Chapter Nine Short Answer (Answers Below)

1. Explain the interaction among difference, identity, and interests in understanding social cleavages.

2. Discuss the factors contributing to the apparent latency of class cleavages.

3. Explain the changes that occurred in the transition from classical to reformed liberalism.

4. Explain the shift from organic to liberal conservatism.

5. Both Liberal and Conservative thinking accepts certain aspects of hierarchy in society. Compare and contrast their thinking on this issue.

Answers

1. Socially relevant differences can take the form of both ascriptive, inherent differences and voluntary identifications. In both cases, the differences are only relevant to the extent that they are visible. In the case of ascriptive differences, such visibility is a product of confrontation; a perception emerges that the ascriptive difference sets one apart as visibly different from some other group. In the case of voluntary identities, the issue of visible difference is inherent, and the point of assuming the identity. Thus, for ascriptive differences, the characteristic is inherent, while establishing difference requires action; for voluntary identities, assuming the characteristic requires some action, but the fact of difference is inherent. In both cases, political relevance comes when the collective identity on the basis of difference leads to organized expression in the form of political action. It is in the pursuit of political interests—connected to, and informed by, collectively recognized differences—that social cleavages assume their full form.
2. While many agree that class is one of the more significant potential cleavages in society, its manifestation seems unexpectedly limited. Basic efforts to analyze class, such as Marx’s structural approach, tend to founder in practice on the range of subdivisions that seem to exist in modern society (the various “collars”). The cleavages internal to class that these identities represent seem to have an inhibiting effect on the ability to act collectively around class identity. Such divisions are also characteristic of the “other” class in society, as recent debates about the role of finance and the banking sector suggest. Other contributing factors might be the relative affluence of “western” society and the development of a political culture that minimized the significance of class (focusing instead on the individual). The absence of a visible other may also contribute. Astute students may note that the recent surge of the “occupy” movement in many ways addressed the bulk of these inhibiting factors, insofar as they created a common identity bridging the “collar gap” (the 99%), identified a set of interests (especially income in/equality), and identified a visible other (the 1%).
3. Classical liberalism was concerned with challenging the traditional social structures and limitations associated with the landed aristocracy; it was the ideology of the emerging merchant class. Attacking entrenched privilege within the state and advocating the restriction of state power (both in terms of constitutionalism and in terms of a laissez faire free market), the focus of classical liberalism was to set individuals free from legal and economic constraint by state power. Reform liberalism coupled an increasing focus on social liberty with the recognition that state power and inherited privilege were not the only sources of inequality in society. In part prompted by the populist appeal of socialism, reform liberalism increasingly advocated the incorporation of political democracy (in the process, overcoming classical liberals’ suspicions of the common mass) and shifted its emphasis from limiting the state to using the state as a rights guarantor and regulator of the excesses of the market economy.
4. Conservatism is fundamentally about assigning value to, and preserving, what exists. Although classical (organic) conservatism emerged in response (and in opposition) to the liberal project, it has changed over time. Given the longevity and success of the liberal project, is should not be surprising that this attitude towards preservation was eventually applied to what can be understood as “traditional” liberalism. In part, this was a product of a reconciliation of economic and social interests; although it was championed by a group challenging traditional authority, the limited form that early liberalism took was compatible with the basis of power of existing elites (it simply advocated broadening the potential pool of those who might aspire to belong to such elites). A second component of the liberalization of conservatism was the tendency among some liberals to continue to suspect mass populism and democracy, an attitude far more compatible with organic conservatism than with reform liberalism.
5. The reality of hierarchy is accepted by both liberals and conservatives, and for both, it is understood as a product of inherent characteristics. People are unequal because they have different capabilities, which, when manifest as action, lead to inequality. Where the schools of thought diverge is in regards to the origin of such characteristics. For liberals, such capabilities are resident in the individual; some people are just smarter, more insightful, or more hard-working than others. As such, when they act in society, they naturally garner to themselves the rewards of their efforts and abilities. Equality, from a liberal perspective, consists of removing barriers to the individual’s ability to flourish, particularly those which consist of inherited privilege. For conservatives, while they acknowledge that some individuals are better equipped to lead or succeed, it is understood that these qualities reside in particular groups or classes. An individual possesses such qualities as a consequence of belonging to such privileged or elite classes. Social inequality (reinforced by the kind of legal barriers that liberals challenge) is a necessary, and just, feature of society, as it ensures that the class of people best able to run society do so. Both liberals and conservatives accept forms of inequality, but for liberals, inequality is a product of individual virtue, while for conservatives, it is an indicator of a virtuous society.