Political Philosophy

As a woman, your political worth is reduced to your marriageability.

If you're beautiful enough, you may be able to escape your terrible living conditions by getting a wealthy man to fall for you.

Pretty girls don't even need to be alive to get some hot princely action.

Appearances don't matter; what counts is what's in your heart. Unless you're the girl.

At first it may seem terrible, being so beautiful that other women get jealous enough to try and kill you. But don't worry, once your beauty attracts a man, he'll protect you.

It's okay to abandon your family, drastically change your body, and give up your strongest talent in order to get your man. Once he sees your pretty face, only a witch's spell could draw his eyes away from you.

Tutor:

Group:

Name:
PHIL3 Key Themes in Philosophy: Political Philosophy

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| **PHIL1 An Introduction to Philosophy 1** | 1.5 hours 90 marks available  
- Reason and Experience  
- Why should I be Moral?  
- Why should I be Governed?  
  Complete the 15 mark and the 30 mark question on Reason and Experience  
  Complete the 15 mark and the 30 mark question on either Why should I be Moral? or Why should I be Governed? | 50% | 25% |
| **PHIL2 An Introduction to Philosophy 2** | 1.5 hours 90 marks available  
- Tolerance  
- The Value of Art  
  Complete the 15 mark and the 30 mark question on Tolerance  
  Complete the 15 mark and the 30 mark question on The Value of Art | 50% | 25% |
| **PHIL3 Key Themes in Philosophy** | 2 hours 100 marks available  
- Moral Philosophy  
- Political Philosophy  
  Complete one 50 mark question on Moral Philosophy, from a choice of two  
  Complete one 50 mark question on Political Philosophy, from a choice of two | N/A | 30% |
| **PHIL4 Philosophical Problems** | 1.5 hours 60 marks available  
- Plato’s Republic  
  Complete the 15 mark question  
  Complete one 45 mark question, from a choice of two | N/A | 20% |

### What’s in this book that’s in the exam?

This theme raises philosophical questions concerning how human wellbeing can be advanced or hindered by the organisation of society and political structures: descriptive and normative issues concern the constitutive institutions and values necessary in order that a political community can function appropriately and in order that its citizens should flourish.
**Human nature and political organisation**

- Competing views of human nature and of the purpose of the state: the state as neutral umpire, the classical liberal state; the state as an organic entity, the conservative conception of the state; the state as an oppressor, Marxist and anarchist views of the state.

**Liberty**

- What does it mean to be free? Concepts of liberty: negative freedom and positive freedom.
- Why is liberty valued and how can it be promoted and defended? How different political ideologies address these issues. The relationship between law and liberty.

**Rights**

- The notion of rights: the distinction between natural and positive rights. Theories of how rights are grounded and problems concerning their extent and application.
- How may conflicts between the rights of individuals and social utility be resolved? What is the relationship, if any, between rights, liberty, morality and law?

**Justice**

- What contributes social, economic or distributive justice? Competing principles for a just distribution of political goods: desert, need, equality.
- How, if at all, could redistribution be justified? The relationship between distributive justice, liberty and rights.

**Nation states**

- The application of these concepts to nation states and to relations between states. Nationalism, national sentiment and liberty: whether restrictions on cross-border movement and association are just; whether rights apply to groups and nations, for example a right of a nation to self-determination; whether distributive justice applies globally; the notion of a just war and how this applies in asymmetric wars.

**Ideology**

What is meant by the term political ideology? Here are two accounts of it:

1. *Ideology: Any comprehensive or mutually consistent set of ideas by which a social group makes sense of the world may be referred to as an ideology... An ideology needs to provide some explanation of how things have come to be as they are, [and] some indication of where they are going (to provide a guide to action)... The term has had very variable connotations, and at least in its dominant sense it has been necessarily pejorative, a term always to be used of the ideas of others, never of one’s own. For some, notably Marxists, ideology has generally been used to describe the world-view of the dominant.*
[Ideology] includes a theory of society, with some explanation of the true nature of how people live in society and how society has developed. Ideologies that challenge the existing order offer a critique of existing society. Those that oppose change offer critiques of those movements that oppose change. Ideologies develop a vision of how they believe future society should be. This may be a specific blueprint, or it could be a partial idea which includes generalised aims based on fixed principles.

From these definitions, it can be said that some of what ideologies do is descriptive, in that they provide an account of how things are in a political sense, and/or how they were in the past or could be in the future. For instance, different ideologies might describe the relationship between the social classes in different ways, or offer alternative explanations of how wealth is distributed in a society.

However, another role that ideologies have is a normative one, in that they are concerned with how things should be. In other words, ideologies can and often do take a moral position on what is and is not politically justified. For instance, they might make the judgment that the current political system needs to be abandoned for a more preferable one, or they might argue for particular guiding principles to decide when it is right to go to war.

**Human nature**

Human nature is a term that gets used a lot in moral and political arguments, so it is important to recognise what it refers to. If something is part of human nature, then it is a psychological and/or behavioural characteristic that all humans are predisposed to. This means that with other influences removed from their lives, people would veer towards this way of thinking or acting. Furthermore, it is often argued that if something is human nature, then people are more likely to act in this way than any other, and/or that it motivates our actions – even if we profess otherwise.

Aspects of human nature can be argued to be fixed, meaning they are an unchangeable, necessary feature of humanity, or plastic, meaning they are a malleable, contingent feature which can change at different times and in different places. For example, the effects of our upbringing, culture and social/economic environment could be argued to have this effect. A further option is to deny the existence of human nature altogether, perhaps arguing that each individual chooses their own character.¹

A key area of disagreement is the extent to which human nature is rational. In this context, rationality can refer to our ability to correctly identify what our needs or desires are, and to work out how best to fulfil them. Another way of putting this is to say that if we are rational, we will make and act on good choices, and if we are irrational, we will not.

¹ This last view is supported by a type of philosophy known as existentialism.
1. What human nature is like is a very important consideration in political philosophy. Why do you think this is?

**Mapping ideologies – the political spectrum**

Various attempts have been made to ‘map’ political ideologies. The goal in doing this is to show the relationship between ideologies, to visually represent their similarities and differences with each other.

**The linear spectrum**

The linear spectrum places ideologies in a line, from far left to far right:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communist</th>
<th>Socialism</th>
<th>Liberalism</th>
<th>Conservatism</th>
<th>Fascism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left-wing</td>
<td>Centrist</td>
<td>Centrist</td>
<td>Centrist</td>
<td>Right-wing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is perhaps the most common, ‘traditional’ method of mapping ideologies. However, it has come under criticism for being too simplistic, and not accounting for different varieties of thought within ideologies – ones that would not necessarily be placed in the same relationship as is currently shown. For example, it was felt there were many similarities between certain types of authoritarian/state communism and fascism, which this linear arrangement fails to represent.

**The horseshoe spectrum**

In response to criticisms such as this, the horseshoe spectrum was devised. One of its stated advantages over the linear spectrum is its closer placing of communism and fascism:

Despite this, the horseshoe spectrum was still felt to be deficient in other areas. A key problem, as with the linear spectrum, is it still does not show the possible varieties within different ideologies, and finds no place for anarchism.
The two-dimensional spectrum

As can be seen below, the two-dimensional spectrum is more complicated than the others. However, it has been argued to overcome some of the major limitations associated with the linear and horseshoe spectra. In the two-dimensional spectrum, ideologies are placed according to their position on these issues:

Economic issues – those relating to the distribution of resources and the freedom of businesses – are mapped on the left/right axis.

Social issues – those relating to government intervention in our lives on social matters (not related to business and trade) – are mapped on the authoritarian/libertarian axis.

As a result of ordering ideological positions in such a way, the two-dimensional spectrum gives particular meanings to the following terms, which are not necessarily captured in the two previous approaches:

**Authoritarianism** is associated with:
- Greater government power
- Fewer social freedoms e.g. relating to speech, protest, religion, lifestyle, choice
- More positive attitudes to nationalism and patriotism
- More negative attitudes to multiculturalism and diversity
- Greater focus on punishment in criminal justice
- A view that human nature is fixed and/or irrational

Extreme authoritarian positions can be described as ‘fascist’

**Left-wing** is associated with:
- More equal distribution of resources and wealth
- Emphasis on the interests of the working classes
- Fewer economic freedoms e.g. free trade, deregulation
- A view that human nature is communal – we benefit from and are reliant on others
- Far-left positions can be described as ‘communist’

**Right-wing** is associated with:
- Equal distribution of resources and wealth not being necessary
- Emphasis on the interests of the middle/upper classes
- Greater economic freedoms
- A view that human nature is individualist or ‘atomist’ – we are self-reliant and benefit from being left to shape our own lives
- Far-right positions can be described as ‘capitalist’

**Libertarianism** is associated with:
- Less government power
- Greater social freedoms
- More negative attitudes to nationalism and patriotism
- More positive attitudes to multiculturalism and diversity
- Greater focus on rehabilitation in criminal justice
- A view that human nature is plastic and/or rational

Extreme libertarian positions can be described as ‘anarchist’
In deciding where to place ideologies on the two-dimensional spectrum, it is necessary to look at to what extent they agree with the oppositional views of authoritarianism/libertarianism and left-wing/right-wing. The more strongly the views of one of these 'sides' is held, the further along that axis they will be placed. For example, if you were to agree that criminals should be punished very harshly, this would pull you towards authoritarianism. If you also agreed that human nature was rational, this would pull you back towards libertarianism. If you firmly agreed with all of the positions of the right-wing, it is likely you would find yourself somewhere at the very edge of that axis.

The diagram below charts the different ideologies referred to in this booklet. Putting them anywhere is contentious, and my placement of them in these, or any other positions, will certainly cause disagreement among some. The main concern here has been to put them in relation to each other – for instance, to show whether one ideology can be considered more libertarian or right-wing that a competing ideology. Furthermore, the area on the spectrum in which ideology appears relates to the range of views which people who identify within a particular ideology tend to express. For example, those who refer to themselves as Marxists are largely united on broad economic issues, but there is a greater range of thought amongst them with regard to the legitimacy of authoritarianism (or lack of it).

Aside from this, other difficulties still face the two-dimensional spectrum, despite it being preferable to the linear and horseshoe approaches. To take one example, approval of economic protectionism is typically taken to be left-wing, as it is preventing businesses and organisations from operating under a free market. Protectionism will be likely to involve some form of enforced restriction with regard to trade, favouring some institutions over others e.g. tax breaks, production quotas, tariffs, guaranteed custom, injections of government funding, an economic law that applies to some but not to all. As also noted, support for the working classes and a preference for economic equality are also taken to be left-wing positions. But if all this is the case, where should we position a support of protectionist measures which favour the rich? The current issue of 'workfare' is a good example, in which companies are provided with government assistance in the form of unpaid labour, with those so employed having to take on these roles or risk losing their benefit payments. Another example is that of economic bail-outs for failing banks. Both instances are clearly protectionist, impeding capitalism in its purest form, where businesses succeed or fail on their own abilities to attract custom, but it is difficult to claim they are serving working class interests. Should examples such as
these be therefore considered left-wing or right-wing? Perhaps these terms are insufficiently simple when attempting to label cases such as these.

Finally, another example of a potential problem for the two-dimensional spectrum is that it allows us to conceive of left-wing and right-wing versions of both fascism and anarchism. This has produced some controversy. For example, some communists have argued fascism can only exist within the context of capitalism, and some leftist anarchists have argued all talk of ‘right-wing anarchism’ is incoherent. I won’t go into any more detail on these arguments here, but it is worth noting that if they are correct, the two-dimensional spectrum needs still further adjustment.

**Political questionnaire**

2. The website politicalcompass.org has devised a questionnaire to plot people’s political ideologies. It does this by asking quite a lot of statements, which you respond either ‘Strongly disagree’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Strongly agree’. These statements are printed below. For each one, use an arrow to indicate which direction it would pull someone on the two-dimensional spectrum if they were to agree with it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. The country and the world</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If economic globalisation is inevitable, it should primarily serve humanity rather than the interests of trans-national corporations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d always support my country, whether it was right or wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one chooses his or her country of birth, so it’s foolish to be proud of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our race has many superior qualities, compared with other races.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The enemy of my enemy is my friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military action that defies international law is sometimes justified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is now a worrying fusion of information and entertainment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Economics</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People are ultimately divided more by class than by nationality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling inflation is more important than controlling unemployment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because corporations cannot be trusted to voluntarily protect the environment, they require regulation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;From each according to his ability, to each according to his need&quot; is a fundamentally good idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s a sad reflection on our society that something as basic as drinking water is now a bottled, branded consumer product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land shouldn’t be a commodity to be bought and sold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is regrettable that many personal fortunes are made by people who simply manipulate money and contribute nothing to their society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protectionism is sometimes necessary in trade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The only social responsibility of a company should be to deliver a profit to its shareholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rich are too highly taxed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those with the ability to pay should have the right to higher standards of medical care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governments should penalise businesses that mislead the public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A genuine free market requires restrictions on the ability of predator multinationals to create monopolies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The freer the market, the freer the people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. Personal social values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abortion, when the woman's life is not threatened, should always be illegal.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All authority should be questioned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxpayers should not be expected to prop up any theatres or museums that cannot survive on a commercial basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools should not make classroom attendance compulsory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All people have their rights, but it is better for all of us that different sorts of people should keep to their own kind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good parents sometimes have to spank their children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's natural for children to keep some secrets from their parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessing marijuana for personal use should not be a criminal offence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The prime function of schooling should be to equip the future generation to find jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with serious inheritable disabilities should not be allowed to reproduce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The most important thing for children to learn is to accept discipline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are no savage and civilised peoples; there are only different cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who are able to work, and refuse the opportunity, should not expect society's support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you are troubled, it's better not to think about it, but to keep busy with more cheerful things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-generation immigrants can never be fully integrated within their new country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What's good for the most successful corporations is always, ultimately, good for all of us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No broadcasting institution, however independent its content, should receive public funding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Wider society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our civil liberties are being excessively curbed in the name of counter-terrorism.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A significant advantage of a one-party state is that it avoids all the arguments that delay progress in a democratic political system.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although the electronic age makes official surveillance easier, only wrongdoers need to be worried.

The death penalty should be an option for the most serious crimes.

In a civilised society, one must always have people above to be obeyed and people below to be commanded.

Abstract art that doesn’t represent anything shouldn’t be considered art at all.

In criminal justice, punishment should be more important than rehabilitation.

It is a waste of time to try to rehabilitate some criminals.

The businessperson and the manufacturer are more important than the writer and the artist.

Mothers may have careers, but their first duty is to be homemakers.

Multinational companies are unethically exploiting the plant genetic resources of developing countries.

Making peace with the establishment is an important aspect of maturity.

5. Religion

Astrology accurately explains many things.

You cannot be moral without being religious.

Charity is better than social security as a means of helping the genuinely disadvantaged.

Some people are naturally unlucky.

It is important that my child’s school instils religious values.

6. Sex

Sex outside marriage is usually immoral.

A same sex couple in a stable, loving relationship should not be excluded from the possibility of child adoption.

Pornography, depicting consenting adults, should be legal for the adult population.

What goes on in a private bedroom between consenting adults is no business of the state.

No one can feel naturally homosexual.

These days openness about sex has gone too far.

