QUESTION #2

Before I begin the actual definitions of conservative, liberal, and socialist views I think it would be relevant to first say a few words about ideology since all political views are ideologically based. One of the defining characteristics of any political system is the underlying ideology which motivates its practitioners to act (or not) and its citizens to follow. So for example in the current American political scene it is democracy that is operative. But what drives this democratic political machine is a particular ideology, in this case moderate liberalism under President Clinton. Although the American public may like him for his charisma or dislike him for his deceitfulness it is his liberal ideology that motivated the voting public to put him in office. And it is also this political ideology that drives the political and social institutions of this country to create a society which reflects the values and goals that liberalism promises to deliver.

I feel it is important to make this distinction because this is a rather modern phenomenon which we enjoy today. Without getting into the specifics it is enough to say that, prior to our modern era, people did not have free access to the political system (voting, speaking out, political representation). But because of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution there was an enormous amount of political and social upheaval. It was an attempt to find a political homeostasis in the wake of these turbulent times that political ideology was born. Perhaps the painfully obvious implication of the birth of political ideology is the one we so often take for

22 Ibid, pg.5
granted: We, as members of a democratic nation, have the right and duty through suffrage to choose the political ideology we feel will best affect institutions to deal with current social problems and most effectively help us as a nation reach our goals to become a better society.

Having made this distinction concerning political ideology I will now attempt to define those three ideologies most prevalent in modern Western culture: Conservative, Liberal, and Socialist. Then I will try to outline my own views while comparing them to these ideologies to show its strengths and weaknesses. Lastly I will try to show how my views would influence progressive social work practice.

CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGY

The first element of conservative ideology is how the nature of man is viewed. Put simply, "Conservatives believe that people are essentially evil and irrational." The evil nature and base proclivity of human beings is precisely because people (conservatives not included) lack the power of reason to do good. Thus conservatives view men as incapable of making good decisions either morally or socially due to a deficient intellect. And although all men are similar biologically they can vary a great deal in terms of quality, which means that all men are not created equal.

The second element of conservative ideology is how the nature of order and the role of institution in society is viewed. Conservatives believe that existing governments and institutions define social and moral precepts for its...

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25 Ibid, pg.25
citizens to follow, and that those who do not are deemed deviant. And since deviancy is expected among people who are rationally deficient there is a real need for negative sanctions through such institutions as prisons and mental hospitals to prevent the further spread of deviant behavior in society. The emphasis here is not rehabilitation but prevention since human nature is inherently corrupt.

As for the role of institutions Conservatives believe that their primary function is to maintain the integrity and stability of the market. This means that the role of institutions is one of self-preservation: As long as institutions are able to subordinate individuals to the goal of the market, which is the preservation of the status quo, then institutions are secure and have served their purpose. But if individuals who are not of the elite interfere with their operation, the market will break down and chaos is sure to follow. Institutions, then, must protect individuals from upsetting the status quo to prevent chaos and protect them from harm.

The third element of conservative ideology is how the nature and form of political power is viewed. Conservatives believe that the nature of power must be authoritarian given the irrational nature of man, and that only those who "rise to the top" of social rank should rule because the common man is mediocre and would make a mess of things. As Edmund Burke put it: "The rich, the able, and the well born" govern, while the people of lower social rank recognize their betters and willingly submit to their rule. Should they refuse...the ultimate result can only be disaster. However this elitism is

27 Ibid, pg.xx
28 Ibid, pg.xix
29 Ibid, pg.xix
not free license to oppress the masses but "a tool to shepherd society to
noble ends."\textsuperscript{31}

As for the form of power it can be defined as the preservation of the
status quo. This is because conservatives recognize the intrinsic value in the
institutions which presently exist and have existed for decades, and so are
very reluctant to toy with them.\textsuperscript{32} This does not mean that conservatives are
unequivocally against change; They resist it because they believe that the
present authority, institutions, and traditions constitute the best that can
possibly be achieved at the moment, and are doubtful that change will produce
better results.\textsuperscript{33} For that reason change comes very slowly and incrementally
within the political form of conservative power, be it in formulation,
implementation, or enforcement of social policy in an attempt to better
society. Besides, people want order in society, and the conservative principle
preserves and protects that order.

