This book now sets out to examine the meanings of globalization that can be identified within conceptual arrangements of major ideological families. The analysis takes off by advancing an argument according to which the currently hegemonic discourse of globalization can be unpacked as integral to a long-established logic of classical liberalism.

**Defining and delineating the dominant ideology**

What is emerging victorious, in other words, is not so much liberal practice, as the liberal idea. That is to say, for a very large part of the world, there is now no ideology with pretensions to universality that is in a position to challenge liberal democracy.

(Fukuyama 1992: 45, emphasis in original)

We are all liberals now.

(Bellamy 1999: 23)

That liberalism is today’s dominant ideology is an assumption shared by liberals and their adversaries, although neither the former nor, naturally, the latter automatically perceive liberal dominance in as far-reaching terms as those chosen by Fukuyama. More controversy surrounds the question of what its hegemony entails for liberalism itself and for the study of this ideology. One consequence of its dominant position is that liberalism’s relationships with other ideologies are particularly intense. Liberalism’s contenders are compelled to articulate their standing on the liberal ideology itself, as well as on the questions that the liberal agenda defines as imperative. The fact that liberal beliefs permeate so-called common-sense thinking may also mean that other ideologies find it
expedient to adopt liberal ideas and modify them according to their own needs, while liberalism may in turn be attracted to these offshoot ideological permutations. The mutual fertilization between liberalism and other ideologies complicates the study of liberal thought and therefore definitional issues need to be clarified prior to the main analysis.

As noted in a popular political ideologies reader, liberalism’s tendency to spill over to other ideologies makes it ‘a notoriously tricky business [...] to police its boundaries’ (Festenstein and Kenny 2005: 52). Philip Cerny puts this bluntly: liberalism ‘means what contrasting traditions say it means’ (2008: 6) and when looked at from a very broad perspective, two such traditions can be identified. On the one hand, ‘classical’ liberalism is a belief system that emerged on the wave of political and economic revolutions of the late eighteenth century. On the other hand, the development of ‘social’ or ‘modern’ liberalism took off with a series of contributions by thinkers such as Thomas Hill Green (1836–82), Leonard Hobhouse (1864–1929) or John Hobson (1858–1940) from the 1880s onwards. The dispute pertaining to these two ideological traditions is whether they represent two different faces of liberalism or whether only one of them can legitimately claim a liberal identity. Modern liberalism overlaps with social democratic ideas and it has been argued that modern liberals are not distinct from social democrats and thus are out of place within liberalism (Barry 1996; Cohen 1986: 79; Hayek 1991: 110). More usual, however, are approaches that define modern liberalism as located within the liberal domain but spilling over to the socialist area. On the other hand, some classical liberal ideas and their contemporary outgrowths share common ground with conservatism and a case has been made for their exclusion from the liberal territory (Freeden 1996: 276–314, 2001: 200).¹

Bearing in mind that no definition or taxonomy of the liberal ideology will evade being approximate and contentious, I limit the following discussion to classical liberalism. Contemporary mutations of classical liberal ideas are conventionally captured by the term ‘neoliberalism’. In the present account I use ‘neoliberalism’ as a convenient shorthand to indicate chronology but I remain sceptical with regard to claims purporting its ideological uniqueness (Turner 2007; Gamble 2009b: 67, 70; Peck 2008). While neoliberalism reinterprets anew some of the classical liberal ideas, the changes stem from the natural process of classical liberalism adapting to new political circumstances rather than from it giving rise to a distinct ideological framework. The nomination of classical liberalism in its contemporary neoliberal form as an adequate representation of the liberal concept of globalization may cause two