea of equal citizenship or equality before the law, requiring a higher degree of equality in the standard of living individuals enjoy (going as far as equality of outcome on some accounts). The commitment to community (or solidarity) reflects the idea 'that people care about, and, where necessary and possible, care for, one another'.[58] As both these principles suggest, a socialist society is supposed to lack the social division and competition that tends to characterise life in a liberal capitalist society.

Despite the importance of egalitarianism and community in socialist thought, the most influential socialist thinker, Karl Marx, did not explicitly draw on these ideas in his mature work. Instead, Marx put forward a 'scientific' account of socialism based on the idea that politics and history are driven by the conflict between different classes, with this conflict in turn reflecting the nature of the economy and its level of technological development. In a capitalist economy, the central conflict is between the bourgeoisie (the capitalist, property-owning class)

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56   Brett 2003.
57   Cohen 2009.
58   Cohen 2009, 34–5.

and the proletariat (the working class who are forced to sell their labour to survive because they do not own property). In contrast to the positive view of the market associated with classical liberalism, which tends to view workers as free and equal in a capitalist society, Marx argued that the proletariat are, in reality, exploited by the bourgeoisie because they are not paid the full value of their labour.[59] This leads to the impoverishment of the working class. Over time, wealth will become increasingly concentrated and the proletariat will increase in size. This ultimately makes it possible for the proletariat to take control of the state and overthrow capitalism.[60] In its place, they will institute a transitory socialist stage, and ultimately communism, which marks the final stage in human history. Marx did not provide a detailed account of what communism would entail, but it would involve the abolition of private property and freedom from exploitative market relations and wage labour. Society would operate on the principle of 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'.[61] Marx believed that this account of history was 'scientific' and that communism was inevitable, in contrast to the many alternative, ethically driven accounts of socialism, which he derided as 'utopian'. What unites Marx's account of socialism with these 'utopian' variants is a shared opposition to the dehumanising effects of free market economies on human beings and support for 'the idea of production for *social* purposes'.[62]

Socialists have also disagreed over how the transition to socialism is likely to occur. Revolutionary socialists believed that a revolutionary takeover of the state was necessary to overthrow the bourgeoisie. Other socialists believed that reform could occur through democratic means if democratic socialist or social-democratic political parties could contest elections, win government and then use the power of the state to institute socialism. Although the term 'social democracy' was originally used to refer to political parties advocating the democratic route to socialism, over time it has come to be associated with a much less radical approach. Instead of winning government to overturn capitalism and bring about full-blown socialism, social democracy now generally means a capitalist economy with a strong welfare state in place that provides a generous level of benefits and services to citizens (such as unemployment benefits and universal health care), thereby ensuring a high level of social protection for workers (and others), a higher degree of equality of opportunity and a lower level of inequality in income and wealth. In other words, 'it stands for a balance between the market and the state, a balance between the individual and the community'.[63]

Both socialism and social democracy have been longstanding influences in Australian politics. In the late 19th century, key socialist works by Marx and Engels

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59 Ryan 2012b, 786–8.
60 Cohen 2000.
61 Marx 1978 [1872], 531.
62 Ryan 2012b, 883.
63 Heywood 2004, 308.

and by 'utopian' socialists such Edward Bellamy, William Morris and others were being read by both workers and the urban intelligentsia.[64] There were also reading groups to discuss Marx's *Capital*, and socialist newspapers and journals. This climate contributed to the development of the ALP in the 1890s, although the relationship between the ALP and socialism is complicated and controversial. Key figures within the Labor Party certainly endorsed socialist ideas and used the term, while making clear that it should be achieved through electoral victory and gradual reform rather than revolution. As Labor MP (and later prime minister) Billy Hughes said in 1910:

> The belief that socialism can be achieved by any coup … can only be entertained by those who fail utterly to understand not only what Socialism is, but what those factors which make for change are … Socialism will replace individualism because it is fitter to survive in the new environment.[65]

This comment reflects the commitment to the electoral route to socialism and the sense that history was on the side of socialism. However, the kind of socialism that most figures within the Labor Party endorsed fell short of the Marxist ideal. This is reflected in the qualified nature of the Socialist Objective the Labor Party adopted as part of its platform in 1921, which committed the party to 'the socialisation of industry, production, distribution and exchange', but not if this property was 'utilised by its owner in a socially useful manner'.[66] Labor's commitment to socialism was perhaps best seen in its support for government ownership, at least until the 1970s and 1980s, but this fell well short of major government control of all key industries. Often Labor's policies in office seemed to be closer to the goals of social democracy in its more moderate form, which focused on building the welfare state to provide greater security for citizens and to reduce levels of inequality. These more moderate social-democratic objectives overlap to a significant extent with social liberalism, so it is not surprising that Labor was able to work effectively with the Protectionists in the early years after Federation to put in place core elements of the Australian Settlement, including wage arbitration.

