

### Study Guide Questions

1. Much of the contemporary literature on distributive justice focuses on the attempt to balance two moral imperatives: (i) life chances should not be determined by endowments of qualities distributed in a manner that is arbitrary from the moral point of view; and (ii) persons should only be compensated for inequalities in fortune for which it is not reasonable to hold them responsible. Various balances between these concerns have been urged. Rawls, for example, argues that the principles of justice that regulate the basic structure of society must be designed to mitigate or neutralize arbitrary influences on life chances; Dworkin argues that persons should be compensated for the effects of bad brute luck, but not of bad option luck; and Arneson argues that persons should not be compensated for inequalities in fortune that result from choices made after a person has been guaranteed equal opportunity for welfare. In a contrasting vein, Nozick argues that neither of these concerns should be central to an account of distributive justice. Discuss three or more thinkers who, in your opinion, best develop the case for or against the centrality of these concerns for an account of distributive justice. Examine the balance of considerations that each theorist cites to justify his/her approach. Which approach provides the firmest foundation for a conception of distributive justice?
2. One of the more important recent developments in political theory has been the articulation of several accounts of deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy emerged primarily as a response to aggregative conceptions of democracy. Aggregative theories of democracy, along with agonistic theories of democracy, are its chief rivals. What characterizes aggregative conceptions of democracy? What characterizes agonistic theories of democracy? What characterizes deliberative theories of democracy (Rawlsian or Habermasian)? What are some strengths and weaknesses of each approach? Which approach provides the firmest foundation for a conception of democratic legitimacy?
3. The impulse to critique liberalism has constituted perhaps the only unifying feature of political theory of the late 20th Century. Discuss three or more thinkers who, in your opinion, best articulate the basis for such a critique. In your answer, assess the claim that liberalism is grounded in assumptions that are ontologically implausible. Does liberalism argue from a metaphysical account of the self as radically unsituated and prior to its ends? Does liberalism provide an adequate basis for identification with the community? Is liberalism internally inconsistent because it attempts to realize toleration for the plurality of doctrines that exist in modern political communities by insisting that all citizens adopt (or at least act from) a particular substantive doctrine (toleration)? Can liberalism be defended against criticisms grounded in these concerns? Explain.
4. Classical political thought and modern political thought are often held to be radically distinct. This line of argument holds that whereas the prior is fundamentally concerned

with justice and takes political association to be both empirically and normatively natural, the latter focuses on the empirical and normative foundations of legitimate political association, and is primarily concerned with securing liberty – individual or collective. Though this interpretation might seem appealing, it may well obscure more than it illuminates. What might be some weaknesses in this interpretation? In answering your question, you should write on at least one thinker from each of the following groups:

Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D	Group E
Plato	Cicero	Machiavelli	Locke	Kant
Aristotle	Augustine	Hobbes	Rousseau	Mill

5. Our form of government includes many countermajoritarian institutions, including inalienable rights, judicial review, and supermajority requirements for amendments to the constitution. Are these institutions consistent with democratic theory? How did the founders (e.g. Madison, Hamilton, Jay) justify the presence of countermajoritarian institutions in a democratic system? Does contemporary social choice theory or democratic theory provide insights regarding the role and justification of these institutions? In particular, should certain categories of preferences (e.g. meddlesome; malicious; myopic) be assigned a lesser weight in the democratic process? Do countermajoritarian institutions perform an important role in preserving the health of democracies?