**Capitalism**

As noted above, political ideologies involve economic as well as social arguments. Given its predominance in the modern Western world, these frequently involve an analysis of capitalism. This term refers to a type of economic system, meaning it is concerned with how resources are distributed within society. The term ‘capital’ itself typically refers to property or assets held.
A central idea of capitalism is that the production and distribution of resources should be in the hands of privately operating individuals and organisations, and not the government. The term private here does not mean secretive, but simply that everything is paid for and managed by people who are not acting as part of the state. In other words, businesses owned by ‘ordinary’ people, not some governmental department. In contrast, an organisation that produces products or services that is run by the state is often referred to as being public.

As well as this, capitalism argues people should be free to invest in businesses, meaning they put forward some of their money in support of it. This will generally involve becoming a shareholder, meaning someone investing in a business, having purchased a ‘share’ of it. Often, people who invest a significant amount of money in a business will have some say over how it is run – after all, they’re paying for it!

If private individuals find their businesses and investments make money, capitalism argues they should keep the profits. If their businesses and investments lose money, the owners and investors should be financially responsible for these consequences as well. Capitalism argues this system of potential rewards and risks is good, because it encourages those making products and services in their businesses to do everything they can to ensure a profit is made. To do this, it is argued they must produce high quality products and services, so that people will want to buy them, resulting in profitability for the shareholders.

This is said to encourage competition between businesses, which is argued to have significant benefits for everyone. Because a business offering product or service x is unlikely to be the only business doing so, capitalists argue that this competitive system encourages them not only to make a customer-enticing, high quality x, but also to offer it at a better price to other businesses who also offer x. Their doing this will then encourage other businesses to either create an even better quality x, and/or sell it at an even more competitive price. With this system in operation, it is said to result in people (or, more specifically, consumers) getting high quality, affordable products and services.

Capitalists argue this creates an efficient system of supply and demand, meaning businesses are responsive to what products and services people want. Where there is a demand for something, businesses will be encouraged to supply it, at competitive prices. The argued benefit of this is that people motivated by self-interest – manifested in the desire to make money, in order to better their economic level – contribute to the well-being of society, as they are responsive to the will of the people. Simply put, what the public wants, capitalism provides, for a price.

A commonly held capitalist argument is sometimes referred to as the sovereign consumer. This is a view of humans which argues we are able to identify what we want to become happier, and make the appropriate, informed economic decisions to achieve it. For instance, we might identify that we would like to go swimming more often, so we look around the market for those businesses who are offering swimming services, and we then make the informed decision as to which of these competing offers is the best one to take advantage of. Another example is of a consumer who concludes that they would prefer more free time instead of being at work, and so, having rationally weighed up the two courses of action, decides to exchange greater wealth for more time off.

In capitalist societies, how much a product or service costs is essentially determined by what people are willing to pay for it. Because people have a limit on what they are willing to spend on various things, it is argued this further encourages businesses to offer good prices, as if they don’t do this, they will find their profits falling because people choose not to consume what they have to offer.

It is worth noting that this does not mean that all products and services up for purchase in a capitalist economy are going to be cheap and within the price range of everyone. Basic, low budget items will certainly exist (e.g. supermarket own brand foods, budget clothing), with the price set by what people are willing to pay for those kind of things. More high-end, expensive products and services will also be on offer (e.g. gourmet
meals, designer clothing), with the same principle ensuring that their price is determined by what people are willing to pay.

Capitalists have often argued this system is also an inherently democratic one. An analogy can be drawn between people purchasing products and services and people voting. In effect, making a purchase ‘votes’ for what the business is offering. Businesses that get enough of these purchases/votes do well, and therefore continue to exist. Businesses that don’t get enough support in this way will fail. Consequently, businesses are compelled to appeal to public demand. In other words, successful businesses become that way because they have the support of the populace.

A common idea that features in writings on capitalism is that of a ‘pure’ capitalist society. This involves having what is known as a free market. In a genuinely free market economy, the government stays out of the way of business, avoiding regulation, meaning laws that restrict what businesses can do. Other terms used to describe a free market include ‘laissez-faire economics’, which literally means ‘allow to do’, and economic ‘non-interventionism’.

Therefore, in a purely free market economy, there would be no regulations on businesses such as laws limiting who they can trade with, what products and services they can offer, how much they can charge or produce, how much they should pay their workers, whether they can form monopolies where one business owns and/or dominates all of a particular sector e.g. owning all of the newspapers that are produced, or being the only provider of education), and what they can say in their advertisements. Furthermore, in a genuinely pure form of capitalism, the government would not be providing any services or products either. In other words, everything would be created by private companies, not public ones.

Also important to note here is that within a laissez-faire economic system, as well as not restricting what private businesses can do, the government would also avoid giving them assistance. This means that protectionism, the enacting of policies to support businesses, would not happen. Examples of protectionist measures include giving businesses government money (e.g. ‘bailing out’ failing companies), or setting up laws that give domestic-run businesses advantages over foreign-run ones. In a pure capitalist system, businesses must succeed or fail on their own merits.

A major reason for capitalism’s hostility to the public sector is the argument that it is not as efficient as the private sector. It is often claimed that state-run organisations are not motivated by competition and profits, and therefore are less compelled to offer high-quality products and services at good prices.

Finally, another feature of capitalist theory is its emphasis on the importance of economic growth. This means businesses do not remain stagnant or deteriorate in their profitability, continuing to produce greater and greater profits. Capitalists warn that if there is no economic growth, this leads to recession, which has negative effects for society as a whole – e.g. mass job losses.

Within the ideologies covered in this handbook, we will see some are in support of a ‘pure’ capitalist system, some are happier with a more regulated form of capitalism, and others reject capitalism altogether.

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2 A related term is oligopoly, meaning where a small number of businesses owns and/or dominates all of a particular sector. For instance, it can be said there is an oligopoly in banking, supermarkets and the mainstream press.
3. Why could it be argued human wellbeing would be enhanced by living in a capitalist society? Give reasons.

4. To what extent might these benefits affect everyone equally? Give reasons.

5. Why could it be argued human wellbeing would be hindered by living in a capitalist society? Give reasons.

6. To what extent might these negatives affect everyone equally? Give reasons.

Human nature and political organisation

Liberalism

Classical liberalism

Classical liberalism typically argues people are naturally rational, being able to work out for themselves how best to lead their lives. Furthermore, a just society is one where people are free to choose the kind of life they want to lead. However, as people are naturally self-interested, we may act in ways which impede on other individual's freedoms. Consequently, we all need protection from the actions of others, in order to maximise our own personal freedom. In other words, we should have the maximum amount of liberty possible which is compatible with other people having the maximum amount of liberty possible.

This viewpoint leads classical liberals to argue the state should be a kind of neutral umpire, passing and upholding laws that grant people the maximum amount of freedom they can possibly have – but not so much that anyone else’s freedom is restricted. As this freedom is something all should have equally, the state must also be neutral, not favouring any type of person over another.
A key example of such a position can be seen in the writings of John Locke (b. 1632 in Somerset, England d. 1704 in Essex, England), who argues a key advantage of the classical liberal state over the state of nature is that the government is better able to resolve disputes between individuals in an impartial way. This is because in the state of nature we are left to resolve disputes ourselves, which means we will lack impartiality, arguing from our own vested interests. The neutral umpire of the classical liberal state is there to be detached from any disputes, legislating, judging and punishing appropriately. The neutral position of the state here ensures any decisions it makes will be fair, and in the interests of those who have been wronged.

Historically, the values of classical liberalism can be seen as a rejection of feudalism. Classical liberals argue feudal societies limit freedom, granting some individuals great privileges simply due to an accident of birth. Capitalism is argued to be a superior system, as it allows all individuals the chance to succeed on their own merits.

Classical liberals often argue we all have rights – for example, the right to freedom or the right to property – and that the state’s role should involve protecting these rights. As all liberals regard human nature as rational, many of the rights they argue for focus on allowing us to autonomously choose the kind of life we wish to lead. Consequently, liberals frequently argue in favour of such things as the right to choose your own religion, the right to join a political organisation of your choice, and the right to engage in business transactions with others. As it is the duty of the state to protect these rights, any state which fails to do so can be legitimately opposed, perhaps even overthrown, by its people.

Through maximising our freedoms, resolving disputes in a neutral way, and upholding our individual rights, classical liberals often argue the state can help us to maximise our potential. The state is considered to have been created by the people, in order to serve the people. In making these claims, an individualist view of human nature can often be seen, with a depiction of a fulfilled human being one who is given the opportunity to succeed on their own merits. Classical liberals argue there is not just one single way in which people can lead a flourishing, fulfilled life. Therefore, the state should avoid intrusion in our affairs wherever possible.

Furthermore, the role of the state is argued to end here. In other words, the state has no business beyond the protection of people’s rights and freedoms. Any further interventionist activity – meaning the passing of laws regarding what individuals and businesses can do – is likely to be argued as unjust by classical liberals. They argue all states are potentially tyrannical and oppressive, because the power those in control possess can be a corrupting influence. Because of this, it is important the powers of the state are restricted, so they cannot be abused.

Therefore, classical liberals frequently support limited government, otherwise known as a ‘minimal state’, with the powers of the state being restricted to only include what they regard as minimally necessary. For instance, Thomas Jefferson (b. 1743 d. 1826 in Virginia, USA) argues “That government is best which governs least”. At its most minimal level this will only include services that protect individuals from threats to their rights and freedoms that are internal to the state, such as a police force and a judiciary, and also from threats external to the state, such as the armed forces. Note that to say a government is ‘limited’ does not mean it will be lazy or inactive – securing and maintaining the liberty of the populace is likely to be quite a task.

A key point here is that classical liberalism is in opposition to the state providing further welfare programmes for its citizens. For instance, they are resistant to such things as nationalised healthcare and education, and state financial support of the unemployed. These measures would have to be funded by taxpayers, which infringes on their property rights to keep the products of their own efforts, and furthermore increases the power and reach of the government into areas in which it has no business to intrude.
Classical liberals often support constitutionalism, as a state having a constitution means there are clear limits to its powers, with rules it must follow. Under a constitution, the rulers of a state cannot make significant changes in how a state is run simply because they feel like it. Therefore, constitutions help to prevent the state’s powers growing too large.

A further aspect of the classical liberal state taking a neutral position is its commitment to recognising the different types of equality people have, and acting accordingly in the laws it passes and its treatment of the populace. Classical liberals argue that we all possess foundational equality, meaning we are born equal, and should be treated as such – factors such as gender, race, wealth and religion should not be grounds for discrimination or a justification for granting particular privileges. Such principles often lead liberals to be against dictatorial and monarchical systems, and to favour the separation of church and state.

Classical liberals further argue the state should grant everyone legal equality, meaning everyone is equal before the law. Their social position or status should not be an advantage or disadvantage to them should they have to go through the legal system.

However, classical liberals do not think the state should enforce economic equality, meaning that everyone has the same level of wealth. They often claim that individuals require incentives to work harder. The possibility of becoming poor if you don’t work, and the possibility of becoming rich if you do, are considered to be powerful motivators. If everyone had economic equality, this incentive would be removed.

As covered in the AS course, further aspects of classical liberalism’s view of the state as a neutral umpire comes from their commitment to tolerance and pluralism/diversity in terms of different beliefs, expressions, religions, organisations, cultures, and so on. The state is considered to have no business in determining how you choose to live your life, as long as you do not harm others. An example of this can be seen in the harm principle of John Stuart Mill (b. 1806 in London, England d. 1873 in Avignon, France), which states that the only laws which a state is justified to pass are those which prevent us from causing physical harm to others.

Adam Smith (b. 1723 in Kirkcaldy, Scotland d. 1790 in Edinburgh, Scotland) greatly influenced the economic arguments of classical liberalism. He reasons that a free trade, laissez-faire approach leads to freedom of choice in the marketplace, with workers able to choose who they work for, and consumers able to choose from a range of products. Businesses are able to compete with each other, making them create innovative products people wish to purchase, and at lower prices to their rivals. This process of supply and demand would be like an invisible hand organising society so people get what they want. The way this works is that individuals are focused on meeting their own self-interest, which in a capitalist system means they will have to provide good products, services or labour to others, so that they receive money in order to meet their needs. Because of this desire to fulfil their own needs, people’s pursuit of what is good for them consequently leads to good things for everyone, given that others are the beneficiaries of these products, services and labour. Classical liberals often argue that if the government avoids heavy economic interventionism, people will consequently be able to pursue their natural self-interest, to the benefit of themselves and others.

Further economic inspiration came from Herbert Spencer (b. 1820 in Derby, England d. 1903 in Brighton, England) and the theory of social Darwinism. Spencer coined the term ‘survival of the fittest’, arguing that free trade results in a form of natural selection, where the talented and hardworking succeed, and the unskilled and lazy do not. For a government to step in and allocate resources to those who have not worked for it would unjustly disrupt this natural process. Spencer also argues economic inequality is inevitable, so it is a mistake for governments to try and change this.

Classical liberalism also has an optimistic attitude towards progress, arguing that through greater freedom, new inventions, discoveries and truths will result, to the benefit of humanity as a whole. Such progress is argued to be less likely to come about under more authoritarian systems such as feudalism. In connection with
this, classical liberals often argue in favour of the positive, progressive benefits of all people receiving formal education. However, classical liberals such as John Stuart Mill present arguments against the state having a monopoly on education, as he is concerned this could result in the state having too much say on what is considered appropriate subjects of knowledge. A market system, offering a range of educational options, is far more preferable.

In looking at liberalism and its view on the nature and purpose of the state, AQA specifies the focus should be on the state as neutral umpire, the classical liberal state. This section of the handbook began with analysis of classical liberal arguments, which you should regard as essential for the exam.

The following two liberal positions covered here – i.e. modern liberalism and neo-liberalism – show how liberal political theory has changed and split off into competing varieties. These serve as good comparative theories, which if discussed in examination would show a well-developed political understanding. However, they are supplementary to the core theory of classical liberalism, so put your revision priority onto this.

Modern liberalism

Historically, modern liberalism follows classical liberalism, being the most dominant variety from the 1930s until the 1970s. With regard to human nature, although modern liberals share the earlier liberal view that we are rational and self-interested, they feel by nature we are more communal than the classical liberals believe. In connection with this, they feel our self-interested nature is not such a controlling force in determining how we act, and so are more open to the idea that we can be motivated by altruistic concern for others.

Modern liberals are more critical of capitalism than classical liberals. They argue laissez-faire economics have helped to maintain inequalities of wealth, and the state should have a more interventionist economic policy. There is the feeling that a gap between rich and poor is not a ‘natural’ phenomenon, and steps should be taken against it. Therefore, many modern liberals are opposed to the social Darwinist position of classical liberalism, and argue in favour of some degree of economic regulation.

Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse (b. 1864 in Cornwall, England d. 1929 in London, England) holds that while liberalism in the 19th century rightly had the focus of liberating the entrepreneur from misguided or oppressive government, it was now necessary to liberate the worker and consumer from the tyranny of the capitalist. While classical liberals emphasised atomism and personal property rights, Hobhouse supports the state working towards common goods as well as individualistic ones.

A further motivating factor for this change of attitude in liberalism was the experience of damaging market crashes and recessions in the twentieth century, which it was variously felt had either been caused by an insufficiently regulated capitalist system and/or had only been ultimately overcome through more economically interventionist government action.