The fourth element of conservative ideology is how the nature and form
of social production and distributive inequality are viewed. Modern
Conservatives believe that entrepreneurship and an unfettered capitalism are
the defining characteristics of social production.\textsuperscript{34} Businesses and
corporations drive and guide the direction of society and so must be protected
at all costs. Thus the form that social production takes is one of obedience
to the demands of Corporate America: "Obedience to authority must be
maintained within the corporation so that goods and services will be

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid, pg.27
\textsuperscript{32}Ibid, pg.23
\textsuperscript{33}Ibid, pg.23
efficiently produced and distributed"\textsuperscript{35}, which will then ensure social harmony. The goal here is strictly economic growth.

As for the nature of distribution it is clearly one of inequality. Since "inequality is necessary for the proper organization and successful functioning of society"\textsuperscript{36}, conservatives believe that "access to the basic necessities of life is not a right".\textsuperscript{37} Men are equal in that they are human, but that is only the starting point. If men want to share in the desserts of production then they must deserve it through work. The form it takes is competition since this is the way of determining the distribution of scarce resources.\textsuperscript{38} If you work hard and succeed then you deserve to be rewarded with wealth and status. If you work hard and fail, then keep trying. If you don’t work, then you get what you deserve, nothing. Conservatives cannot agree to equal distribution of wealth and power simply because we all happen to be human: "(We) did nothing to become human or equal and therefore deserve no political or social benefits because of it."\textsuperscript{39}

The fifth element of conservative ideology is how the nature of individual well-being and aggregate social welfare are viewed. Conservatives believe that individual well-being is self-determinative because "the rights of the individual have priority over those of the community."\textsuperscript{40} This means that the state should protect an individual’s right to: land ownership, accumulation of resources, social status, and power because he/she enjoys that freedom guaranteed by the constitution. Just because some or even many other

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{35}Ibid, pg.XX
\item\textsuperscript{36}Ibid, pg.281
\item\textsuperscript{37}Ibid, pg.219
\item\textsuperscript{38}Ibid, pg.219
\item\textsuperscript{40}Etzkowitz, H. (1980). \textit{Is America Possible?} 2nd ed. West Publishing, pg.2
\end{footnotes}
individuals don’t succeed in their struggle for resources does not mean that those who do should be penalized. The ability for some to rise above others is how freedom is defined.41

As for the aggregate social welfare, “Conservatives believe that the free enterprise system is the solution to urban problems” because it creates the opportunity for everyone to find work so as to accumulate goods and live well.42 The stance of political non-involvement regarding social problems is because conservatives fear doing more harm than good. Besides, the American economic system is structured by conservatives in such a way that it will inevitably take care of societies problems.43

LIBERAL IDEOLOGY

The first element of liberal ideology is how the nature of man is viewed. Liberals believe that man is neither good or bad: People have the potential to be moral, competent, and intelligent if they use human reason.44 Only then are they able to improve the quality of life for individuals and society. The emphasis here is equality and rights. Because we are all equally human we all have the right to be treated equally, and this they call human rights.45 These rights; the right to free speech, equality, fair distribution of goods and power are considered inalienable to all citizens and therefore need to be protected from those who would attempt to compromise them through the abuse of power.46

41Ibid, pg.2
42Ibid, pg.5
43Ibid, pg.5
The second element of liberal ideology is how the nature of order and the role of institutions are viewed. Liberals believe that crime is predominately motivated by poverty.\textsuperscript{47} When people lack the resources necessary to live a happy life they turn to crime to get their share. Crime is a problem for liberals but the solution is not one where negative punishment is unilaterally handed out. While supporting the need for a legal system liberals go on to eliminate crime by reducing poverty through government programs.\textsuperscript{48} These programs that provide such services as job training, education, and public assistance in the form of welfare are effective primarily because they help its recipients to get the same jump on life as the upper classes.

