

Handout A: Key Terms

Key Terms

Limited government:

Citizens are best able to pursue happiness when government is confined to those powers that protect their life, liberty, and property.

Natural/inalienable rights:

Rights that belong to us by nature and can only be justly abridged through due process. Examples are life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness.

Positive rights:

Rights that obligate action by the government to uphold. “Positive” is not meant as a value statement but rather means that action must be taken to provide something. For example, if health care is deemed to be a right, the government must raise taxes and create programs to ensure everyone has it.

Classical liberalism:

A political philosophy according to which the most important role of government is to protect natural rights like “life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.”

Modern liberalism:

A political philosophy according to which the role of government is to protect positive rights based on need and guarantee a result. Such rights may be defined by membership in an oppressed group.