



Political philosophy [PY 3090]

Introductory reading

Wolff, J. *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

Kymlicka, W. *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

Levine, A. *Engaging Political Philosophy: From Hobbes to Rawls* (Blackwell, 2001).

Sample examination questions

1. EITHER

(a) Does Plato provide a compelling argument in the *Crito* for the obligation to obey the state in all circumstances?

OR

(b) Does Plato make a convincing case, in the *Republic*, that philosophers would be ideal rulers of cities?

2. EITHER

(a) What political arrangement, according to Aristotle, best meets the goal of developing human flourishing? Assess his argument.

OR

(b) Why does Aristotle compare the politician to a 'craftsman'? Is he right to?

3. EITHER

(a) According to al-Farabi, why does the ideal ruler need to be a prophet as well as a philosopher?

Does his account show that prophecy could be a legitimate basis for political authority?

OR

(b) What, according to Aquinas, is the natural law? How does it relate to legislation laid down by humans?

4. EITHER

(a) What is the relation between Hobbes's conception of human nature and his political philosophy?

OR

(b) Does Hobbes demonstrate that obeying the absolute sovereign is both our duty and to our advantage?

5. EITHER

- (a) 'He that encloses land, and has a greater plenty of the conveniences of life from ten acres, than he could have from a hundred left to nature, may truly be said to give ninety acres to mankind.'(Locke). How does this passage contribute to Locke's justification of private property?

OR

- (b) On what grounds does Locke affirm a natural right to punish? How plausible is his claim that there is such a right?

6. EITHER

- (a) How far does Hume's political theory allow for disputes about the proper extent of political liberty to be resolvable rationally? Does it matter whether such resolution is possible?

OR

- (b) Does Hume show that political obligation has nothing to do with consent?

7. EITHER

- (a) Why does Rousseau distinguish the general will from the will of all? How clear and illuminating is this distinction?

OR

- (b) Why does Rousseau claim that we must sometimes be 'forced to be free'? Does this expression show that his is an authoritarian conception of the state?

8. EITHER

- (a) Why does Kant think that rightful possession of property cannot be acquired in a state of nature? Is he right?

OR

- (b) Does Kant offer convincing reasons for the requirement of a league of nations?

9. EITHER

- (a) Critically examine Hegel's distinction between the state, civil society, and the family.

OR

- (b) What is the relation between Hegel's theology and his political philosophy?

10. EITHER

- (a) Does Marx show that capitalism must inevitably break down?

OR

- (b) What does Marx mean by 'alienated labour'? Under what circumstances is labour alienated?

11. EITHER

- (a) To what extent, according to Mill, may the state coerce individuals to come to the assistance of others? Is this position consistent with Mill's harm principle? Is the position consistent with his principle of utility?

OR

- (b) Mill says that one may seize a man who cannot be warned against crossing an unsafe bridge, 'for liberty consists in doing what one desires, and he does not desire to fall into the river'. What is the significance of this claim for Mill's case against paternalism?

12. EITHER

- (a) 'The principle of open positions ... expresses the conviction that if some places were not open on a basis fair to all, those kept out would be right in feeling unjustly treated even though they benefited from the greater efforts of those who were allowed to hold them.' (Rawls) Discuss.

OR

- (b) Why does Rawls think that the parties behind the veil of ignorance would accept his two principles over utilitarianism? Is he right?

13. Is every comprehensive conception of the good capable of accommodation in a Rawlsian overlapping consensus?

14. EITHER

- (a) What, if anything, does Nozick's Wilt Chamberlain example show?

OR

- (b) Does Nozick show that self-ownership is compatible with the existence of the minimal state?

15. EITHER

- (a) Do we harm the global poor?

OR

- (b) 'Against his many critics, Rawls was right not to extend the difference principle to the global level.' Discuss.

16. 'Properly functioning markets reward social contribution, and are therefore just.' Discuss.

17. EITHER

- (a) On the best understanding of negative liberty, what kinds of 'interference' make us unfree?

OR

- (b) Are all freedoms valuable?

18. EITHER

- (a) What, if any, is the relationship between political equality and majority rule?

OR

- (b) Is it possible to successfully combine intrinsic and instrumental justifications in a single, coherent justification of democracy?

19. EITHER

- (a) What is the 'levelling down' objection to equality? Can this objection be answered?

OR

- (b) What role, if any, should the idea of responsibility play in a theory of distributive justice?
20. Can the notion of 'human rights' be given a philosophical justification?
21. 'If we want to understand civil authority, we need to distinguish there being a government exercising civil authority from two contrasting things: on the one side, from large-scale voluntary co-operative associations, and on the other from a place's being quite under the control of a smooth sophisticated mafia' (Anscombe). Discuss.