As for the role of institutions liberals believe that their primary function is to promote social equilibrium: If social problems emerge then it is up to the relevant institution (government, congress, judiciary) to step in and make the changes necessary to restore social equality. They believe that change is possible, particularly when good men are in positions of power.\textsuperscript{49} This is possible not only because of one's goodness but mostly one's ability to reason well. Liberals have confidence that solutions to social problems can be found through science and research.\textsuperscript{50} It is therefore the role of institutions to assist the poor and powerless by working together to analyze the problem and discover rational solutions to create a more just and equal society. The third element of liberal ideology is how the nature and form of political power is viewed. Liberals believe that the nature of political power is one of limitation and dissemination of control.\textsuperscript{51} This means that no one

\textsuperscript{47}Ibid, pg.44
\textsuperscript{48}Ibid, pg.44
\textsuperscript{49}Ibid, pg.xxi
person can have the power to push personal interests' and agendas over the welfare of the masses. Towards this end liberals believe that the form of political power is one where authority is divided so that the branches of government, congress, and the judiciary work in tandem to keep each other in check. With this balance in place institutions are in a better position to effect change. Although liberals can recognize flaws in society and are anxious to make changes, they also realize that, while policies that would bring about radical social change might be tempting, they must favor policies which will bring about social change gradually. The emphasis here is that, while institutions and corporations hold enormous power, they must only exercise this power on behalf of the poor and oppressed who lack the power to improve society. To prevent them from abusing their power government must regulate institutions and businesses to maintain a balance of power.

Liberals recognize that corporations and a free market do the best job in maintaining a healthy economy. However, because they have witnessed severe abuses of power in an unfettered market, they feel that the best way to ensure public safety and preserve our environment from further abuse is through regulation of businesses. What this means is that the form of social production is one where businesses and corporate America are encouraged to compete to produce products efficiently, but ultimately are required to follow the rules and regulations which government deems necessary to promote the best for society.

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52 Ibid, pg.xxi
53 Ibid, pg.xxiii
54 Ibid, pg.xxii
55 Ibid, pg.350
56 Ibid, pg.350
57 Ibid, pg.350
As for the nature of distribution it is one of equality for liberals: Because all people share the same equal rights, they must also share the same level of access to the goods and services produced by corporate America. While it is true that people must work to receive their just desserts, individual success cannot be the sole criterion for distribution. The form of distribution, then, becomes one of economic regulation. What this means is that everyone, regardless of economic or social status, has the right to the same economic opportunity to succeed. And since the poor are at a competitive disadvantage, therefore it is the role of government to create and implement programs so that the poor get the education and health care necessary to succeed.

The fifth element of liberal ideology is how the nature of individual well-being and aggregate social welfare are viewed. Liberals believe that individual well-being is important and must be supported, but never supersedes the well-being of society as a whole. This means that, while the individual still has rights to land ownership and moderate subsistence, no one person has the right to amass large quantities of resources while others go without. For this reason it becomes necessary for the state to regulate and balance its resources so that all receive an equitable share.

As for the aggregate social welfare liberals believe that this is society’s highest priority. And since the social problems in urban America are extensive, the solution therefore is for the state to fix these problems by reforming institutions and creating programs that help raise up the poor and

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58 Ibid, pg.219
59 Ibid, pg.220
60 Ibid, pg.2
61 Ibid, pg.2
the oppressed. By investing in education, employment, and health care programs, the state can eliminate inequality and promote the general well-being of the aggregate population.

SOCIALIST IDEOLOGY

The first element of socialist ideology is how the nature of man is viewed. Socialists believe that all men are basically good and have genuine concern for others. When people behave immorally it is not because they are bad by nature but because they are “subverted by existing social institutions that do not fulfill (their) human needs”. Men also possess the innate desire to engage in work that is productive and meaningful, and to participate in activities of leisure, art, and social interaction to satisfy basic human needs. Men reach their full human potential when the mode of production is commensurate with true human labor.