Some modern liberals
Thomas Hill Green
Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse
John Maynard Keynes
Bryan Magee
John Rawls

Thomas Hill Green (b. 1836 in Yorkshire, England d. 1882 in Oxfordshire, England) feels the focus on profit in capitalism has led to economic inequality, and a lack of regulation for businesses allows them to exploit
workers. In opposition to classical liberals, he argues the choices made in business are not always free and voluntary, as often workers have little choice but to accept particular jobs and do what their bosses command them to do. Employers have more freedom, as they are often able to choose from a greater number of potential workers. This therefore challenges the traditional capitalist view of the sovereign consumer.

Modern liberals argue the economic inequality brought about by unrestrained capitalism means a great many people are not truly free. Simply being given equality of opportunity and legal equality does not mean that someone born into poverty has as much chance of succeeding as someone born into riches. To help mitigate against these disadvantages, modern liberals argue in favour of the welfare state. This involves financial assistance being provided for the most disadvantaged, in order to ensure their position does not get so worse they are not free to successfully compete in the marketplace alongside everyone else. Such measures are funded by progressive taxation, where higher earners pay a proportionately higher percentage of their income than lower earners. There is also a greater emphasis on the government providing more services, such as nationalised education, emergency services, and possibly also healthcare. In other words, compared to classical liberalism, modern liberalism is much keener to support the public sector in a range of areas.

Overall, modern liberalism takes a more paternalist, interventionist approach to classical liberalism, arguing that when capitalism does not help people to develop themselves and maximise their freedom, state intervention is justified.

While classical liberalism takes a lot of its economic inspiration from Adam Smith, modern liberalism is greatly influenced by John Maynard Keynes (b. 1883 in Cambridgeshire, England d. 1946 in Sussex, England). He argues for a managed economy, meaning a less ‘pure’ capitalism, with greater regulation and protectionism of particular businesses. He supports an economic policy of tax and spend, as a key feature of what is known as ‘Keynesian economics’. This style of economic organisation differs from a more free market economy, in that states are encouraged to spend their funds on projects that they think will stimulate the economy, particularly when they are hit by periods of recession. For example, building new schools, factories or hospitals, which will provide employment for citizens, enabling them to start spending their earnings, is argued to help ‘reflate’ the economy in times of poor economic growth. At the same time as this, states should cut taxation, with the intention that it will encourage investment and entrepreneurial activity, again with the goal of stimulating the economy.

John Rawls (b. 1921 in Maryland, USA d. 2002 in Massachusetts, USA) makes similar arguments, stating that the distribution of wealth in a state should be organised so that those at the lowest level are in the best possible situation. Like other modern liberals, Rawls believes some disparity in levels of wealth is unavoidable, and to an extent desirable, given how it provides people with a material incentive to work harder. However, he thinks it is wrong for the state to sit back and allow those at the bottom to suffer unnecessarily. The welfare state should protect them against the harshest consequences of the capitalist system.

Modern liberals have often been keen on equality of opportunity, meaning everyone has the same chance to succeed or fail in a meritocratic system. How this works in practice involves smaller-scale activity like providing wheelchair access to buildings to ensure that being a wheelchair user does not impair a person’s ability to gain entry to it, or legislating that employers cannot base their decision to hire an individual on factors such as disability, race or age. The motivation of such measures is to ‘open the doors’ to all, so the only reason someone might fail to achieve a particular goal is if they haven’t worked hard enough to do so. Modern liberals feel a less interventionist approach by the state results in people not being truly free to better themselves.

Between the end of WWII and the early 1970s, Keynesian economics became very popular among Western industrialised states, largely replacing the earlier commitments shown to a more classical liberal approach. Many of the states took on what has been referred to as a mixed economy, referring to a conglomeration of nationalised and privatised industries. However, this was all to end when further recessions hit, with increased
inflation and unemployment affecting many nations. As it had done once before, liberalism considered what to do to address these returned problems. This resulted in a further change – neo-liberalism.

**Neo-liberalism**

Historically, neo-liberalism follows modern liberalism, but is in many ways a return to the values of classical liberalism. It has vied with modern liberalism as being the dominant liberal position since the 1970s. In recognition of this return to many of liberalism’s original values, reference is sometimes made to ‘neoclassical liberalism’.

Neo-liberals argued that the recessions in the 1970s indicated the managed/mixed economy approach of modern liberalism had been a failure. They hold a view that has sometimes been described as market fundamentalism, stating free trade is the only economic system that can produce benefits for all. Although support for capitalism can be clearly seen in classical liberalism, it is arguably even more pronounced among neo-liberals, who are often more keen to argue the best way of providing services and products is through a society organised on free trade principles. In making these arguments, renewed support for a minimal state position can be seen. They argue governments’ attempts to intervene with capitalism were the cause of any problems, not capitalism itself. Smith’s idea of the ‘invisible hand’ was invoked once again, marking a commitment to pure, *laissez-faire* capitalism. Neo-liberals argue for a ‘rolling back’ of the state, encouraging the (re)privatisation of many industries, and the deregulation of business.

The influence of this thinking on government policies can be seen in a great number of nations during this period. For example, Milton Friedman (b. 1912 in Brooklyn, USA d. 2006 in San Francisco, USA), along with his economics associates at the University of Chicago, greatly encouraged and supported countries around the world to embrace neo-liberal economics, taking highly influential roles in advising a number of governments.

Friedrich Hayek (b. 1899 in Vienna, Austria-Hungary d. 1992 in Freiburg, Germany) argues any governmental planning is going to be inefficient, as state workers are simply faced with too much information to make informed decisions. Consequently, private businesses, motivated by profit, and therefore a concern in providing the best, most efficient and affordable products and services, will deliver the goods much better than unwieldy and cumbersome government departments.

Neo-liberals are often keen to point out that while the aims of modern liberalism may have been good, their economically interventionist methods are not the way to achieve them. Only a truly free trade system, on a global level, can produce the benefits that capitalism has always promised. Thanks to governments getting in the way of this with their regulations, protectionism and being influenced by the demands of trade unions, capitalism has so far been unable to deliver on this promise.

Furthermore, Hayek regards the state’s intervention in economic matters as an attack on individuals’ freedom, and also likely to be followed by further interventionist measures. In other words, governments tampering with the free market are likely to start tampering elsewhere. The reason for this is because human nature is self-interested, so government officials are likely to abuse their position by increasing their powers further. Serious concerns are raised by Hayek, Friedman and other neo-liberals that there is a slippery slope from governments intervening on an economic level to their ultimately becoming tyrannical, oppressive states.

Friedman provides an argument against minimum wage laws, in which he claims that by states setting a minimum wage they are contributing to unemployment. This is because it prevents those with low skills –
worth less than whatever the minimum wage is – from gaining employment, as businesses can no longer hire them for what they are worth.

Robert Nozick (b. 1938 in New York, USA d. 2002 in Massachusetts, USA) argues property rights are inviolable, meaning taxation for welfare purposes is unjustifiable. He believes states can rightly demand taxation in order to fund the services required to protect our freedoms – namely, defence against internal and external attacks that is provided by the judiciary, army and police force – but no more than this. Economic transactions are only just if they are agreed to by both parties without coercion, making taxation nothing less than theft. The disadvantaged must either find a way to exploit the skills they do have, or rely on charitable donations.

**Conservatism**

**Traditional conservatism**

Conservatism is one of the more difficult ideologies to define. Firstly, because it can be argued conservatism is largely a reactionary criticism of other ideologies rather than an ideology in itself. For example, in the 1800s, conservatives reacted against liberalism and its push towards individualism. In the 1900s, conservatives reacted against Marxism, other forms of socialism, and also modern liberalism, and their push towards communality. Secondly, because of some resistance within conservatism to think of itself as an ideology at all. A number of conservatives have felt the term ‘ideology’ has a pejorative connotation, and have therefore been keen to label other bodies of political thought as being ‘ideological’, while conservatism itself has not been described in this way. For example, there has been a trend in conservatism to describe their own beliefs as simply ‘common sense’, in contrast to the ‘ideological’ thinking of others.

Despite these points, we can see within traditional conservatism a number of dominant trends and ideas. Firstly, traditional conservatism holds a particular view about humanity, typically arguing people are by nature irrational and self-interested. Furthermore, we are not improvable – these aspects of human nature are unavoidably, regrettably, fixed, and there is simply nothing that can be done about that. Further characteristics of human nature, as argued by traditional conservatism, include the view that we are controlled more by our instincts and appetites than reason, we desire power and property, and we wish to stay away from poverty. By nature, we are more concerned with ourselves than society as a whole.

Traditional conservatives often argue that humans naturally fear isolation, instability and the unfamiliar, and find comfort in a cohesive community that provides stability, familiarity, dependability and predictability. Security can be found in ‘knowing your place’ in society. The state should play a key role in helping with this, through a focus on social order. Therefore, traditional conservative thought can often be seen to have a strong emphasis on the importance of law and order. It is not the role of the state to be overly concerned with increasing our social freedoms, as it is better to exchange greater security and safety for less liberty.

On this particular point, with regard to criminals, traditional conservatives often take the view that the cause of criminal activity is a personal moral failing in the criminal themselves, as opposed to other factors such as economic deprivation. Therefore, they lean more towards harsher punishments for wrong-doers, so that order in society is preserved. This is in contrast to more libertarian political ideologies, who are often inclined to argue that the inequalities found in some sectors of society are a key contributing factor to people’s criminal behaviour.
Edmund Burke (b. 1729 in Dublin, Ireland d. 1797 in Beaconsfield, England), an influential figure in traditional conservatism, argues the role of the state should be a paternalist one, with the relationship between rulers and ruled similar to that between parent and child. That people are naturally irrational justifies this approach. Ruling is an art, which most do not understand and only a few can acquire the knowledge and expertise.

Despite their authoritarian leanings, the majority of traditional conservatives have been against dictatorships, as they have great concerns about giving individuals, who will invariably be irrational and self-interested, that much power, as it will surely be abused.

Secondly, and because of this view of human nature, traditional conservatism is sometimes described as supporting a kind of political scepticism, meaning it is critical of the use of theory and ‘rationally’ argued positions found in other ideologies. Traditional conservatives have strong doubts that the – admittedly often well-meaning – views held by competing ideologies can ever be fully realised, given what human nature is like, and also given that political realities rarely match up to the academic arguments and naively simplistic principles others commonly put forward. It is preferable to give political power to those with extensive and direct political experience, rather than to people inspired by ideologies with more abstract and theoretical systems of organisation.

Thirdly, another dominant trend within traditional conservatism is its focus on the importance of traditional customs, practices and values. It argues in favour of keeping what are considered to be the best elements of society, by being resistant to radical social and economic changes. Conservatives, as the name suggests, wish to conserve. The motivation for this tends to be either a wish to return to a way of life that is considered to now be gone, or to halt or slow down what is felt to be unnecessary change in society. Traditional institutions, practices and values (e.g. moral, religious, aesthetic), should therefore be upheld. Part of the role of the state is to ensure that traditional ways of life are protected. This may involve a limitation of people’s liberty, but this is considered a fair price to pay. Part of the objection that traditional conservatives have to other ideologies is with their greater willingness to abandon established practices and values.

Traditional conservatives argue that we naturally find change generally upsetting or distressing, all the more so if it is large and sudden. Change can lead to unintended and unforeseen consequences. Large political changes not only have this problem, but often fail to meet their intended goals as well. However, it is better to characterise traditional conservatives as being suspicious of change, rather than rigidly opposed to it. But if change is to occur, they argue it should be gradual, with each step carefully considered. Cautious reform is acceptable, but rapid alterations to society and the state are unwise. Part of the reason why this view on change is supported can be linked to traditional conservatism’s conception of the state as an ‘organic’ entity (see below).

Examples of customs conservatives have been in favour of maintaining include the monarchy, the church, the nuclear family, traditional moral values and state identity. However, a ‘complete list of conservative values’ could not be written up, as the customs conservatives wish to preserve differ in place and time.

Fourthly, a further dominant trend within traditional conservatism is their ‘organic’ conception of the state. Traditional conservatives hold that humans are dependent on each other, and seek to feel belonging in a society. Individuals feel strong ties to social groups that support them, providing them with security and meaning. Furthermore, people need to know their place in society, which is one of the benefits of having hierarchical systems, such as there being those who rule and those who are ruled. People have clear connections with others, through things such as language and national character. This all shows a combination of both communal and authoritarian attitudes to human nature.

Organicism argues society is like an organic entity, with all the parts of it needing to work well together in order for it to function well as a whole. Society is not just a collection of individuals – everyone has ties to each other. The way things are has come about gradually over time, so it is therefore dangerous to tamper with this. If you damage part of an organic entity – e.g. wounding or mangling a limb – this will have negative effects on
the entity as a whole, with it no longer being able to function properly. The same is true of a state, in that if you damage one part of it – e.g. removing the ruling classes, or radically altering traditional practices – there are undesirable repercussions for everyone. Examples of popular organicist thinking among conservatives come on the topics of the family, traditional values, and the nation itself. In families, people learn about duties and respect for others, and what their role in society is. The family is socially stabilising, providing a sense of community. Therefore, the family unit is something to be maintained.

Traditional values provide similar security and cohesion among people, as there are orderly expectations of how we should behave – for instance, within the expectations/nature of our class or gender. The nation as a whole provides its citizens with a common identity and sense of communal belonging, which helps to explain why traditional conservatives are frequently strong supporters of patriotism and nationalism. However, with any of these examples, it is worth remembering that, as noted above, there is no ‘complete list of conservative values’ – for instance, some may place importance on the role of the family, while others might not.

Traditional conservatives are often opposed to a pluralism of values in a society, something which liberals commonly have less of a problem with. Traditional conservatives argue there should be a common culture of shared values, favouring monoculturalism over multiculturalism. If there isn’t a common culture, the organism of society can be damaged, because of the conflicts that will inevitably result from a mixture of practices and values sharing the same space.

Fifthly, traditional conservatism can be seen to have particular values regarding private property. As indicated above, liberals often argue one of the roles of the state is the protection of individuals’ property. Traditional conservatives would agree with this, but they often place a further emphasis on the importance of property and its place in our lives. Property provides security and protection, being a good investment for the future, and something to bequeath to the next generation. Because of this, they have often placed value on ownership, particularly of houses and land, savings and investments. Furthermore, property also encourages a range of social values in those who have it. For example, people who own property are more likely to respect the property of others, and are more likely to be concerned with law and order, which protects this property.

Also, property can be thought of as an extension of our personality – particularly our homes. For this reason, traditional conservatives often feel burglary and vandalism are particularly unpleasant crimes, as they don’t just remove and damage items that we have bought, but can be seen as a personal violation. The socialist idea that property should be commonly owned by everyone is something conservatives are opposed to as they fear it would create a soulless and depersonalised society.

Sixthly, following on from related points that have already been raised, traditional conservatives place high importance on concerns of law and order. An emphasis on these matters helps to secure a well-structured, organic society, with clear legal expectations of everyone, and clear consequences if these expectations are not met.

It can be argued the law is a set of customs with firm political authorisation, which as an historical accumulation deserves respect. New legislations should not overwhelm the law as it is currently established. The constitution, if there is one, determines what laws are made, and so should be changed the least. British conservatives, because there is no written British constitution, tend to oppose setting one up, whereas American conservatives, who live in a country founded on one, hold the constitution in very high regard.

Seventhly, traditional conservatism can also be seen to have particularly positive attitudes to the institution of the state, and to patriotic and nationalistic values.
Traditional conservatives, particularly before the latter half of the 20th century, have often argued that although different classes have different levels of economic wealth, this is justified because of their differing responsibilities. Simply put, although the working class don’t have much money, nor do they have much responsibility to other people, which is the opposite state of affairs for the ruling class. In connection with this view, Burke argues that as the upper classes have ruled for centuries, they have built up the accumulated wisdom of how to do so. Therefore, this social arrangement is justified.

