Despite liberal parties struggling to gain footholds, the ideas of classical liberalism and modern liberalism have profoundly influenced landmark reforms in the UK and the USA.

**John Locke (1632–1704)**

Locke was a key Enlightenment figure who applied rational thought to the nature of government. Locke disputed the divine right of kings and argued that the state was the creation of humankind. This was the principle of 'government by consent'. The state was a result of a social contract between citizens and the government. Government was subject to the consent of the people, in return for which the people agreed to obey its laws. Government should be limited and its powers should be agreed to obey its laws. Locke argued that the right of kings and government. Locke argued that the right of kings and government.

**Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97)**

Wollstonecraft's liberal philosophy had a profound influence on feminist ideas. She believed that human nature was naturally positive and individuals naturally rational. Wollstonecraft argued that women were as rational as men and should be granted formal equality under the law, the right to vote and the right to be educated.

**John Stuart Mill (1806–73)**

Mill argued for restraint by the state, leaving individuals free to take whatever actions they judged fit, provided this did not harm others. He has also been described as an early feminist, as he was an advocate of votes for women. In Mill’s early writings he argued that government should interfere as little as possible in society and the economy. He later modified his views, arguing that the state must intervene to help individuals attain developmental individualism. He saw these ideas, which influenced modern liberalism, as a natural continuation of classical liberalism and not a contradiction.

**T.H. Green (1836–82)**

Green argued that freedom should be understood in a positive rather than a negative sense. This conception of freedom would see the state play a proactive role in assisting individuals to improve and maximise their innate talents, which would contribute to the common good of society. Green argued that this could be achieved if society removed hereditary privileges and the state took on a more positive role to tackle poverty in its various incarnations: ignorance, disease, housing, and exploitation of the workforce.

**Betty Friedan (1921–2006)**

Friedan's ideas developed from classical liberalism (the importance of individualism) through to embracing modern liberalism (the enabling state). Initially she argued for individual freedom, arguing that women were the victims of discrimination and of restricted opportunities because of the patriarchal nature of society. Friedan was later influenced by modern liberalism and the idea of the enabling state helping women achieve their potential via state benefits to single, divorced and widowed women. She also advocated change in social institutions to allow all people to achieve their potential.

**John Rawls (1921–2002)**

Rawls is considered the most important exponent of modern liberalism. His ideas have influenced strands of conservative and socialist thought. Rawls argued for justice and fairness and believed that everyone would agree to the positive freedom of an enabling state if they thought about it rationally (he used the veil of ignorance example to illustrate this point). Moreover, Rawls argued that a just society must provide equality of opportunity for everyone and this could only be achieved by the state taking a larger role in society, funded by progressive taxation.