The second element of socialist ideology is how the nature of order and the role of institution in society is viewed. Socialists believe crime and disorder in society are a direct result of capitalism. While crime can be linked to poverty and other social problems, socialists believe that crime would not exist at all were it not for the demoralizing effects of capitalism which corrupts inherently good men. The restoration of order for the socialist calls for nothing less than radical change in the American economic system. By destroying capitalist practices and replacing it with socialist ideals; work would once again be owned by the worker, the social wounds among family and

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62 Ibid, pg.xxii
63 Ibid, pg.xxiv
64 Ibid, pg.xxiv
65 Ibid, pg.xxiv
66 Ibid, pg.44
community would be healed, and ultimately crime would be eliminated and order would once again be restored to society.67

As for the role of institution in society, socialists believe that "The purpose of social institutions is to meet human needs."68 This means that institutions are meant to benefit the needs of the masses, and not merely those of the few elite. Thus institutions, particularly businesses and corporations, should be under the control of those who perform the work which makes it exist, and not the elite who rake in the profits of the worker's labor. It is utility, not elitism, which "should be the criterion for production of goods, and distribution should be based on the principle of need."69 Institutions must therefore be structured in such a way that everyone has access to "sufficient material goods and social services."70

The third element of socialist ideology is how the nature and form of political power is viewed. Socialists believe that the nature of political power is corrupt when it is shared by only a select few. Capitalism is the most corruptive force of power since it divides men into distinct and conflicting social classes while alienating the worker from his means of production. But more importantly capitalism allows for the business owners to attain and maintain the majority of the resources it produces. This capital can then be transformed into political power by contributions to politicians to maintain capitalism as the status quo.71 And since capitalism is inherently corruptive it cannot be reformed in any way. The only form of political power acceptable to socialists is one where capitalism is dismantled from society

67Ibid, pg.45
68Ibid, pg.24
69Ibid, pg.xxiv
70Ibid, pg.xxiv
71Ibid, pg.351
and replaced with a system more conducive to meeting the needs of all.72 This calls for a complete transformation of government and to create a new one either through: class consciousness, labor strike, or even a violent revolution.73

The fourth element of socialist ideology is how the nature and form of social production and distributive inequality are viewed. Socialists believe that capitalism as a mode of social production is forever and always a corruption of human work since it allows for the concentration of resources to end up in the pockets of the elite business owners and maintain this affluence through political corruption. For this reason socialists argue that the only solution is to allow for public ownership of production by the workers themselves.74 Rather than being privately owned, businesses would be owned by the workers and regulated by the government as nationalized institutions.75 This way the worker would have ownership over his labor and be fully human.

As for the distribution of resources, socialists argue that; "everyone is entitled to the basic necessities of life as a fundamental right."76 This means that resources should be distributed according to entitlement rather than personal achievement or social class. For this reason the existing class structure must be eliminated and a surplus of resources must be produced in order to maintain social equality.77

The fifth element of socialist ideology is how the nature of individual well-being and aggregate social welfare are viewed. Socialists believe that individual well-being cannot be defined by land ownership since it is clear

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72Ibid, pg.xxiv-xxv
73Ibid, pg.351
74Ibid, pg.351
75Ibid, pg.351
76Ibid, pg.220
77Ibid, pg.220
that this leads to inequality and the formation of two classes where those who have oppress those who don’t.\textsuperscript{78} The goal of socialism then is to create a classless society where all have equal access to the resources needed to live a life of dignity. In order to do this society must be reorganized so that “the means of production of a society must be socialized and controlled, directed and coordinated by those who work.”\textsuperscript{79} In this way, the existence of inequality which is contrary to socialism will be removed from society.

As for the aggregate social welfare, socialists believe that what manifests’ itself as social problems in a capitalist society are really mere manifestations of the corrupt nature of capitalism itself.\textsuperscript{80} Since capitalism propagates class inequality, and class inequality is the root cause of social problems, and since social problems cannot be resolved until this class struggle is over, therefore it is necessary in the mind of the socialist to “replace capitalism with a qualitatively different form of human society”\textsuperscript{81} in order that the optimal aggregate social welfare is obtained.

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By outlining and supporting my own views on the topics already treated I will try to include some evaluations of these three political ideologies and some concrete examples as to why I did or did not accept their views.

As for the nature of man I find myself in agreement with the socialist position. Unlike the conservative ideology I cannot accept that man is