Liberals argue the authority the state has is something granted to it by its citizens, with the state being answerable to the people. In opposition to this, traditional conservatives argue authority is something that develops naturally, out of necessity. This is true of the relationship between ruled and ruler, and is also the case with other forms of relationship, such as that between parent and child, employer and employee. Everyone needs and benefits from such authority, as it provides guidance and stability. However, it should be noted that conservatives do not typically argue that someone with authority should use it however they wish – they have specific natural responsibilities, and so should act accordingly. Compared to liberalism, it can be said, traditional conservatism argues the government has more of a role in preserving national identity and some form of moral consensus. A further key role of the government is to pursue the national interest, defending it from external and internal threats.

In looking at conservatism and its view on the nature and purpose of the state, AQA specifies the focus should be on the state as an organic entity, the conservative conception of the state. This section of the handbook began with analysis of traditional conservative arguments, which you should regard as essential for the exam.

The following three conservative positions covered here – i.e. paternalist conservatism, authoritarian conservatism, and the New Right – show how conservative political theory is split into competing varieties. These serve as good comparative theories, which if discussed in examination would show a well-developed political understanding. However, they are supplementary to the core theory of traditional conservatism, so put your revision priority onto this.

**Paternalist conservatism**

A variety of this ideology known as paternalist conservatism shares many of the core values of traditional conservatism, but has a stronger concern for the poorer and disadvantaged in society, arguing steps should be taken to improve their position. Such attitudes put paternalist conservatism to the left of the traditional variety. However, as its attitude towards capitalism is one of carefully considered reform, its overall economic beliefs still place it right-of-centre.

During his role as British prime minister (twice), the paternalist conservative Benjamin Disraeli (b. 1804 d. 1881 in London, England) felt the poor would be unlikely to accept their continued misery for much longer. It was in the interests of the rich if something were done about it, as this would prevent uprising. However, he also felt that being wealthy and privileged brought with it the obligation of being responsible for those who were less well-off. Therefore, reforms should be carried out to assist the poor. This particular movement of paternalistic conservatism became known as ‘One Nation conservatism’, as it stressed how everyone in the nation was connected, with those in positions of advantage having responsibilities towards the less fortunate.

**Authoritarian conservatism**

Authoritarian conservatism can be seen to have a more negative view of human nature than traditional conservatism, typically stating people are particularly irrational and self-interested, meaning a state of nature, without a strong state to exert its ordering influence over us, is extremely undesirable. Unsurprisingly, authoritarianism is like traditional conservatism, but it’s more authoritarian.
Such arguments can be seen in the writings of Thomas Hobbes (b. 1588 in Wiltshire, England d. 1679 in Derbyshire, England), who claims individuals’ natural concerns for self-interest and power will result in the state of nature being a war of all against all. Because of this, the Leviathan – an all-powerful leader – is needed to ensure the state of nature does not return.

Joseph de Maistre (b. 1753 in Chambery, Kingdom of Sardinia d. Turin, Kingdom of Sardinia) states absolute rule should be given to an hereditary monarchy. Above the monarchies should be the supreme rule of the Pope. He argues society would collapse if not governed by ‘throne and altar’. The preservation of order is all-important. Even cruel rulers should be obeyed, because if authority is opposed, greater suffering will result.

Plato (b. 428 BCE d. 347 BCE in Athens, Greece) can also be argued to fit in with authoritarian conservatism. He calls for a small class of absolute rulers, qualified for the position because of their ability to rule justly. These rulers will have been carefully bred, trained and selected following many years of training, and so can be trusted to exert their will in a way that most benefits the state. It is the duty of all others to obey their rule, there being a rigid class system, with everyone having a clearly defined role in society.

More recently, some modern conservatives can be seen as having tendencies of authoritarian conservatism. It generally manifests as a strong nationalist viewpoint, putting what is in the ‘national interest’ above other concerns. One way this view often manifests itself is in very firm opposition to immigration into their countries, as they worry multiculturalism creates problems of disorder, breaks with tradition, and brings with it too many radical changes. However, this does not necessarily involve racist or fascist beliefs. While modern authoritarian conservatives favour a strong state, and place a high emphasis on national identity and law and order, the majority still favour democracy, and are open to pluralism to the extent that it does not upset the traditions of their society.

**The New Right**

In recent decades in European and North American politics, many conservative politicians and parties have departed from a number of values and beliefs held by traditional conservatives, supporting what has come to be known as The New Right, or ‘neo-conservatism’. This variety of conservatism found particular popularity in the governance of Ronald Reagan in the US, and Margaret Thatcher in the UK. The New Right can be seen as a combination of the social values of traditional conservatism with the economic values of neo-liberalism.

The economic attitudes of the New Right are inspired by neo-liberal arguments, made by such figures as Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman and Robert Nozick (see above). In practice, this has often meant deregulation and privatisation of business, tax cuts (particularly for the wealthy), demolition of welfare programmes for the poor, and hostility towards trade unions.

The social attitudes of the New Right are inspired by a more ‘back to basics’ conservatism. A strong focus has been placed on law and order, discipline, traditional moral values, and the importance of a strong national identity for the state. In practice, this has often meant a greater emphasis on harsher punishment of criminals, increased police and surveillance powers, a more aggressive foreign policy, and a strong concern that increased immigration has led to an unstable and conflict-ridden multicultural society. Arguably, in a similar

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way to how neo-liberals were even keener than the earlier classical liberals on free market economics, neo-conservatives can be said to have returned to authoritarian social policies with renewed vigour.

A key point here is that, in line with its far-right economic views, the New Right takes a more individualist view of human nature and society, compared to the more communal attitudes of traditional and paternalist conservatism. In a number of ways, it can be seen to place far less emphasis on an organist view of society. Where there is retention of these values, it can be seen in such things as emphasising the importance of the family unit, the national character and traditions, and ‘the big society’.

**Socialism**

Very broadly speaking, socialism can be used to label any political ideology which sits left-of-centre on the spectrum. Those who have labelled themselves as socialist can be seen to exhibit a variety of attitudes on the libertarian-authoritarian scale. But if one thing unites socialists and socialisms, it is their economic values, which are certainly diverse, but find common ground in their opposition to capitalism – an opposition which runs from the reformist to the revolutionary.

Socialists have frequently claimed economic inequality is not simply a reflection of inequalities of skill or effort in individuals, but also (and more importantly) a reflection of the unequal treatment carried out by the capitalist state. In a capitalist state, poor people are extremely likely to stay poor, and rich people are extremely likely to stay rich. For socialists, distributive justice requires greater levels of economic equality.

Socialist theories of all types also emphasise a view of human nature that is communal, and that we can be motivated by altruistic concerns rather than purely self-interested ones. They argue our skills are learned from society – our achievements come about from the support of others, not solely through our own efforts. In other words, people are not entirely self-sufficient and self-contained. Instead, we all rely on each other. The society we live in and the values it promotes should reflect this.

Socialists argue people can be motivated by things other than material incentives. For example, moral incentives. If we view people as naturally self-interested, we will think that appealing to their moral nature is a waste of time. A society that places a true emphasis on the moral obligations we owe to others and our communal nature will see that people can be motivated by things other than material wealth. Socialists argue that capitalism expects and encourages individualistic, self-interested behaviour, so we shouldn’t be surprised to see people acting like this within capitalist societies. In connection with this, many socialists argue human nature is plastic rather than fixed, as the society we live in can affect what we are like.

An immediate objection to this view of human nature could be that if you look around society, you will see a lot of activity that appears to be very self-interested indeed. This suggests people are by nature egoists. However, one point socialists can make in response is that we are more inclined to focus on the negative, and simply overlook the enormous number of instances of people acting in a cooperative or altruistic manner.

Another argument socialists can make is that the great majority of people have a decidedly negative reaction to self-interested behaviour. Those who focus on themselves and their own interests over the concerns of others are often criticised and thought morally objectionable for acting in this way. This suggests, socialists can claim, that egoism is not such a dominant value in human nature after all.
Writing about the socialist Karl Marx (b. 1818 in Trier, Germany d. 1883 in London, England), Andrew Collier states that:

Those who say that Marx ignores human nature usually mean by ‘human nature’ egoism, selfishness. Marx does not deny that in existing capitalist society people tend to be narrowly egoistic. Since they must compete and do their neighbours down in order to survive, they have to be. To look at people in capitalist society and conclude that human nature is egoism is like looking at people in a factory where the pollution is destroying their lungs and saying that it is human nature to cough.

**Marxism**

Marxism views the state as an oppressive institution. Specifically, Marxists place their primary focus here on why the capitalist state is oppressive. In order to explain this view, it is necessary to see what particular objections Marxism has against capitalism.

As well as being socialist, Marxism can also be described as a type of communism. Communist theories sit anywhere on the far left of the spectrum, and are firmly anti-capitalist. Reforming capitalism will not do – it must be replaced. To sum up, Marxism can be said to be a type of communism, and communism can be said to be a type of socialism.

Marxism places great importance on economic matters and class. When Marxists speak of the class someone is in, it is important to note that this is defined in economic terms i.e. your access to and control of material wealth. Another way of looking at class would be to regard it as cultural rather than economic – for instance, to define your class by such things as the type of people you mix with, your social interests, post code, or things like that. But Marxism defines class in economic rather than cultural terms. Furthermore, a person’s class membership is objectively defined, in that they do not have to possess a conscious awareness of the class they are in, or have any level of economic understanding themselves. In other words, the class you are part of is not determined by your subjective and personal feelings of association towards a particular group of people.

Simply put, in a capitalist state there is the ruling class, and there is the working class. The ruling class, otherwise known as the capitalist class or the bourgeoisie, are those who own the means of labour (e.g. land, tools, raw materials, workplaces). The working class, otherwise known as the proletariat, sell their labour power to the capitalists in order to gain access to goods. The majority of people are in the working class. As Andrew Collier notes:

A proletarian with a degree, a mortgage and a car is still a proletarian. A secretary or a shopworker or a lorry driver is as much a proletarian as a miner or a steelworker. The shift from industrial to service employment [in modern Britain] in no way affects the class structure.

Marxism is predominantly concerned with the proletariat, arguing their situation cannot be satisfactorily improved without changing the whole of society – i.e. overthrowing the oppression of the capitalist state.

Marxism claims the economic system a society uses has many effects beyond just the simple distribution of resources. Marx argues in favour of a materialist conception of society, meaning the kinds of social structures

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3 Marx also makes reference to the petty bourgeoisie, who own some means of labour themselves, and work on them through self-employment. For example, artisans and small shopkeepers.
a society has are determined by what its economic structures are. Marx refers to the base of a society, meaning the type of economic system it is – e.g. slavery, feudalism, capitalism, communism – and the superstructure of a society, meaning the institutions, values and way of life that exists within it e.g. politics, religion, art, culture. Marx argues the nature of the superstructure can be explained by the nature of the base. In other words, the economic system a society uses has enormous influence on the kind of moral values and culture it has. Much about any society can be explained and understood by reference to its economic base.

One key reason for this is that, according to Marxism, the ideology of a society is the ideology of its ruling class. As economic systems such as slavery, feudalism and capitalism allow a particular minority class of individuals to flourish by exploiting the majority, they are able to exert a great degree of control over all areas of society. In other words, the ruling classes don’t just have a disproportionately high level of control over the wealth, they also have a disproportionately high level of control over society, culture and morality as well. The economic advantages of the ruling class provide them with significant social advantages of power and control.

For example, one aspect of capitalist societies Marxism criticises is their focus on how it is moral to uphold people’s ‘rights to property’, something which both liberals and conservatives argue is a worthwhile position to hold. He feels this value has been able to gain widespread acceptance and enforcement because it is in the interests of the rulers. The ruling class benefit much more from there being property rights than the working class, as they have more to lose. It is therefore unsurprising that in capitalist societies it is considered a terrible injustice to have ‘your’ property taken from you, whether through theft or taxation. This kind of thinking would be described by Marxism as an example of false consciousness, where individuals support practices and values that are in opposition to their real interests.

We will now look further at specific complaints made by Marxists against the capitalist state – why it oppresses, why it should be removed, and why revolution is the necessary means for achieving this goal.

Firstly, capitalist societies are distinguished by significant gaps between the rich and the poor. The more capitalist a society is, the more pronounced the gap. Although capitalism is very successful at creating great wealth for a small minority, its other legacy has been creating great poverty for the majority.

Secondly, one of Marx’s concerns about the effect of capitalism on the working classes is alienation, a term used to criticise the kind of working life they have. Marx refers to a number of negative features of work that lead to this alienation, such as:

- Although the worker is creating goods, they do not own the products of their labours. What they produce belongs to their employer. In this way, Marx argues the worker is being exploited.

- If they work well, the profits created for the employer can have negative effects for the worker. For instance, the employer might invest in more labour-efficient ways of producing the same goods, rendering the worker redundant.

- Capitalist work often involves the division of labour, meaning the production of goods is divided up between different workers. When this occurs, a worker is only responsible for a small part of the production process, which lessens how rewarding their labour can be, and also makes it more narrow, specialised and repetitive. It is part of human nature to find productive work fulfilling. But in capitalism, work is typically unrewarding and repetitive, with the worker having little connection to whatever it is they are producing.

- A worker’s time at work is not their own, it is their employer’s. Given the amount of time it is necessary to stay in work to survive in a capitalist society, this means that much of a worker’s life is spent focused on
serving the interests of the capitalist class, and not their own interests. To spend a life devoted to un.rewarding labour, while someone else reaps the benefits of that labour, is the typical fate of those who are employed under capitalism. And this is the existence of those lucky enough to have a job!

- Workers become more individualistic, in that they set themselves against other workers in competition for the more desirable jobs and conditions. This is encouraged by capitalism from an early age, through the schooling system and other propaganda.

Thirdly, workplaces are not democratic institutions. Power and control is very much exerted top-down, and in the rare cases where there is a concern among the employers about such things as staff morale, satisfaction and ‘work-life balance’, this all depends very much on there existing (1) favourable economic conditions, which at times of recession and lack of demand for the goods being produced by the workplace cannot be guaranteed, and (2) the will of the ‘benevolent’ employer, who could just as easily decide not to be so amenable to their employees.

Although in the West significant changes have emerged with regard to governments becoming more democratic, Marxists have sometimes argued this doesn’t count for much, given that the conditions of working life do not have such democratic structures.

Fourthly, capitalism is also argued to encourage materialistic and consumerist attitudes in people. These false needs present people with an unhealthy value system, focusing on the pursuit of consumer goods as a way of achieving happiness and fulfilment. Such individualistic, commodity-focused attitudes are ultimately un rewarding, and can never be satisfied.

Andrew Collier writes:

[In most historical human societies... unlimited desire for wealth is regarded as a vice, indeed an unnatural perversion of human nature... But in the capitalist world, it is regarded as a virtue. When villagers in a ‘primitive’, self-sufficient community are taught a more efficient way of producing their staple goods so they can do so in half the time, they may tend to work half as long and spend the rest of the time talking to their friends and neighbours. Western economists tend to regard this as ‘irrational’. If they were ‘rational’ (read: covetous) they would spend all their spare time producing surplus goods and selling them.]

