# 2.3 Optional theme: political philosophy

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 30 marks**

**KEY WORDS** political philosophy • social contract • justice • veil of ignorance • difference principle • negative liberty • positive liberty

## Objective

Study the optional theme **political philosophy**: why we should obey the state (**social contract**), what **justice** requires, and how far the state may limit **liberty**.

**You must be able to:**

- compare the social contracts of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau
- explain Rawls' veil of ignorance and the difference principle
- explain Nozick's entitlement theory
- explain negative and positive liberty
- evaluate a theory of justice with a case

## 1 Key knowledge and worked examples

### The social contract

| thinker | state of nature | the contract |
|---|---|---|
| Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651) | a "war of all against all"; life "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" | give power to a strong sovereign for safety |
| John Locke (1689) | natural rights to life, liberty and property, but no fair judge | a limited government that protects rights; people may resist a tyrant |
| Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) | people free, but society makes them unequal | rule by the "general will" of all citizens |



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**John Rawls** (1971): choose principles behind a **veil of ignorance**, not knowing your sex, class, talents or beliefs. He argued you would choose (1) equal basic liberties and (2) the **difference principle**: inequalities are allowed only if they benefit the least advantaged. **Robert Nozick** (1974): a distribution is just if it came about by just steps (fair acquisition and free transfer). Taxing earnings for redistribution is "on a par with forced labour".

### Liberty

**Negative liberty**: freedom *from* interference. **Positive liberty**: freedom *to* act, having the real ability to do things (Isaiah Berlin, 1958).

**Worked example.** Society A: everyone earns 30. Society B: the poorest earn 40, the richest 100. Rawls' difference principle prefers B, because its least advantaged (40) are better off than in A (30), even though B is less equal.

## 2 Practice

**2.1** Distinguish **negative liberty** from **positive liberty**, with an example of each. [2]

**2.2** Three societies have these incomes for their poorest and richest groups: X (25, 25), Y (35, 90), Z (30, 150). Which does Rawls' difference principle choose, and why? Which might Nozick accept? [3]




**2.3** Compare the views of **Hobbes** and **Locke** on the state of nature and its consequences for government. [4]

**2.4** Explain Rawls' **veil of ignorance**, and evaluate **one** objection to it. [6]

## 3 Exam-style questions

**3.1** *(Optional theme style.)* "A just society is one that guarantees equal outcomes for all." Discuss. [15]








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