

Study Guide Questions

1. The political theorists listed below represent some of the major political thinkers in Ancient, Medieval and Modern Western European political thought. Pick one theorist from each of the three categories (a, b, c) and describe the basic components and structure of the political theory of each. Compare and contrast these three selections, noting both similarities and differences in their theories, and discuss the ways in which they exemplify major differences between ancient, medieval, and modern political thinkers.

- a) Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, St. Augustine
- b) Machiavelli, St. Thomas Aquinas, Calvin, Jean Bodin
- c) Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Adam Smith, J. S. Mill

2. An important strand of contemporary egalitarian thought, a strand that Elizabeth Anderson calls 'luck equality', argues that responsibility for disadvantage should constitute a *decisive* concern for egalitarian theory. Gerald Cohen, in particular, asserts that an acceptable egalitarian theory must assign central importance to the distinction between choices grounded in preferences that are acquired voluntarily and those which reflect the influence of habituation or other nonvoluntary processes. Matt Matravers, however, expresses the concern of many political philosophers when he observes that political philosophy will "be on hold for some time" if we must wait for a defensible account of genuine choice before addressing the basic questions of egalitarian justice. Other critics of luck equality, including Martha Nussbaum, Elizabeth Anderson, and Timothy Hinton, argue that responsibility for disadvantage constitutes an inappropriate focus for egalitarian theory. Discuss and evaluate this controversy. Your essay should discuss the work of at least one luck egalitarian (e.g. Ronald Dworkin, Gerald Cohen, Richard Arneson) and at least two critics (e.g. Elizabeth Anderson, Martha Nussbaum, Matt Matravers, Timothy Hinton).

3. Some political philosophy seems more constrained or influenced by a sense of what the social science of their time could tell them about the capacities and limitations of actual human beings. Some political philosophy on the other hand seems relatively innocent of this sense. Cite at least one political philosopher who should be placed on each end of the "reality" spectrum. What is the basis for assigning these positions? Do their positions have consequences for their arguments or conclusions?

4. Social contract theory provides the most influential modern account of political legitimacy. Discuss the development of social contract theory. Where do contract theorists (e.g. Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau) agree, and where do they differ? In particular, what assumptions does each theorist (discuss at least two) make regarding: (i) human nature; (ii) conditions in the state of nature; (iii) the status of consent; and (iv) the status of presocial rights? How and to what extent

do these assumptions determine the nature of each theory? What objections might be made to contract theory as a way of determining the basis of legitimate rule? Assess the persuasiveness of the contractarian account of political legitimacy.

5. 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?