Fifthly, capitalism has a bad history (and present) of treating particular groups of people in a discriminatory and exploitative manner, aside from the working class in general. For example, Marxists have sometimes claimed that the root cause of attitudes such as racism can, at least in part, be attributable to capitalism. For example, in capitalist societies, the working classes are often in competition with each other, because this system of economic organisation by no means guarantees there is decent work available for all. Indigenous residents of states will then often place the blame for this situation on the presence of immigrant communities, who are felt to be taking jobs that are rightfully ‘theirs’. In response to this, Marxists have argued, firstly, those in control of the capitalist state do little to discourage workers from having this hostile view of other workers, and, secondly, the working classes wrongly view their oppressors as being other workers, rather than the capitalist ruling classes who perpetuate such a system.

A similar dynamic can be argued to be encouraged whenever one group of workers engages in industrial action such as strikes, in that the ruling classes are all too keen to present those carrying out such activities as being the source of the problem. In cases such as this, Marxists are keener to suggest that the capitalist conditions which encourage industrial action should be the focus of all workers’ discontent. The ruling class, Marxists claim, find it far more in their interests that everyone views groups such as trade unions as troublemakers,
rather than thinking of the employers in this way, or at least the capitalist-friendly laws which allow employers to treat their employees in exploitative ways.

Sixthly, capitalism’s commitments to continual economic growth and profitability have been criticised by Marxists. These values encourage the ruling classes to get more and more profitable labour out of the working class, which provides incentives to do such things as (1) lower wages, (2) avoid costly regulations that may have been set up – e.g. safer working conditions, paid and/or voluntary overtime, and (3) look for cheaper employment options in countries which do not have such regulations in the first place, leading to unemployment and an overall driving down of wages. No matter how much profit is made, it is never enough, and in the quest to be more ‘efficient’, there are often negative effects on the workers.

Seventhly, and in connection with this, Marxists argue that states run on capitalist principles are very likely, if they are powerful enough, to seek out the resources and goods of other states, so that they can be turned to their own profits. Many businesses are now globalised, and Marxists have raised concerns that this has led to ever widespread exploitation of the international workforce. Also, a common Marxist analysis of the reasons behind war is that they are the result of capitalist states wishing to secure valuable commodities around the world. Therefore, capitalism has an imperialist aspect to it as well.

Eightly, class conflict occurs because of the differing interests of the two classes, also known as their class consciousness. The ruling class feel they have a strong common need to protect private property interests, to promote and protect businesses, and to keep taxes as low as possible. The working class are more concerned with welfare issues, higher wages, good working conditions, and policies that promote greater material equality. It is impossible for both sides to achieve these goals at the same time, thereby leading to class conflict, one of the defining features of capitalism.

A further key concern for Marxists can be found in their attitudes to private property. In opposition to liberals and conservatives, Marxists have argued private property is not a ‘natural’ phenomenon. In keeping with their communal stance, Marxists argue wealth is produced by collective effort, so it is wrong that property should be owned by individuals rather than communities. Economic inequalities cause a divide between the classes that limits cooperation, because it is harder to associate and identify with those from a substantially different economic background to you.

As noted above, the existence of private property also encourages materialism and consumerism, making us think that happiness and fulfilment is to be found in the pursuit of financial wealth, possessions, designer brands and shopping. These values are further reinforced through such things as the mainstream media and advertising. Were people to overcome their condition of false consciousness and recognise that a more satisfying life can be found in communality rather than individualism, greater happiness would be the result.

Marx writes:

Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation.

It has been objected that upon the abolition of private property all work will cease, and universal laziness will overtake us.

According to this, bourgeois society ought long ago to have gone to the dogs through sheer idleness; for those of its members who work, acquire nothing, and those who acquire anything, do not work.

Andrew Collier adds:
Both the invisibility of class exploitation and complacency [in the modern West] about the rich-poor divide between countries may stem from the fact that, in capitalist societies, people think oppression means what it meant in pre-capitalist societies, that is, personal relations of mastery and servitude; where this does not exist, people do not believe that there can be oppression. But in capitalist societies, such personal relations are not the main form that oppression takes. Marx has shown that inequality in ownership of the sorts of things that everyone depends on is the basis of all oppression. The worker who has a job also has ‘master-slave’ relations with his or her boss. But the unemployed worker, who has not, is the more oppressed.

Ownership of what others lack is both what enables the owner to benefit at the expense of the non-owner, and is also what deprives the non-owner of basic freedoms... What is property, if not the power to block other people’s access to something? The illusion that keeps people’s consciences clear in capitalist society is the illusion that property is a relation between the owner and the owned, and does not affect anyone else. Marx shows that... [y]ou can be an oppressor simply by owning what other people need and lack.

Another label which can be applied to Marxism is that of revolutionary socialism, given its belief that the only way to remove the oppressive nature of the capitalist state is to overthrow it. Revolution is regarded as necessary as it is not felt that the abolition of the capitalist state can be achieved through reformist means alone. The reason for this is that those in a position of power and wealth will not give up their privileges without a fight. Unfortunately for the working class, forcefully defending their economic interests is something the ruling class is always very good at doing. Consequently, Marxists often speak of there being a ‘class war’ between the classes.

Marx argues human history has been a history of conflict between oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited. Societies can be seen to have progressed through several historical stages:

1. Primitive communism, tribal society – material scarcity provides the main source of conflict
2. Slavery – conflict between masters and slaves
3. Feudalism – conflict between land owners and serfs
4. Capitalism – conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat

Movement from one type of society to another involves significant conflict and the alteration of circumstances of power and control. Moving away from capitalism will necessarily require the proletarian revolt against the bourgeoisie, in opposition to the oppression that class conflict has created. Although the ruling class has more resources (e.g. police, army) and is more organised and accustomed to defending its interests than the workers typically are, the workers have the advantage of numbers, and the ability to withdraw their labour – which is what allows the capitalists to maintain their social position in the first place.

Marx cautions that the bourgeoisie will not give up their privileges without a fight, and those who are not convinced by the morality of socialist arguments will have to be dealt with, their bourgeois ‘counter-revolutions’ defeated, for the greater good of everyone. To help organise against these counter-revolutions, a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat needs to be formed – a state run by the workers, for the workers, on democratic principles. Once the bourgeois threat has disappeared, the state can ‘wither away’, to be replaced with a stateless, classless society with common ownership of wealth. Capitalism would then be replaced with communism.

Because of these arguments, it is somewhat controversial to place Marx at the libertarian end of the social spectrum, as he does argue for the necessity of a dictatorial regime. However, as the end goal is of a free society, the case for his libertarianism can also be made. Also, as mentioned earlier, placing Marxism on the
social scale is further made challenging by the number of groups who firmly argue they are Marxist in their philosophies, who occupy all positions from authoritarianism to libertarianism.

It can be said that Marx did not know – and could not have known – how resilient capitalism would prove to be. For example, workers have in many countries become increasingly less revolutionary, largely because of things like the welfare state and the development of the middle classes, who Marxists typically regard as being simply better-off members of the working class, are in effect dissuaded from revolutionary activity by being passed down a few more privleges from the ruling class in order to keep them complacently satisfied. Such ‘divide and rule’ tactics lead further to the workers placing undue focus on perceived conflicts and disputes between themselves – for example, with privileged workers turning on the less privileged (accusations of ‘welfare scrounging’, ‘laziness’, the view that there is the ‘deserving’ poor and the ‘undeserving’ poor, public sector workers vs. private sector workers).

One response to this resilience of capitalism that Marxists have made is to view the economic situation on a global rather than national level. Although in industrialised states there exists for many a far greater quality of life than existed a few decades ago (although there is still crippling poverty even in these places), the division between rich and poor has grown even further, with whole states oppressed by others in the pursuit of profit. However, this presents further difficulties for the possibility of Marxist revolution, as it would need to be on an international scale to be truly effective.

Marx himself writes very little about the details of what a post-capitalist society would be like. He is more focused on presenting arguments that capitalism states are oppressive, and need to be done away with. However, a communist society would be stateless, classless, and with an emphasis on communality and common ownership of goods. The finer details would have to be something which are worked out later on. Perhaps in the same way that somebody critical of feudalism could not have envisaged capitalism, it is extremely difficult to speculate from our current position as to what a post-capitalist world would be like.

In looking at Marxism and its view on the nature and purpose of the state, AQA specifies the focus should be on the state as an oppressor, Marxist... views of the state. This section of the handbook began with analysis of Marxist arguments, which you should regard as essential for the exam.

The following socialist positions covered here – i.e. social democracy – shows how socialist political theory has changed and split off into a competing variety. This serves as a good comparative theory, which if discussed in examination would show a well-developed political understanding. However, it is supplementary to the core theory of Marxism, so put your revision priority onto this.

**Social democracy**

Other variants of socialism have not been so hostile to the capitalist state, and are consequently less likely to paint it in such oppressive shades. The ideology of social democracy agrees with Marxism (to an extent) that capitalism states have an undesirably inegalitarian distribution of wealth, and have also exploited those lower on the economic scale. However, the social democratic solution to this is not a revolutionary overthrow of the state, as they believe capitalism can be regulated and reorganised to work better for everyone. Through such state interventionist methods, the relationship between the classes can become more peaceful and beneficial, rather than one of conflict. In addition to this, social democrats often have the view that capitalism is a very effective method of generating wealth and encouraging innovation. While ‘pure’ capitalism is extremely undesirable, a strongly regulated variety of it is not.

Social democrats argue the state should ensure everyone has equality of opportunity, so that all have the chance to succeed, or fail, depending on their individual efforts. The state must also provide welfare...
programmes to assist the disadvantaged, redistributing resources and funding nationalised public services through means of progressive taxation. Social democrats argue the state is a very useful tool for ensuring such an enormous task gets done — therefore, states should not be abolished. Furthermore, as the primary political concern in social democracy is that of meeting the needs of the people, this is a task that is best given to the state rather than private businesses, because as a result of their focus on attaining a profit, they may be tempted to cut corners and exploit individuals in order to get the job done.

Along with a more extensive support of welfare and economic regulation, what distinguishes social democracy from modern liberalism is a greater emphasis on class consciousness and conflict. As a guiding political principle, modern liberalism’s focus is on increasing freedom, while social democracy’s focus is on decreasing economic inequality.

### Anarchism

Anarchism is perhaps an even more misused word than other political terms we have encountered so far. It is often used to refer to a situation of chaos, violence, conflict and disorder. Anarchists have frequently argued this is not the case (although some have been in favour of insurrectionary activity against the state), but the word still has a commonly pejorative connotation. Being an anarchist can involve a wide range of economic views, but on the social scale, all types of anarchism are united in their rejection of the state. Consequently, a defining feature of anarchism is its wish for a society without centralised government.

It is important to understand what anarchists mean by this, and why they argue for it. Anarchism is deeply suspicious of any system that involves people having power over others. Although any ideology could claim to be opposed to unjustified power, anarchists have a broader definition of what this involves.

As with socialism, anarchism views human nature as both rational and plastic. It places a great emphasis on how much we value and benefit from our freedom and autonomy. Therefore, any political system which threatens these desires is looked at very critically by anarchists.

Further anarchist conceptions of human nature depend on the type of anarchism. Left-wing anarchists argue human nature is communal, while right-wing anarchists argue human nature is atomist. But regardless of the type of anarchism, the ideology can be said to have the most positive and optimist conception of human nature. Communal anarchists feel people are fundamentally sociable and cooperative, and individualists argue people are by nature egoist and self-sufficient. Both wings agree that states have a corrupting, oppressive influence which results in humanity going against these natural tendencies.

States receive particular critical focus by anarchists, as they have the most power, but anarchism is hostile to all forms of coercion. States exert this power over everyone who lives within them, requiring compulsory obedience to their laws, and punishing those who oppose them with oppression and violence. Because of this attitude, anarchism can be described as an anti-statist ideology, meaning they are opposed to the institution of the state. (Other ideologies, which argue the state is necessary, are statist.) Like Marxists, they regard the state as an oppressor which should be abolished. However, the reasons anarchists provide for this view are more varied than those found within Marxism, as we will see below.
Anarchists argue the state provides a minority of individuals with an unjustifiable and unequal amount of power. Those who have this power invariably oppress others – and this happens even in the most libertarian of states, with those who have power gaining a desire for more of it, which they then make use of against other people. We are all born naturally free, and the state unjustly places limits on this freedom. States and governments may claim to operate in the interests of, for example, ‘the people’, or ‘the workers’, but anarchists note that even in such situations, a power relation exists, favouring those who have it over those who don’t.

Anarchists oppose the state and other oppressively hierarchical institutions because they claim they are without satisfactory justification, are not required for organisational purposes, and have undesirable consequences. For example, they channel privilege and wealth to particular groups e.g. the ruling classes, one gender more than another, one ethnic group more than another etc. States are typically corrupt, maintaining and entrenching inequalities, domination and exploitation. They are an incredibly expensive drain on resources. They are a major source of war, and a major source of major war.

Arguments for a minimal state, such as put forward by classical liberals, do not go far enough for anarchists. While liberals often think of the state as a ‘necessary evil’, anarchists argue it is an unnecessary one. All statist ideologies claim we have political obligation, a duty to obey the law of the state, but anarchists do not see there being good justification for this claim. Anarchists find unconvincing retro-justification attempts to suggest that a (minimal) state evolved out of state-like security agencies into its modern form. Instead, anarchists are keen to note that states are often existent through conquest and colonisation, largely using military means rather than justifiable arguments in order to secure their power.

Statists can argue that states provide optimal public services and the preservation of public order. However, many states do a terrible job at this, so anarchism could claim it only needs to show its alternatives are only better than the worst state in order to come across as a more appealing alternative. Nonetheless, most anarchists make more positive claims about their own theories than this.

Anarchists argue there is no reason why societies should not institute and regulate specialised bodies coordinated among themselves to ensure the adequate maintenance or production of various types of public goods. This includes the control of damaging anti-social behaviour e.g. activities which within the legal system of a state would be known as ‘crimes’. Real examples include postal and communication arrangements, and international regulatory bodies in sport. What is important is that these bodies are fully democratic, voluntary and non-coercive, and that anyone who is part of them is instantly recallable by the people they might be representing.

Anarchists claim that people who live in states come more and more to expect the government to do what they might do themselves, or organise together to do. The state establishes conditions for its own survival, and one of these conditions is to become needed.

Discussing the key positions of anarchism, Andrew Heywood writes:

[The state is a coercive body whose laws must be obeyed because they are backed up by the threat of punishment... The state can deprive individuals of their property, their liberty and ultimately, through capital punishment, their life. The state is also exploitative in that it robs individuals of their property through a system of taxation, once again backed up by the force of law and the possibility of punishment... The state is destructive... Individuals are required to fight, kill and die in wars that are invariably precipitated by a quest for territorial expansion, plunder or national glory by one state at the expense of others.]

The basis of this critique of the state lies in the anarchist view of human nature. Although anarchists subscribe to a highly optimistic if not utopian view of human potential, they are also deeply pessimistic about the
corrupting influence of political authority and economic inequality. Human beings can be either ‘good’ or ‘evil’ depending on the political and social circumstances in which they live. People who would otherwise be cooperative, sympathetic and sociable, become nothing less than oppressive tyrants when raised up above others by power, privilege or wealth.

...However, anarchism is not simply based upon a belief in human ‘goodness’... Although the human ‘core’ may be morally and intellectually enlightened, a capacity for corruption lurks within each and every human being... [Anarchists] regard human nature as ‘plastic’, in the sense that it is shaped by the social, political and economic circumstances within which people live.

