

# The Origin and Growth of Liberalism

## PART

# 2

*The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it...Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest.*

—John Stuart Mill,  
*On Liberty*, 1859

Left: Paul Gauguin, “D’où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?” (detail) 1897–1898. Photograph © 2009 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Right: Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), self-portrait, 1889.

In 1891, the troubled French painter Paul Gauguin fled from Paris to live in the South Pacific paradise of Tahiti. Despite failing health, poverty, and thoughts of suicide, his paintings sought to capture the essence of humanity as he saw it in local life. When a steamer docked in Tahiti in 1897, Gauguin learned of the death of his beloved daughter, Aline. Troubled by the news, he was inspired to create one of his most provocative murals that summed up his thoughts on life and death. The picture’s title is based on three questions he scribbled down after learning of Aline’s death—*D’où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?*—Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?—three questions central to Social Studies.

These three questions also provide the basis for considering the Related Issue for Part 2, *To what extent is resistance to liberalism justified?* In Part 2, the question *Where do we come from?* is explored by investigating the emergence of classical liberal ideology during the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason. The complete transformation of the social, political, and economic structures through the political and economic revolutions of the last millennium offers insights into an ideology that continues to evolve and shape our daily lives, our identity, and our conception of the role of a citizen.

The reaction of people within society to this evolving ideology answers Gauguin’s question *What are we?* Investigating this question



gives insights into the concept of identity addressed in Part 1. Answers to this complex question can be seen in the actions of Luddites who smashed machines, Nazis who rejected liberalism, and free market advocates who established a postwar consumer society.

Visit the Learn Alberta site [www.LearnAlberta.ca](http://www.LearnAlberta.ca) and click on the *Perspectives on Ideology* learning object for fully interactive learning scenarios entitled ExCite (Exploring Citizenship). These scenarios related to issues and concepts in the Student Resource enhance learning.



*The uniform, constant and uninterrupted effort of every man to better his condition, the principle from which public and national, as well as private opulence is originally derived, is frequently powerful enough to maintain the natural progress of things toward improvement, in spite both of the extravagance of government, and of the greatest errors of administration.*

—Adam Smith,  
***The Wealth of Nations*,  
Book II Chapter III, 1776**

Much like Gauguin’s third compelling question—*Where are we going?*—Part 2 encourages you to consider the past while preparing for the future. You will investigate how others have responded to the economic and social conditions that arose based upon this evolving ideology. This inquiry will provide the basis for you to consider the Key Issue for this course: ***To what extent should we embrace an ideology?***

While you read this section, consider how the people quoted here and in Part 2 might respond to Gauguin’s questions. Consider also how the current economic and social conditions might cause you to respond to Gauguin’s questions or Part 2’s Related Issue.

*But if allowed to run free of the social system, capitalism will attempt to corrupt and undermine democracy, which is after all not a natural state.*

—John Ralston Saul,  
***The Doubter’s Companion*  
(New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994),  
p. 57.**

