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What Does It Mean to be a Liberal?

When someone hears the word “liberal”, the first associations that come to a mind are the Libertarian Party of the United States and liberal values promoted by the American society. However, what does it mean to be a liberal? Is liberal a person who is free of any prejudices and is open for new ideas and diverse opinion? Does being a liberal means neglecting all traditional values and ignoring the value of history? A liberal is a person who believes in liberty and freedom as being the key values of contemporary society, where freedom of speech, religion, or any other expression of personal or community beliefs is not restricted or suppressed by the state or others.

From political perspective, liberal doctrine implies that “the state should have no purpose of its own” because “its function is to provide a framework of law and policy within which individuals are free to pursue their own needs” (Anderson 3). This definition of liberal values is rather interesting to assess because it deals with personal freedom of every individual as well as touches upon the role of the government. A good example of a liberal person is President Barack Obama. His first presidential campaign was based on the key liberal value – change and proactive approach to leadership. President Barack Obama urges the nation to be open for new perspectives, which is the core aspect of being a liberal person.



To explain what it means to be a liberal, it seems reasonable to compare this concept with its antonym, conservative. In essence, being a liberal implies looking forward to the future and contemporary life, while being a conservative includes past-oriented beliefs and resistance to change. For example, with regard to death penalty, liberals argue against death penalty because contemporary society has an opportunity to replace this inhuman punishment with more effective measures. Conservatives, on the other side, argue in favor of death penalty as being the only appropriate punishment of severity equal to murder, for instance. This difference between liberal and conservative views on death penalty unveils the contrast between change-focused and traditional views on social order.

Liberal means being free of prejudices and looking at the world and the future in a proactive manner. Tolerance and response for differences among the people are embedded in the concept “liberal”. Freedom from prejudices is the best exemplified by the liberal approach to same-sex marriages. Conservatives argue that same-sex marriage is a problem Americans have to face today, that such marriages are “unions of shame” (Guerrero 205). Liberals, on the contrary, believe that all people should have freedom to make their own decisions, as long as their decisions do not affect the freedoms of other people.

The concept “liberal” has many dimensions and meanings, and yet at the heart of what it means to be a liberal is the word “liberty” or freedom. The American nation can be described as liberal because American society is characterized with respect for individuals and their rights and freedoms. President Barack Obama, as a liberal person, shows the American people that liberal approach to politics is beneficial for the ordinary citizens. Similarly, the liberal views on death penalty and same-sex marriage promote humanism and respect for individual dignity of every person.



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