The anarchist Errico Malatesta (b. 1853 in Santa Maria Capua Vetere, Kingdom of the Two Sicilies d. 1932 in the Kingdom of Italy) argues the following:

The basic function of government everywhere in all time, whatever title it adopts and whatever its origin and organisation may be, is always that of oppressing and exploiting the masses, of defending the oppressors and exploiters; and its principal, characteristic and indispensable, instruments are the police agent, the tax collector, the soldier and the gaoler.

The anarchist Noam Chomsky (b. 1929 in Pennsylvania, USA) says:

I think it only makes sense to seek out and identify structures of authority, hierarchy, and domination in every aspect of life, and to challenge them; unless a justification for them can be given, they are illegitimate, and should be dismantled, to increase the scope of human freedom.

An example of an exertion of power which Chomsky thinks is legitimate is when a parent prevents their child from blindly running out into the road. He claims it is not difficult to justify why restraining the child in such a situation is justifiable. However, he does not believe it is so easy to justify the levels of power and coercion which states possess.

The anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (b. 1809 in Besancon, France d. 1865 in Paris, France) claims:

To be governed is to be watched, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, regulated, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, checked, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right nor the wisdom nor the virtue to do so. To be governed is to be at every operation, at every transaction noted, registered, counted, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, prevented, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, drilled, fleeced, exploited, monopolized, extorted from, squeezed, hoaxed, robbed; then at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, vilified, harassed, hunted down, abused, clubbed, disarmed, bound, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed, and to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, derided, outraged, dishonored. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality.

The anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (b. 1814 in Pryamukhino, Russian Empire d. 1876 in Bern, Switzerland) says:

Nothing is as dangerous for man’s morality as the habit of commanding. The best of men, the most intelligent, unselfish, generous and pure, will always and inevitably be corrupted in this pursuit. Two failings inherent in the exercise of power never fail to produce this demoralisation: contempt for the masses, and, for the man in power, an exaggerated sense of his own worth.

And he also says:

Does it follow that I reject all authority? Far from my mind is such a thought. In the matter of boots, I refer to the authority of the bootmaker; concerning houses, canals, or railroads, I consult that of the architect or engineer. For such and such knowledge I apply to such and such a specialist. But I allow neither the bootmaker nor the architect nor the specialist to impose his authority on me. I listen to them freely and with all the respect
merited by their intelligence, their character, and their knowledge, though reserving always my incontestable right of criticism and censure.

This last point makes a clear distinction between those who are ‘an authority’ on something, and those who are ‘in authority’. Authority figures, in the sense of those with knowledge and expertise, are by no means rejected by anarchists, but their skills do not mean it is justified for them to exert power over others.

All states exhibit a concern with some form of ‘national identity’, which anarchists argue results in undesirable consequences for minority groups and anyone perceived to be opposed to ‘national interests’. States claim complete authority over their subjects, and are compulsory, in that everyone born into the society is forced to recognise certain obligations to the state which governs that society. States claim a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within their territorial area. It is essentially inevitable that states are therefore centralised, authoritarian and coercive. Because of these features, anarchists oppose them.

States have a centre of power, the government, which anarchism removes. Anarchism thus implies decentralisation, but in a precise sense. Eliminating the centre does not mean removing all structures. It leaves available the possibility of a rich variety of structures, including network arrangements with no centres or with multiple ‘centres’, such as federal structures, syndicates, and (in anarcho-capitalism) free market structures.

With no centralised power system, anarchist theories of all kinds present different arguments on how society should be run. There should be organisation, but that organisation should be by acceptable means. This entails non-coercive, non-authoritarian organisation.

Anarchism has been criticised, even more so than socialism, for utopianism – i.e. putting forward arguments on how society should be that are unattainable and unnecessarily optimistic. Arguments made against it include the view that human nature does not lend itself to self-organisation without a state, and that dealing with internal and external violence would be too problematic without states.

Anarchists argue states are major sources of corruption and crime, inducing much of the evil it is supposed to remove. Firstly, it prosecutes for many victimless crimes that go against its morality. Secondly, it acts to preserve its questionable monopolies, such as banking and policing. Thirdly, states support social outcomes involving gross inequalities and privatisation of wealth and resources, which results in property crime. The anarchist Emma Goldman (b. 1869 in Kovno, Russian Empire d. 1940 in Ontario, Canada) claims that:

Crime is naught but misdirected energy. So long as every institution of today… economic, political, social, and moral… conspires to misdirect human energy into wrong channels; so long as most people are out of place doing the things they hate to do, living a life they loathe to live, crime will be inevitable, and all the laws on the statutes can only increase, but never do away with, crime.

The anarchist Alexander Berkman (b. 1870 in Vilnius, Russian Empire d. 1936 in Nice, France) writes:

‘But who will protect us against crime and criminals?’ you demand.

Rather ask yourself whether government really protects us against them. Does not government itself create and uphold conditions which make for crime? Does not the invasion and violence upon which all governments
rest cultivate the spirit of intolerance and persecution, of hatred and more violence? Does not crime increase with the growth of poverty and injustice fostered by the government? Is not government itself the greatest injustice and crime?

Crime is the result of economic conditions, of social inequality, of wrongs and evils of which government and monopoly are the parents. Government and law can only punish the criminal. They neither cure nor prevent crime. The only real cure for crime is to abolish its causes, and this the government can never do because it is there to preserve those very causes. Crime can be eliminated only by doing away with the conditions that create it. Government cannot do it.

In looking at anarchism and its view on the nature and purpose of the state, AQA specifies the focus should be on the state as an oppressor, ... anarchist views of the state. This section of the handbook began with analysis of common anarchist arguments, which you should regard as essential for the exam.

The following two anarchist positions covered here – i.e. left-wing anarchism and right-wing anarchism – show how anarchist political theory is split into competing varieties. These serve as good comparative theories, which if discussed in examination would show a well-developed political understanding. However, they are supplementary to the core theory of ‘general’ anarchism, so put your revision priority onto this.

**Left-wing anarchism**

Left-wing anarchism is a term used to describe theories that can be considered a form of ‘ultrasocialism’. The communal aspect of socialism – arguing we are social animals who operate best in communities, focusing on the common good rather than their individual self-interest – is taken to its limits, stating the proper, natural kind of relationship between people is one of sympathy, cooperation and sociability. The state is seen as unnecessary and oppressive, greatly impeding any hope of social solidarity.

Left-wing anarchists can share many of the same economic arguments made by Marxists (see above), arguing for a complete rejection of capitalism, on the grounds it leads to exploitation and class conflict. Such anarchists have argued that the state intervening in capitalism merely allows capitalism, and the class exploitation that goes along with it, to continue. In other words, the only way to get rid of the negative results of capitalism is to get rid of capitalism. Reform is not enough.

One area in which Marxists and left-wing anarchists can disagree is with regard to how we should carry out the transition from capitalism to a stateless society. Marxists, as we saw above, call for a dictatorship of the proletariat, but left-wing anarchists regard any state as evil and corrupting, and must be done away with entirely. Strengthening state power, even if the intention is that it is done so temporarily and in the interests of the working class, is a spectacularly bad idea. The state must not ‘wither away’, as Marx suggested, it must be abolished. Left-wing anarchists question how and why this workers’ state will ever cease to exist, given that a key feature of states is their perpetuating their own existence. Whether we are governed by workers or capitalists, we are still being governed, and states are pretty ‘wither-proof’.

Some left-wing anarchists
- Mikhail Bakunin
- Alexander Berkman
- Murray Bookchin
- Noam Chomsky
- Emma Goldman
- Peter Kropotkin
- Errico Malatesta
- Georges Sorel
- Nicolas Walter
The anarchist Murray Bookchin (b. 1921 in New York, USA d. 2006 in Vermont, USA) argues another key difference between left-wing anarchism and Marxism is that while Marxism places its emphasis on the role of economics and the hierarchies between the classes, the concerns of left-wing anarchism are more broadly focused on hierarchies of all kinds. So, while left-wing anarchists do not deny the oppressive nature of the economic hierarchy of class, Bookchin emphasises it should equally be recognised that other oppressive hierarchies (can) also exist. For example, between genders, races, parents and children, teachers and pupils, religious leaders and their followers. Marxists are by no means supportive or ignorant of such hierarchies, but Bookchin’s claim is that Marxism looks at all issues through the filter of economics, as seen in the arguments relating to base and superstructure (see above), whereas anarchism does not necessarily do this.

To illustrate this point further, a comparison can be drawn between Marxist and left-wing anarchist variations of feminism. There is a tendency within Marxist feminism to focus on a capitalist root of sexism. In a capitalist system, Marxists may argue, gender inequalities are perpetuated as they serve the interests of capital. For instance, the ‘traditional’ work of women – i.e. domestic work – is devalued under capitalism, it not being considered ‘proper’ labour, at least not in the sense it should be financially remunerated for. This free labour – at least from the perspective of those who exploit it – remains free and considered a less valuable type of labour under capitalism, with correspondingly low opinions of those who carry it out. In other words, the structures of capitalism position, reinforce and maintain ‘women’s work’, and by association women themselves, in an inferior relationship to ‘men’s work’ and men as a group. The economic conditions of capitalism are argued to have the social consequence of sexism. Because of this, Marxist feminists can conclude, if we wish to abolish sexism, we must abolish capitalism – and if we wish to abolish capitalism, we will abolish sexism.

On this issue, while feminist left-wing anarchists may agree that capitalism helps to continue gender inequalities in this way, they are less likely to agree that capitalism and sexism necessarily go hand in hand. Capitalism as a system is unavoidably exploitative, and took advantage of pre-existing gender inequalities when it was established. A non-sexist capitalism can be envisioned with greater ease by left-wing anarchists, as can a sexist post-capitalism. The abolition of capitalism will not necessarily abolish all exploitative hierarchies – only those necessarily tied to economics, such as the relation between capitalists and workers.

The left-wing anarchist Nicolas Walter (b. 1934 in London, England d. 2000) says this:

*The main function of the state is in fact to hold down the people, to limit freedom... All the benevolent functions of the state can be exercised and often have been exercised by voluntary organisations. Here the modern state resembles the medieval church. In the Middle Ages the church was involved in all essential social activities, and it was difficult to believe that the activities were possible without it. Only the church could baptise, marry and bury people, and they had to learn that it did not actually control birth, love and death. Every public act needed an official religious blessing... and people had to learn that the act was just as effective without the blessing. The church interfered in and often controlled those aspects of communal life which are now dominated by the state. People have learnt to realise that the participation of the church is unnecessary and even harmful; what they now have to learn is that the domination of the state is equally pernicious and superfluous. We need the state just as long as we think we do, and everything it does can be done just as well or even better without the sanction of authority.*

*...[Most anarchists believe the state] is the representative of the people who own or control the wealth of the community and the oppressor of the people who do the work which creates that wealth. The state cannot redistribute wealth fairly because it is the main agency of the unfair distribution... The state will not wither away – it must be deliberately abolished by people taking power away from the rulers and wealth away from the rich; these two actions are linked, and one without the other will always be futile. Anarchy in its truest sense means a society without either powerful or wealthy people.*
This does not mean that anarchists reject organisation, though here is one of the strongest prejudices about anarchism... Anarchists actually want much more organisation, though organisation without authority. The prejudice about anarchism derives from a prejudice about organisation; people cannot see that organisation does not depend on authority, that it actually works best without authority.

A moment’s thought will show that when compulsion is replaced by consent there will have to be more discussion and planning, not less. Everyone who is involved in a decision will be able to take part in making it, and no one will be able to leave the work to paid officials or elected representatives. Without rules to observe or precedent to follow, every decision will have to be made afresh. Without rulers to obey or leaders to follow, we shall all have to make up our own minds. To keep all this going, the multiplicity and complexity of links between individuals will be increased, not reduced. Such organisation may be untidy and inefficient, but it will be much closer to the needs and feelings of the people concerned. If something cannot be done without the old kind of organisation, without authority and compulsion, it probably isn’t worth doing and would be better left undone.

What anarchists do reject is the institutionalisation of organisation, the establishment of a special group of people whose function is to organise other people. Anarchist organisation would be fluid and open; as soon as organisation becomes hardened and closed, it falls into the hands of a bureaucracy, becomes the instrument of a particular class, and reverts to the expression of authority instead of the co-ordination of society.

Noam Chomsky says:

Candidates say ‘Vote for me, and I will do so-and-so for you’. Few believe them, but more important, a different process is unthinkable: that in their unions, political clubs, and other popular organisations people should formulate their own plans and projects and put forth candidates to represent them. Even more unthinkable is that the general public should have a voice in decisions about investment, production, the character of work, and other basic aspects of life. The minimal conditions for functioning democracy have been removed far beyond thought, a remarkable victory of the doctrinal system.

And he also says:

Modern industrial civilisation has developed within a certain system of convenient myths. The driving force of modern industrial civilisation has been individual material gain, which is accepted as legitimate, even praiseworthy, on the grounds that private vices yield public benefits, in the classic formulation. Now, it’s long been understood – very well – that a society that is based on this principle will destroy itself in time. It can only persist with whatever suffering and injustice it entails as long as it’s possible to pretend that the destructive forces that humans create are limited, that the world is an infinite resource, and that the world is an infinite garbage can.

At this stage of history, either one of two things is possible. Either the general population will take control of its own destiny and will concern itself with community interests, guided by values of solidarity, and sympathy, and concern for others, or, alternatively, there will be no destiny for anyone to control.

As long as some specialised class is in a position of authority, it is going to set policy in the special interests that it serves. But the conditions of survival, let alone justice, require rational social planning in the interests of the community as a whole, and by now that means the global community.
The question, in brief, is whether democracy and freedom are values to be preserved, or threats to be avoided. In this possibly terminal phase of human existence, democracy and freedom are more than values to be treasured—they may well be essential to survival.

Anarcho-communism is a variety of left-wing anarchism, which focuses on communities working together in a shared existence. Work can and should be a social experience, with everyone concentrating on producing what is good for the community, rather than what is financially profitable. Furthermore, what is made by the community should be owned by the community rather than single individuals. Therefore, anarcho-communists have argued for common ownership of property and an end of such things as private property and money. Material goods would be allocated by need, with communities pooling together to work out what they require and then, perhaps through cooperation with other communities, working together to produce it.

Capitalists are likely to argue that such an economic system is bound to be terribly inefficient, demanding a great deal of time from all members of the community, which they would be unable and/or unwilling to give. Anarcho-communists can respond that even if capitalism is more efficient than communism, it is preferable for other reasons—namely, greater freedom, autonomy and involvement for all concerned rather than the privileged few. However, the assumption that communist economics is inefficient can also be questioned, as it can be pointed out that a lot of time is spent in capitalist economies on producing goods and services that are surplus to our needs.

Like Marxists, anarcho-communists argue private property encourages materialism and acquisitiveness, and leads to social inequality and conflict, a principal cause of crime and social disorder.

Of all ideologies, anarcho-communism is perhaps the most optimistic about the capacity of people to cooperate together. A major theory associated with anarcho-communism is Pyotr Kropotkin’s (b. 1842 in Moscow, Russian Empire d. 1921 in Dmitrov, Russian SFSR) idea of mutual aid. In opposition to the social Darwinist theories supported by the right-wing, Kropotkin states that species are not successful because they are competitive and aggressive, but because they are able to focus their energies cooperatively on achieving what they want. In evolutionary terms, cooperation in species leads to far greater things than conflict does, so Herbert Spencer’s view of ‘survival of the fittest’ is flawed. Kropotkin argues capitalism turns people’s focus away from mutual aid and more to selfish individualism.

