

To what extent are the key features of political ideologies different? (20)

You must refer to two political ideologies and also refer to the ideas of relevant theorists.

A political ideology is a way to describe a broad and cohesive set of beliefs, values and opinions that contain views on history and what the ideal model of society would be. The well-known ideologies of conservatism and socialism, have a diverse range of opinions both within and between them and have arguably played a significant role in shaping society, both historically and contemporary. Conservatism, as an ideology emerged as a reaction to the French Revolution in the 1790s, where Conservativists were opposed to quick change like this, believing instead in protecting the established order of society. Theorist Edmund Burke tends to be credited with the development of conservatism as an ideology. Socialism came to prominence in the early 19th century after a growth in industrial capitalism; the socialist movement was opposed to the poor conditions faced by workers and wanted them there to be more of a share of the power. Therefore, socialism is characterised by the ideas of community, cooperation, equality and common ownership and theorists Karl Marx and Frederic Engels are often seen as the founders of socialism. The views of theorists on the key points of human nature, the economy, society and lastly on property can be analysed to determine the extent to which the key features of conservatism and socialism are different. It is clear that while both ideologies can be viewed as different in many regards, there are similarities which can be analysed.

The first key area to analyse is the ideological standpoints on human nature. Traditional Conservatives would argue that humans are naturally flawed beings who are inherently selfish, greedy and reckless in the absence of a strong leadership who can provide them with a firm moral compass. Conservative thinkers, such as Thomas Hobbes would argue that, presented with the right circumstances, our nature and inherent flaws will lead to human beings breaking the law because, as humans, we cannot be trusted to always do the right thing as we all form our own versions of what's right and what's wrong. For this reason, we would need a strong set of laws to act as a deterrent and ensure conformity. To give an example, Boris Johnson's introduction of 20,000 new police officers would be seen as a very traditionally conservative response to crime. However, within conservatism there are of course, as with all ideologies, divergent opinions and some New Right Conservativists, most notably Margaret

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Thatcher and Ronald Reagan take a more optimistic view on human nature. They would argue that if given more freedoms by the state, individuals are more likely to take initiative and flourish from there, which would be to the benefit of society. Additionally, this New Right way of thinking on human nature would arguably encourage and bolster the fundamental conservative values of competition and individualism, and ultimately takes a differing view from traditional conservatives. On the other hand, the ideas of socialism take a very different stance on human nature. Generally, all socialist thinkers and theorists take a much more positive view of human nature and is largely more positive than even the New Right view on human nature. Socialists would argue that humans are self-reliant, helpful and cooperative when dealing with others. It is not the fault of the individual when society creates a system whereby individuals would feel the need to turn to breaking the law in order to get by, and this is the view of Marx on capitalism. It would be argued that while humans may be flawed to an extent, that we are a product of our environment, so it is therefore that environment that needs to change to see humanity prosper. This idea in practice would be best exemplified by the Labour Party pledge to "aim to break the vicious cycle of poverty, inequality and crime" by state intervention, as stated in the 2019 manifesto. This idea is in direct contradiction to the pessimistic conservative view of human nature. Overall, while New Right conservative thinking may be broadly similar to socialism's view of human nature in some regards, it is clear that the ideologies do differ to a large extent on this viewpoint. Conservatives largely view human nature as being fixed, and even those who are more optimistic would still only view humans as more likely to do the right thing when given the freedom to. On the other hand, socialism views human nature as being totally malleable and believe that it can change based upon environment as our nature is a product of our environment, and not fixed: contrary to conservative beliefs. They are also generally much more optimistic about human nature than conservatives. Ergo, it can be said that the ideas of conservatism and socialism do differ in this regard.

A second key feature of both ideologies that can be analysed is the ideas surrounding property. Conservatives believe that private property is a crucial part of society; it is our right. For instance, one of the clearest examples of the conservative support for private property would be Thatcher's 'right to

buy' initiative whereby tenants of council houses had the opportunity to buy their own homes at lower rates. She saw this as being part of a new 'property and share-owning democracy' in the UK at the time. Conservative thinkers believe that property provides confidence and security, and that property owners are much more likely to have a stake in society, subsequently respecting the other fundamental beliefs of conservatism. Property ownership is something that drives individuals to want to be successful and want to participate in society. However, this way of thinking many would then argue causes inequalities which is why socialists oppose private property. This 'hard work leads to success' type mindset means that those who don't or cannot work hard and then cannot afford this private property are often left behind in society. Socialists would tend to favour the idea of common ownership, where wealth should be produced by a collective effort. This would mean community owned institutions because the very nature of private property encourages materialism and causes social conflict. Karl Marx argued that property shouldn't exist, however he did not actually go on to explain how this could be achieved. The ambiguity with regards to this aspect of beliefs has led to many socialists taking a different stance. Democratic socialists, for example Anthony Crosland believed that allowing private property was acceptable because it allowed for economic growth, creating more jobs and then making society more equal. Arguably, in contemporary times, socialists have strayed further and further away from the idea of common ownership and accept it may provide societal benefits. Whilst maybe not fully agreeing with conservative beliefs in private property e.g. socialists would still support progressive taxation as an important function of the welfare state, it can be said that both conservatism and socialism accepts that private property has some benefits, and therefore their views on this are not as different as many would make out.

