

TABLE 4

Comparison of Conservative, Liberal, and Radical Perspectives

Attitudes Toward	Conservative	Liberal	Radical
Change	Change is generally not desirable; it is better to keep things as they are.	Change is generally good; it brings progress. Moderate change is best.	Change is a good thing, especially if it means a fundamental change in the system.
Human Nature	People are essentially selfish; they need to be controlled.	People are basically good; they need structure to reinforce good impulses.	People are basically good; they can be corrupted by institutions.
Individual Behavior	Individuals have free will; they are responsible for their own lives and problems.	Individuals are not entirely autonomous or self-governing; environment plays a part in problems people face.	Individual behavior is strongly influenced by social and economic structures.
Family	The traditional family is the basic unit of society; it should not face government interference.	The family is changing; it needs social and government supports.	The traditional family is oppressive; the changing family needs government supports.
Society	Society is inherently fair, it functions well on its own, and it is a system of inter-related parts.	Society needs regulation to ensure fair competition between various interests.	Society contains inequalities, conflict between those with power and those without, and thus it needs changing.
Roles of the Government and the Economic System	A free-market economy is the best way to ensure prosperity and fulfillment of individual needs; the government role is to support, not regulate, the market.	A free-market economy needs regulation by government to ensure fairness; government programs are necessary to help meet basic human needs.	A market economy is exploitative and inherently unfair; alternatives include mixed public/private economy and a socialist system.

The value system that is the basis of conservative thinking in the United States is referred to by Keith-Lucas as the *capitalist–puritan value system*, or CP for short. He summarizes the basic assumptions of the CP value system as follows:

- 1. People are responsible for their own success or failure.
- 2. Human nature is basically evil but can be overcome by an act of will.
- 3. A person’s primary purpose is the acquisition of material prosperity, which is achieved through hard work.