A number of anarcho-communists have expressed admiration for small communities, along the lines of city-states or communes. This focus is sometimes described as localism. Advantages of this way of living are argued to include:

- Strengthening compassion and solidarity, lowering selfishness and greed.
- Decisions are made through direct democracy, guaranteeing a high level of participation and equality.
- Communes are small-scale/human-scale, meaning people manage their affairs through face-to-face interaction.
- Communities would be voluntary—anyone could leave or join.
- Self-sustaining, providing what they need, with little of the waste and unnecessary products that capitalism creates. Also, this would limit competition with other communities. If communities have something another wants, they can work out methods of exchange that are mutually beneficial.
- Voluntary links can be made with other communities, forming federations between groups to help provide for any wants that cannot be met on a local level—e.g. access to resources that are not found in the area. With modern technologies, there is no reason to imagine the communication between and within different communities would not be strong and well-connected.
A major criticism made against anarcho-communists is the question of how minority views in communities will be treated, along with the presence of individuals who cause harm to others. With regard to minority views, a typical response to these problems is to argue that anyone can choose to leave and form their own communities, so their freedom is not greatly affected. Perhaps more importantly than this, it can be argued that hierarchical power structures have been a major force behind particular groups receiving discrimination. Therefore, a society run on anarcho-communist lines would not be so oppressive and divisive.

With regard to the treatment of harm-causing individuals (they cannot truly be called criminals, as without a state there is by definition no law-breaking), anarcho-communists often argue, firstly, such behaviour would be greatly minimised due to the effect of communal living on human nature, secondly, rehabilitation would take precedence over retribution in dealing with wrong-doers, and thirdly, such individuals would find themselves excluded from communities who would simply not tolerate their behaviour. Without a formal police force, the community would take on this role, as they recognise this is no longer a task they can delegate to the state.

**Anarcho-syndicalism** is a further variety of left-wing anarchism, sharing many of the critiques of states, hierarchies and capitalism which anarcho-communism subscribes to. A key difference between the two approaches lies in their attitudes with regard to how anarchist societies should be organised. Anarcho-syndicalism can be described as revolutionary trade unionism. Unions of workers, which can be structured either around different industries, and/or as unions of anarchist revolutionaries irrespective of their industries, are to act as ordinary, albeit especially militant, unions – e.g. bettering the position and conditions of their members through strikes, direct action, workplace sabotage etc. – but to have an additional concern with abolishing the capitalist state and redistributing the power to those previously exploited. Syndicalist unions are to be structured in ways which foreshadow the intended structures of the post-state society e.g. non-hierarchical, decentralised, democratic, safe spaces for all involved. By forming federations with other syndicalist unions, they can further their mutual causes all the more effectively.

**Right-wing anarchism**

**Right-wing anarchism** is a term used to describe theories that can be considered a form of ‘ultraliberalism’. The atomist aspect of liberalism – arguing we are rational, egoist, self-reliant individuals – is taken to its limits, with the most important political value being that of freedom of interference from all other individuals and institutions. We are well able to make and act on our choices that serve our own interests, and should be permitted to do so. Furthermore, being reasonable by nature, we will recognise that conflicts are better resolved through non-violent means. The state is seen as unnecessary and oppressive, as through its invariably interventionist and paternalist policies, by its very nature is the biggest threat to human freedom ever invented.

**Anarcho-capitalism** is a variety of right-wing anarchism, which argues that states intervening in the capitalist economy in any way takes it away from ‘pure’ capitalism, which needs to be left unrestricted in order to work most effectively. In this respect, they share a common economic ground with classical and neo-liberals, agreeing an economically laissez-faire approach is required.

Anarcho-capitalists argue government should be abolished and replaced with unregulated capitalism – a genuinely free market system. Property should be owned by individuals, who are to voluntarily engage in market transactions with others for any services they require. Consequently, the individual is completely free from economic interventionism, and the market organises everything. It can be said the arguments made in favour of the laissez-faire approach are most firmly held by anarcho-capitalists, who see no useful role for the state whatsoever.
States impede capitalism, through restricting trade and creating monopolies through protectionist policies. Furthermore, any services provided by states will be inefficient, as they are not encouraged by competition with other industries to offer better services. Therefore, all goods and industries should be in private hands, so they more effectively serve our needs.

Whereas neo-liberals felt the state should have a role in providing such minimal services as the judiciary, police forces and armed services, anarcho-capitalists argue that these can all be provided by the market. Privately-owned protection services and courts can be contracted to solve any disputes that might arise. Such organisations would offer a better service than publicly-owned ones, as they would be forced to compete with other businesses, and so be compelled to offer the best, most affordable service they can. Murray Rothbard (b. 1926 d. 1995 in New York, USA) argues that if such services were able to guarantee justice, then rational, enlightened individuals would voluntarily go along with what they did. This would mean, for example, a privately run court would have to develop a reputation for fairness and appropriate sentencing in order to attract custom. A state-run, monopolistic court system does not have this concern, because there is no competition, so is likely to be more inefficient and corrupt. In every area of life, anarcho-capitalists argue private-run initiatives are preferable to those organised by collectives or the state.

Liberty

What does it mean to be free?

In this topic, we will be looking at freedom, a term which can be used interchangeably with ‘liberty’. People who possess freedom have often been labelled as ‘free agents’. Along with several other key terms in (political) philosophy, it is very important to note that freedom is a contested concept, meaning there is disagreement over what it actually means to be free.

We can see that liberty is a contested term not just within academic discussions in philosophy classrooms, but also out there in the world of party politics. When politicians talk of freedom, they are not always explicit what they mean by it. Often, this suits their purposes very well, as it is a term which has lots of positive connotations for many people, so it is a popular word to make use of.

As with any other contested term you use when writing philosophy essays — e.g. ‘morality’, ‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘right’, ‘wrong’ — it is essential that you recognise its contested status. For example, if an essay title asks you to focus on liberty, you should show that you understand there are differing accounts of what this word actually refers to, or what counts as ‘true’ or ‘proper’ freedom.

Let’s start by looking at some of the different conceptions that exist of what is meant by this word:

Individuals can be said to have social freedom when they are able to make choices about how they live their lives in the social sphere. For example, religion, sexual orientation, speech, thought, action, protest, assembly, joining a trade union, forming/joining a political organisation, abortion, marriage, having children, adoption.

Individuals can be said to have economic freedom — a.k.a. ‘material freedom’ — when they are able to make choices relating to trade and business. For example, engaging in business ventures, and freedom of choice in the marketplace for consumers, employers and employees. Economic freedom is likely to involve such things as free trade, deregulation, privatisation, being able to choose where you work and/or who works for you, and what the conditions of labour are.
With reference to the two-dimensional political spectrum, attitudes to social and economic liberty can be summed up as follows:

7. Give at least two reasons as to why social freedom could be considered a good thing.

8. Give at least two reasons as to why limiting social freedom could be considered a good thing.

9. Give at least two reasons as to why economic freedom could be considered a good thing.

10. Give at least two reasons as to why limiting economic freedom could be considered a good thing.

Further contestation arises between what has come to be called negative and positive liberty, following Isaiah Berlin’s (b. 1909 in Riga, Latvia d. 1997 in Oxford, England) essay ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’.

It is important to note that these terms refer to two opposing standpoints that can be taken on what it means to be truly free. In other words, they are competing definitions of what liberty actually involves.

Another point worth noting is that just because you support one definition of liberty over the other does not necessarily mean that you think liberty is a good thing. For instance, someone could agree that freedom should be defined in ‘negative’ terms, and also believe that freedom is not something which should be promoted and defended.
**Negative liberty** is also referred to as ‘freedom from’. Supporters of this definition typically conceive of liberty as being free from interference by others – in particular, governmental laws which prevent us from carrying out particular actions. As Berlin puts it, *political liberty in this sense is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others.*

The theory of negative freedom argues that in the absence of interference, you are free. On this account, all people who are not coerced by laws and other external constraints are equally free.

Because of this, philosophers who favour thinking of liberty in negative terms will often see the law as a major source of constraint in our lives. Therefore, the more the government leaves us alone, the freer we will be. Consequently, those who accept this definition and also regard freedom as being a good thing will typically argue against state intervention and paternalism.

11. List at least two ways in which you could currently be said to have negative freedom.

12. List at least two ways in which you could currently be said to lack negative freedom.

**Positive liberty** is also referred to as ‘freedom to’. It is typically defined as being able to do or achieve a particular thing. Philosophers who support the theory of positive liberty argue that being free from the interference of constraints placed upon us by others – i.e. being in a condition of negative liberty – does not necessarily mean we are able to attain all of our goals, and so we are not therefore truly free.

A significant reason for supporting the conception of positive freedom is if it is felt that meaningful barriers exist which serve to constrain us; barriers which are not laws. Popular examples that are given include lack of money, education or healthcare. In these cases, it can be argued that an absence of specific resources holds us back from attaining our goals, meaning we do not have genuine liberty, even though we are free from legal interference.

Berlin adds:

*The ‘positive’ sense of the word ‘liberty’ derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men’s, acts of will... deciding, not being decided for... conceiving goals and policies of my own and realising them... I wish, above all, to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by references to my own ideas and purposes. I feel free to the degree that I believe this to be true, and enslaved to the degree that I am made to realise that it is not.*

Therefore, supporters of this definition who think that liberty is important are more likely to argue in favour of state interventionism and/or society being organised more communally, as this can assist us in achieving greater levels of freedom. We are being helped by others so that we can help ourselves. For instance, by increasing taxes resources can be redistributed to fund state education and healthcare services. Doing such a thing, it can be argued, increases our freedom, as we will be able to be more developed, autonomous individuals if we have such services provided for us.

In contrast to the theory of negative liberty, positive liberty argues that the absence of legal interference is not sufficient for freedom. To be free, it is necessary that we have the ability or resources to do what we want to
do – it is not enough that the law does not hold us back from carrying out a particular thing. On this account, all people who are not coerced by the law might not be equally free, as there may be other barriers to them achieving certain goals.

Berlin raises concerns that a commitment to positive liberty could in some cases lead to unnecessary intervention or manipulation. For example, if a political system is committed to moulding people in a particular way, ‘for their own good’, it may well carry out all sorts of measures – e.g. unnecessary economic redistribution, propagandist education systems – in order to help realise its political goals. We may be forced to be ‘free’, as has been decided for us by others.

13. List at least two ways in which you could currently be said to have positive freedom.

14. List at least two ways in which you could currently be said to lack positive freedom.

Speaking more broadly on the issue of liberty, Berlin notes that attaching political importance to freedom is comparatively modern. There seems to be scarcely any discussion of individual liberty as a conscious political ideal (as opposed to its actual existence) in the ancient world... The notion of individual rights was absent from the legal conceptions of the Romans and Greeks; this seems to hold equally of the Jewish, Chinese, and all other ancient civilisations that have since come to light. The domination of this ideal has been the exception rather than the rule, even in the recent history of the West.

**Why is liberty valued and how can it be promoted and defended?**

In this section, we will be looking at how different political ideologies address these issues. As we will see, one of the distinguishing features of specific ideologies is how they conceive of freedom – whether in negative or positive terms – and the extent to which they think it should be promoted and defended.

**Liberalism and freedom**

**Classical liberalism and freedom**

Liberals have often argued there is a strong connection between freedom and rights. This is because having rights protected by law promotes our freedom. For example, having the legal rights to freedom of speech or protest.

Classical liberalism typically defines freedom in negative terms, and argues such freedom is a highly desirable thing. However, classical liberals often immediately add to this point that it is necessary for the state to make and enforce particular laws (often relating to the defence of our rights, as mentioned above) in order to maximise freedom for everyone. They claim that if there were no laws at all, people would not have the maximum possible amount of freedom, because their liberty would be significantly impeded by the lawless actions of others. For instance, if there were no laws protecting our right to life, there is a greater chance that we will be killed. Therefore, the state is justified in placing some limits on our freedom, in order that we can be guaranteed greater freedoms in return.

Locke and Mill both emphasise the importance of negative freedom. Locke argues for the existence of our possessing natural, God-given rights, which states must protect. Laws by their very nature restrict what we can
do, but they are there to preserve liberty for all. Furthermore, the only type of laws that should be passed are those which promote individual freedom. The state therefore has the role of an impartial protection agency or umpire.

One strong trend in classical liberalism has been a focus on economic freedom, characterised by a commitment to *laissez-faire* economics. Mill argues, wherever possible, private organisations rather than governments should run services. He argues this will avoid government powers increasing further, leading to greater tyranny and a lack of freedom for all. He is also concerned that if the state is running most services, the majority of talented people will end up as government employees in some capacity.

Also, Mill feels that economic regulations tend to create more harm than good, as they lead to higher-priced, inferior products. This is because businesses will have to spend more of their time and resources ensuring that they meet with the requirements of state regulations, rather than producing good products and services. Nonetheless, he does accept that some regulations are acceptable, for example, *sanitary precautions, or arrangements to protect workpeople employed in dangerous occupations*.

Mill’s major argument regarding freedom is the harm principle. As he states:

*The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.*

By ‘harm’, Mill specifically means physical harm. Continuing his argument, Mill distinguishes between the following types of harmful actions:

**Self-regarding actions** – those which affect only the individual carrying them out.

**Other-regarding actions** – those which affect others.

As self-regarding actions affect only the person doing them, Mill reasons we should be free to carry them out. Therefore, it is unacceptable for the law to prevent us carrying out any self-regarding action. There should be no law blocking your freedom to harm yourself.

Mill argues the only time it is justifiable for states to make laws are when they prevent harmful, other-regarding actions. Although we have the right to carry out any actions that may harm ourselves, this is not necessarily the case with actions that harm others.

One very important thing to note here is that although Mill argues that a harmful action being other-regarding is a necessary condition for it to be rightly outlawed, it is not a sufficient condition. This means that – if Mill’s directions were followed – all laws would be preventing harmful other-regarding actions, but not all harmful other-regarding actions would be against the law.

For example, assaulting people is a harmful other-regarding action. But so is your being hired for a job when one of the other candidates will starve if they are not employed. Mill thinks the first example should be against the law, but it would be wrong if there were laws against situations like the second example, even though it is harmful and other-regarding.

Furthermore, Mill specifies it is acceptable to constrain people’s freedom if they are *a child, delirious or in some state of excitement or absorption*. In such circumstances, people do not recognise what is good for them, and so are not making choices based on their ‘real’ interests. An example Mill uses to illustrate this is a person about to cross a dangerous bridge. If the person does not know about the danger, and the only way we have to prevent them crossing is to physically restrain them, then it is acceptable to do so, as the person is being prevented from doing something – i.e. be injured/killed – that they do not really want to do. However,
Mill adds that if there are signs up informing the person about the danger of the bridge, then it is impermissible for anyone to prevent them attempting this harmful but self-regarding action.

In order to further clarify his arguments, Mill makes these additional points. Firstly, if a self-regarding action leads to the harm of others – e.g. a neglectful parent, or soldier who is drunk while on duty – then this becomes an other-regarding action, and so something we should not necessarily be free to do. Secondly, if we incite others to carry out harmful actions, then our doing so is other-regarding, and could be prevented by law. Thirdly, if someone is lazy and contributes nothing to society, this should be legally permitted as it is a cost that society can bear. However, Mill would encourage others to discuss this behaviour with such a person.

