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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Solutions

Marking: **M1** a correct method, **A1** the correct answer, **B1** an independent mark.

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

negative liberty: freedom from interference, e.g. no law stops you speaking; positive liberty: the real ability to act, e.g. free education gives you the ability to choose a career

2.2

Rawls chooses Y, because its least advantaged group (35) is better off than in X (25) or Z (30); Nozick would accept any of them if the holdings arose by fair acquisition and free transfer; he looks at history, not the pattern

2.3

Hobbes: the state of nature is a war of all against all, so people should accept a powerful sovereign for safety; Locke: people have natural rights even without government, but no fair judge, so government should be limited and can be resisted if it violates rights

2.4

people choose principles without knowing their own position, talents or beliefs; so they choose fairly, without bias to their own interests; they would protect the worst-off position: equal liberties and the difference principle; objection, e.g. Nozick: it ignores how goods were fairly earned / people might gamble rather than play safe / real people cannot ignore their identity (communitarians); explanation of the objection; evaluation of how strong it is

3.1

Mark with the markbands: [13-15] clearly focused on the question, clear explanation of the philosophical issue, relevant philosophers and arguments used accurately, counter-arguments evaluated, well-developed critical analysis, different perspectives evaluated, a reasoned conclusion; [10-12] focused, mostly accurate knowledge, analysis with some evaluation; [7-9] some focus, relevant knowledge, mostly narrative or description with limited analysis; [4-6] little focus, limited knowledge, mostly narrative; [1-3] little understanding of the question. Points that may be included: explains justice and the claim of equal outcomes; arguments for equality of outcome, e.g. luck in birth and talents is undeserved; Rawls: not equal outcomes, but the difference principle; worked example of the difference principle; Nozick: entitlement theory; liberty upsets patterns (Wilt Chamberlain example); utilitarian view of justice as maximum welfare; positive and negative liberty in the debate; a real case, e.g. progressive taxation or a universal basic income; evaluation of the strongest view; a reasoned conclusion

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