Socialist, particularly Marxist, ideas have also had a powerful influence on political thinkers and organisations outside parliament. The most obvious example was the Communist Party of Australia; however, there are other groups, such as the Socialist Workers Party and more radical trade unions, that have also had an important presence as socialist activists. Socialist writers and academics have a long history in Australian intellectual life and have often been influential critics of the policies and ideas put forth by Australia's major political parties. One of the recurring criticisms in this literature has been of the Labor Party for remaining

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64   Water 2010, 70–6.
65   Cited in Walter 2010, 108.
66   Cited in Bramble and Kuhn 2011, 43. See also Dyrenfurth and Bongiorno 2011, 68–9.

committed to capitalism and adopting policies that benefit businesses more than the working class.[67]

Labourism

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge another distinct – and perhaps distinctively Australian – ideological influence on Australian politics. This is the ideology of 'labourism', which 'in its traditional guise, sought a Labor government charged with the duty of managing the economy for the benefit of wage earners'.[68] Labourism does not draw its inspiration from socialist ideas, even in the watered-down way that modern social democracy does. It is broadly supportive of a market economy and electorally pragmatic, focusing on making sure that Labor governments are elected and that they are able to bring in policies that are in the interests of the working class, 'making the market work more efficiently and fairly'.[69] Up until the late 1960s, this meant support for 'industry protection, restrictive immigration policy, and compulsory arbitration'.[70] Labourism also differed from social democracy in supporting a smaller welfare state, emphasising targeted and means-tested forms of welfare support rather than the universal forms of social provision that are often associated with social democracy. Labourism has been a major influence on the ALP throughout its history, and although it has moved away from many of the traditional labourist policies in recent decades, an emphasis on electoral pragmatism, a broadly supportive attitude towards a market economy and support for targeting and means-testing welfare payments remain important to contemporary Labor.

Nationalism and exclusion

Australian politics has also been influenced by a number of other ideas that cut across and interact with many of the ideologies discussed above. Foremost among these is nationalism. A nation is an 'imagined community' into which one is born,[71] and often those who belong to such a community are believed to share certain characteristics. Nationalism is the idea that 'people who share a common birth – who belong to the same nation – should also share citizenship in the same political unit, or state'.[72] The development of Australian nationalism is generally traced to the second half of the 19th century. It was associated with a growing sense that there was a distinctive Australian identity characterised by egalitarianism, mateship and

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67   For a recent example, see Bramble and Kuhn 2011.
68   Manning 1992, 14.
69   Manning 1992, 14.
70   Manning 1992, 14.
71   Anderson 1983.
72   Ball and Dagger 2004, 14.

distrust of authority.[73] This sense of nationalism was linked to the growing desire for greater independence from Britain and to the 'progressive' policy measures associated with the Australian Settlement, which were supported by social liberals and the labour movement, particularly labour market regulation.

However, the egalitarianism and mateship associated with Australian nationalism for the most part applied to white men. Australian national identity embodied 'a specific model of masculinity – the Lone Hand or Bushman' – that excluded women.[74] First Nations people were also excluded, being denied the formal rights and status associated with equal citizenship until well into the 20th century, and migration was restricted to 'white' races through the White Australia policy. The latter policy was a core part of the Australian Settlement, enjoying support across the mainstream ideological spectrum. Speaking on the *Immigration Restriction Bill 1901* (Cth), which introduced the policy, Alfred Deakin famously stated that '[t]he unity of Australia is nothing if it does not imply a united race'.[75] The 1905 federal Labor Platform called for '[t]he cultivation of an Australian sentiment based on the maintenance of racial purity'.[76] Thus, although nationalism was linked to relatively progressive policies in some areas, it was also infused with both sexist and racist ideas.

It is important to emphasise that racism predated the emergence of Australian nationalism. In fact, it has been at the heart of Australian politics since 1788. Britain colonised Australia without the permission or authorisation of the First Nations people, who had occupied the land for tens of thousands of years and whose own ways of life and systems of government were violently displaced. One of the ideas underpinning this colonisation and violence was racial hierarchy – the idea that some races are inherently superior to others.[77] Indigenous peoples were treated and depicted in dehumanising ways by the colonists, and the idea that they were the 'lowest race in the scale of humanity' appears to have been very influential.[78] In the second half of the 19th century, Social Darwinism emerged as the dominant way of thinking about race, linking racial hierarchy to the idea that there was a constant conflict between races and that 'the fittest and the best' would ultimately survive, while the others would die out.[79] The legacy of these ideas was policies of violence and oppression towards First Nations people, and assimilation, which assumed that First Nations cultures would eventually die out. These ideas also shaped the development of Australian nationalism. As Marilyn Lake has put it, 'The project of progressive reform was imbued with settler colonialism's "regime of race", which informed the ascendant politics of "whiteness"'.[80]