A third key feature of both ideologies that can be analysed is the views on society. Traditional conservatives like Burke viewed society as naturally hierarchical in the sense that societal 'layers' are fixed and established. He describe society as "little platoons" meaning that there were a collection of communities, hierarchical in structure, where those with the power reside at the top and can direct/help those below them. The very nature of this 'organic society' will foster inequalities, but conservatives would see this as being acceptable as different institutions require individuals to have

different talents and roles, therefore there must always be 'leaders' and 'followers'. This idea does link back to the core conservative beliefs in private property and their individualist ideas in the sense that equality will be impossible due to the unequal distribution of power, status and property. Should an individual find themselves in a situation where they suffer as a result of this, it should be up to them to get themselves out of it. However, socialist like Marx completely oppose such ideas, believing them to be patronising and only serving to facilitate exploitation. Generally, many socialists would agree with Marx's interpretation, seeing it as only creating class conflict and inequality. Rather, they believe in equality of opportunity and social justice which does not fit in with the Burkean state model which shows one of the fundamental differences between the ideologies. Despite the vast differences between Burke's interpretation and the views of socialists, the ideas of one nation conservatism on society appears to be somewhat of a middle ground as there is aspects of both conservatism and socialism. Benjamin Disraeli's concept of one nation conservatism promoted the notion of social stability and the reduction of the inequality gap. He argued that a division between the powerless and powerful would lead to a society of two nations, therefore unity was needed to avoid revolution, class conflict and provide more opportunities for all showing how socialist principles are mirrored in his views. Overall, views on society between the two ideologies do differ in many ways as conservatism does believe in hierarchy to protect tradition by keeping to this idea of an organic society. On the other hand, socialists are very much opposed to this idea, believing it to exacerbate inequalities. However, one nation conservatives would now look to a much more socialist viewpoint of unity as a way of achieving other conservative values and, as such, it can be said that there are ideological similarities in this regard.

Finally, the last feature that can be analysed is views on the economy. Conservative economics is typically very capitalist in nature, and although many (traditional conservatives especially) do struggle with this due to the uncertainty that capitalism brings. In spite of this, traditional conservative Burke did in fact favour the 'laissez-faire' idea of Adam Smith as this would help to keep this hierarchical order of society. New Right conservatives, for example, are in favour of a free-market economy as this is a way to defeat socialism and Thatcher's privatisation of state-owned industries such as BT and

British Gas are examples of this in action. Again, the principles of socialism are largely in opposition to capitalism. Socialists, like Beatrice Webb, believed capitalism was a corrupt system and the primary source of "crippling poverty and demeaning inequality". That being said, Anthony Crosland was in favour of a mixed private and public economy. He thought that capitalism could be beneficial in the sense that it would bring employment and then economic growth. Therefore, it can be said that some socialists can have views that are more aligned to conservative thinkers who may be wary of a fully capitalist system, which proves the ideologies to be similar in this sense.

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By way of conclusion, there a plethora of both differences and similarities between the ideologies of conservatism and socialism. On the one hand, we can see fundamental differences in terms of features like human nature when conservatives typically take a very pessimistic view thinking that humans are greedy, selfish and untrustworthy. Socialists take a much more positive and optimistic view on humans, showing a key difference between the ideologies. Additionally, conservatives have a strong belief in private property, arguing it provides confidence and security. Marx's views of abolishing property all together have somewhat lost support in contemporary times and many socialists would think that property in some senses aids equality as it boosts economic growth which is more equal overall, showing an aspect of similarity between the two ideologies. The 'middle ground' ideas of one nation conservatism on the feature of society shows how aspects of both can be taken to create a perhaps better stance on an issue, with this view of society still having a 'hierarchy' but the powerful using their power to help the powerless, to create one nation, showcases aspects of both ideologies and illustrating another similarity. Lastly, the economy has been a clash point for the ideologies, with the free-market economy of the New Right opposing the anti-capitalist socialists. However, once again, similarities can be found: the view of Crosland once again incorporated aspects of both ideologies showing how the views have come to be more aligned. Overall, while it would be an accurate judgment to suggest that the fundamental, core principles of the ideologies are very different, it has been the case where developments in thinking has led to views becoming more aligned and similarities beginning to emerge. However, it would still be fair to argue that the two ideologies both have their differences as well as similarities, dependant on which feature is being analysed.

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Another excellent essay, Grace! Well done.

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