73   Brett 2003, 203; Ward 1958.
74   Lake 1997, 42.
75   Deakin, cited in Brett 2017, 265.
76   Dyrenfurth and Bongiorno 2011, 43.
77   Reynolds 1987, 110–1.
78   Byrne, cited in Reynolds 1987, 110–1, quotation at 110.
79   Reynolds 1987, 116, 119.
80   Lake 2019, 5 (references suppressed).

The dominance of sexism and racism in Australian political thought was challenged by women, First Nations people and people of colour. Key thinkers challenged their exclusion from accounts of Australian national identity and called on 'progressive' thinkers to apply their ideas more consistently. For example, suffragists such as Rose Scott appealed to Australian patriotism to argue that the right to vote should be extended to women,[81] while later feminist activists drew on the 'enabling state of social liberalism' in their fight for gender equality.[82] First Nations thinkers have also drawn on social liberal ideas, calling for equality and freedom to be extended to all people. An early example of this was the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association, which formed in 1924 to fight for equal citizenship for First Nations people.[83] These ideas played a role in helping achieve equal citizenship (at least in a formal sense) for women and First Nations people and an end to a racially discriminatory immigration policy. However, there are also significant and ongoing disagreements among these groups over political ideas. In particular, many thinkers have argued that there is a need to move beyond a liberal framework to achieve gender equality for women[84] and justice for First Nations people.[85] It is also clear that, although mainstream politicians now (generally) profess to support gender equality and racial equality, this is not always reflected in their policies or rhetoric, as illustrated by Australia's treatment of (primarily non-white) refugees who arrive by boat, the demonisation of Muslims and scare campaigns against African migrants. Combined with the persistence of violence against women, First Nations people and people of colour, this highlights that sexism and racism remain major problems in Australia.

Before concluding, it is important to note another, different type of bias that is held by most of the ideologies explored in this chapter. For the most part, these ideologies all operate within a broadly materialist and anthropocentric paradigm. In other words, they focus on the wellbeing of human beings, often to the exclusion of non-human animals and of environmental sustainability. One of the marked features of public life in Australia in the last few decades is the way in which Green political thinkers have drawn attention to this bias and brought new issues onto the mainstream political agenda. As one of the key figures in the Australian environmental movement put it:

> Green politics does not accept the philosophical dualism which underpins modern industrial society (mind/body, humanity/nature, boss/worker, male/female) nor that of the traditional left (class struggle and class war leading to a classless

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81   Lake 1997, 41.
82   Sawer 2003, 165.
83   Lake 2019, 238–41.
84   Lake 2019, 238–41.
85   For example, Moreton-Robinson 2015.

society). Instead, it presents the goal of a society where people live in harmony with each other and with nature.[86]

Australian activists and political thinkers have also challenged the animal/human dualism, questioning the human tendency to treat animals as mere instruments for advancing human wellbeing. The work of Australian ethicist Peter Singer has been particularly influential in this area.[87] Singer's argument for animal liberation is based around the idea that what ultimately matters is whether an animal is sentient – not the species to which they belong. Promoting the happiness and preventing the suffering of any sentient being should be our primary ethical concern. This means that human beings need to radically rethink their treatment of non-human animals. This represents a further challenge to the assumptions that underpin the political ideologies that have long dominated in Australia.

Conclusions

This chapter has introduced some of the major ideologies that have shaped – and continue to shape – Australian politics. It has outlined the Western ideologies of conservatism, liberalism, socialism, social democracy and labourism, explaining their key ideas and discussing the ways they have influenced Australian politics. It has also highlighted some of the common ideas that cut across many of these ideologies, particularly relating to nationalism, race, gender and human dominance over the rest of the eco-system. Although much more could be said on each of the positions discussed here, this brief overview challenges the view that Australian politics is bereft of ideas and illustrates – for better and worse – the diversity of Australian political thought.

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86   Hutton, cited in Walter 2010, 279.
87   Chen 2016, 31–6. And see especially Singer 1975.

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About the author

Dr Nicholas Barry is a lecturer in the Department of Politics and Philosophy at La Trobe University. His research and teaching interests are in political theory, political institutions and Australian politics. He is currently working on a number of projects relating to contemporary theories of egalitarian justice, the dynamics of constitutional conventions and institutional change in Australia.