Mill holds that freedom of speech has great importance in a society. If we do not hear a wide range of views on different topics, then our options become limited. As none of us are infallible, it is wrong to prevent the ideas of others being expressed. Furthermore, progress and the discovery of truths cannot flourish in an environment where freedom of speech is not protected.

In discussing freedom of speech, Mill notes there should be no law against the speech or publication of offensive material. He argues there is an important distinction between something being offensive and something being harmful. While it can be right for the law to prevent harmful other-regarding actions, it is not appropriate for the law to prevent offensive actions. The benefits of freedom of speech, Mill argues, outweigh the danger of people being offended by things they do not want to hear or read.

When it comes to being free to choose how we wish to live, Mill notes that, like clothes, a life needs to be tailored to the individual. As others know us less well than we know ourselves, we should have the liberty to make our own choices. If we have negative freedom to lead our lives without external restrictions, we will become autonomous:

*He who chooses his plan for himself employs all his faculties... reasoning, judgment, discrimination . . . self control... provided that he is left to carry his opinions into practise at his own cost.*

Therefore, Mill can argue that those who support positive freedom, because the assistance we gain from the state leads to our leading an autonomous, empowered life, are mistaken. These benefits, Mill holds, come about when the state leaves us alone more i.e. when we are given more negative freedom. The more we are left alone to make and learn from our own choices, the better our lives will be.

**Modern liberalism and freedom**

Modern liberalism saw a shift in focus from regarding and supporting liberty in positive rather than negative terms. For instance, Thomas Hill Green (b. 1836 in Birkin, England d. 1882) argues the poor and vulnerable suffer because of their limited resources. Their being free of external, legal constraints did not mean they were truly free, as their lives were still miserable. Therefore, the state needs to engage in more interventionist measures, particularly in areas of welfare, nationalised healthcare, education and regulated improvements in the conditions of working people. Only with these provisions will everyone have the genuine freedom required to fully develop themselves and enjoy their lives. State welfare protects us from becoming poor, and therefore protects us from losing our freedom.

Nonetheless, Green argues that once these hardships are removed from people's lives, they should be left to largely live as they please. Therefore, he does not completely reject the value of negative freedom.

One contrast that can be made here between modern and (neo)classical liberalism regards what the proper role of government is. Modern liberalism could be characterised as arguing that its role is to help us through interventionist measures, whereas (neo)classical liberalism could be characterised as arguing that its role is to
do nothing more than protect our rights and freedoms through a minimal state, in order that we can then help ourselves.

**Neo-liberalism and freedom**

As we have seen, neo-liberalism returned to the concerns of classical liberalism, and in some cases amplified them. With regard to liberty, neo-liberals returned to the earlier liberal position of conceiving of freedom in negative terms, and also thinking that freedom of this type was preferable. Of particular worry among neo-liberals has been the interference of the state in the free market. A *laissez-faire* approach is the only one which will allow capitalism to truly flourish, meeting supply and demand to its fullest potential, and providing us all with the products and services we desire.

**Conservatism and freedom**

**Traditional conservatism and freedom**

Commitments to liberty can also be seen in traditional conservative ideology. Indeed, many traditional conservative philosophers and politicians have spoken of the value of freedom. However, it does not have the centrality of importance given to it by, for instance, liberals.

Edmund Burke (b. 1729 in Dublin, Ireland d. 1797 in Beaconsfield, England) argues liberty is not necessarily a good thing. For instance, an escaped prisoner has liberty, but this is not good. When judging whether freedom is good, it is essential that we look at the surrounding circumstances.

Burke argues liberty is only good when it is combined with other good things in a society. For example, the government, army, taxation, morality, tradition, property rights, peace, law and order, civility. If we are to make changes in the amount of liberty in a society, all other elements such as these need to be taken into consideration. For a change to be good, it must be gradual and in keeping with the other elements of the culture which surrounds it.

Therefore, Burke would be unable to say whether positive or negative freedom is the more preferable definition of liberty, and would also be unable to say whether liberty is a good thing in itself. In keeping with this organicist conception of the state, Burke would be likely to argue that the whole of a society needs to be looked at in order to judge what kind of freedoms fit best into it. In some cultures, positive freedom may fit in well. In others, negative liberty may be better. In yet other societies, liberty may not even be desirable at all.

While Burke shares Mill’s concern regarding the amount of power the state has over the individual, his primary concern is with social cohesion and harmony, not liberty. Following tradition is a better guide than the theoretical ideas of other ideologies. As Burke argues, the *stock of reason in each man is small*. There has been, and always will be, a hierarchy among individuals and social groups. Attempts to change this are misguided and likely to fail and/or bring about disorder.

Consequently, Burke and many other traditional conservatives argue in favour of limited government, whose principal concerns are providing security and a legal system which allows for social cohesion and shared values to develop. Any further intrusion in our freedoms is likely to be rejected as a sign of the *nanny state* – in other words, an excessively paternalist government.

However, it could be argued that the traditional conservative’s support of people being provided moral guidance through such institutions as the family, school and church shows a commitment to positive liberty. This is argued because these bodies are intervening in our lives to allow us to make the right choices.
Authoritarian conservatism and freedom

Unsurprisingly, of all the varieties of conservatism we have studied, authoritarian conservatism is the least supportive of individual freedom. Supporters of this ideology argue a strong state, likely to be monocultural in its practices and values, is of far more importance than personal freedom, providing as it does greater levels of certainty, security and consistency. With its particularly pessimistic view of human nature, authoritarian conservatism argues it is a mistake to give naturally irrational citizens too much freedom.

Thomas Hobbes argues that for our freedoms to be protected there must be an emphasis by the state on matters of law enforcement, with clear boundaries and strong penalties for offenders. This emphasis on law and order has been a common trend in conservative belief, the argument being that if crime is dealt with in a firm manner, law-abiding citizens will be able to enjoy their freedoms more, without fear of others.

Hobbes takes a view of freedom that can be clearly seen as negative. He argues freedom is ‘the silence of the laws’, meaning that where there are no legal constraints against us, we are free. However, it is important to note that while he defines freedom in negative terms, he is not supportive of people having a great deal of freedom.

Paternalist conservatism and freedom

In contrast to other varieties of conservatism, greater emphasis in defining liberty in positive terms can be seen in paternalistic conservatism. As it makes particular arguments in favour of the state providing for the poor in order to improve their position, paternalist conservatives feel that negative freedom alone is insufficient for those at the lower levels of society to secure themselves a comfortable way of living. Consequently, some intervention by the state is required, to redistribute some wealth and resources to the most needy.

The New Right and freedom

The major emphasis of the New Right has been on defining and supporting freedom in negative terms, particularly in promoting laissez-faire economics. It is argued that such non-interventionism in the market will lead to good benefits for all, as competition between businesses will provide us with what we want at the best prices, and the absence of a ‘welfare net’ will encourage a good work ethic while discouraging dependency on government handouts.

The New Right has shown particular opposition for the ‘nanny state’, arguing that government intrusion robs us of individual choice, particularly in our business decisions. However, other areas of society, such as the family, church, workplace and school, should provide us with a strong moral framework.

Socialism and freedom

Marxism and freedom

Karl Marx can be said to be highly supportive of people having freedom, given that he argues in favour of the revolutionary overthrowing of the capitalist state. As he claims people will only be free when the state has gone, he can therefore be said to define freedom in negative terms. However, the case could also be made that as he has a particular view of the kinds of conditions needed for us to be free – i.e. communism – that he actually supports a positive definition of freedom. (This seems to be Berlin’s own interpretation of Marxist attitudes to freedom).
Marx claims the laws made by capitalist states are constructed in the interests of those with property, and only help to continue economic divisions. Such laws also encourage acquisitiveness, materialism, the alienation of the working class, the pursuit of profit above all else, and an unhealthy competition between individuals who might otherwise be comrades. Such a state of affairs, holds Marx, cannot be described as ‘freedom’.

True liberty, argues Marx, will come about when the alienating effects of capitalism are brought to an end. This cannot happen under the bourgeois-run state. Our human nature can only truly flourish under communism. Marx would even be opposed to a social democratic state, as although perhaps the worst excesses of a capitalist economy would be removed, there would still exist class inequalities in terms of wealth and power. Also, profit-driven work would still be an alienating experience, and capitalist forces would be inclined to claw back any reforms which had been made.

Marx would argue that in the final communist stage of history, we would experience freedom, as there would be no state-imposed laws constraining us. Given the communal, non-capitalist arrangement of such a communist society, this negative freedom would enable us to flourish and be fully autonomous.

Capitalists could argue against Marxism that a communist society restricts the economic freedom of the individual. However, Marxists could respond to this accusation by arguing that what communism more accurately does is limit the freedom that a minority of people have in a capitalist society because of their power over others. The emphasis in communism is the freedom of the workers, not the freedom of the bourgeoisie to exploit them.

Anarchists would be keen to draw attention to Marxist arguments on the dictatorship of the proletariat, and note that this doesn’t sound a very good way to bring about freedom, particularly as they would claim this situation would not wither away as Marxists promise.

**Social democracy and freedom**

Social democrats argue that a state run on non-revolutionary socialist principles does adequately restrain capitalism enough, and that there is no need to carry through with Marx’s complete overhaul of society. Reasons for thinking this could include the fact that in many countries – for instance, the industrialised West, such as European and North American nations – the average living conditions of the working class have greatly improved since Marx’s day, thanks to restrictions made by governments to economic freedom (e.g. anti-monopoly laws, greater levels of taxation, minimum wage laws, health and safety regulations), and other interventionist measures in the social sphere (e.g. legal protections of freedom of speech, action, assembly, and joining a trade union). In other words, social democrats can argue that the overthrow of the bourgeoisie is no longer necessary – it has been shown the level of freedom and equality to be enjoyed by all can be sufficiently improved with regulation rather than revolution.

Social democracy defines freedom in positive terms, and looks upon such liberty favourably, arguing the state is a useful tool in promoting working class interests. Through such interventionist measures as progressive taxation, comprehensive education, nationalised healthcare and a strong legal defence of workers’ rights and unionisation, it is argued everyone is able to enjoy a greater level of liberty, particularly compared to how much liberty workers experience under more capitalist rule.

In response to this, Marxists (and also anarcho-communists) could argue that although many people have indeed benefitted from a more restrained version of capitalism, on a global scale the rich-poor divide is as
wide as ever, and that the great economic benefits some countries have achieved is at the expense of poorer, more vulnerable ones. While the average European or North American might be in a better economic position than they were in Marx’s time, a quite different picture emerges if we look at, for example, South America, Asia or Africa. The more social democrat first world states have simply outsourced the most unpleasant labour they rely on for their resources to less wealthy states – e.g. sweatshops. If the working class is to have an equal level of freedom across the globe, capitalism must be wholly rejected.

**Anarchism and freedom**

Given the absence of the state, and therefore laws, anarchist societies of any type can be characterised as viewing freedom in negative terms, and placing extremely high value on such freedom. Regardless of the variety of anarchism, they all believe that the arguments made by other ideologies regarding how much the state should intervene in order to secure our freedoms are essentially redundant, as the anarchists deny the need for a state in the first place. The best way the state can help us to be free is by disappearing.

Nonetheless, as with Marxism, the claim that anarchism is focused on a positive definition of liberty can also be made. Each type of anarchist theory has a view of a particular kind of society in mind, which must be worked towards through various methods (e.g. communist localism, revolutionary trade unionism, uninterrupted market forces) in order to bring about the specific brand of freedom it envisages.

**Left-wing anarchism and freedom**

As noted above, left-wing anarchists share the view with Marxists that even though a number of states have improved the freedoms and quality of life for their citizens from what they once were, if the economic situation is looked at on a global level, the spread of capitalism has been a miserable failure for the majority. For these people, it is wrong to describe them as ‘free’.

Left-wing anarchists object to Marxist arguments in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In common with anarchists of all varieties, anarcho-communists are hostile towards any individual or group holding this much power. Marx’s argument that the dictatorship is to be a temporary one with a focus on the interests of the working class has not convinced anarchists, as they worry a set-up like this will only continue, given the corrupting nature of power. Only those that rule in a state can be described as being free, particularly in a dictatorial one.

Kropotkin argues we can only have freedom when everyone else does as well. An altruistic society run on the principle of ‘mutual aid’ is the only way such freedom can be meaningfully achieved. In other words, freedom comes about when there is voluntary cooperation between individuals. In this view, freedom and equality are fully compatible.

**Right-wing anarchism and freedom**

Anarcho-capitalists such Rothbard focus particularly on negative freedom in economics. With increases in liberty in this area, all of society would be organised by the outcomes of genuinely free trade. With the removal of welfare and taxation, people would be free to spend the entirety of their earnings as they wish. Everyone would recognise that their success or failure in life would depend on their own individual efforts, compelling them to work harder and not to be so dependent on handouts from others, such as are provided by the welfare state. This would cause and encourage people to embrace the individualist aspects of human nature, which more communal ideologies have discouraged. Once we see ourselves and begin to act as self-sufficient ‘atoms’, we will achieve genuine liberty.

*Murray Rothbard*
Anarcho-capitalists argue that living under any form of state places significant, unjustifiable restrictions on our economic freedom. For instance, we cannot choose to ‘opt out’ of funding many services that we may wish to avoid contributing to, such as nationalised services like health care, education, public highways, and the military.

In an anarcho-capitalist society, we would be free to pay for or not pay for any service we wish. Furthermore, this is argued to be a more democratic system, in the sense that purchasing a service is in a way like ‘voting’ for it. With your available funds, you and you alone decide which businesses and goods you make use of, and which you do not. The law of supply and demand alone determines what is successful.

**Rights**

**The notion of rights**

If we possess a right, then we have an entitlement to act or be treated in a particular way. Obligations are necessarily connected to rights, in that if we possess a right, then others are obliged to act in a certain way towards us. For example, if we have a right to life, then others are obliged not to kill us. If we have a right to vote, then others are obliged to not prevent us from voting. Furthermore, if others are obliged to treat us in a particular way, we should not feel we are making an unnecessary imposition on them.

This points to a common misconception that is held about rights. The criticism made is that a focus on our rights necessarily combines with a focus away from our responsibilities. But this objection misses the point that conceiving of having rights goes hand-in-hand with conceiving of obligations held towards others. Any right which could be said to exist creates obligations in other moral agents.

It can be argued that if we have rights, then we are able to waive some of them. This means we can choose to disregard them. For example, if I have a right to property, then others are obliged not to take my possessions. However, I might choose to waive this right in certain situations, meaning that this right can be ignored. For instance, if I permit someone else to have some of my food, they have not violated my right, as I have voluntarily waived it in this case.

A distinction should also be drawn between a legal right, which exists in law, and a moral right, which is a moral value. For example, if the law grants us the right to freedom of speech, this is a legal right. If it is truly the case that we are morally entitled to the right to freedom of speech (regardless of whether the law recognises it), this is a moral right. Furthermore, it is certainly possible to have one kind of right without the other.

An argument that someone possesses a legal right can easily be confirmed or denied empirically – all we have to do is check what the law says. Legal rights are grounded in law, and the extent to which we have them and how they should be applied will also be determined by the legal system.

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4 However, it is important to note that only moral agents have obligations to uphold and respect the rights of other moral patients. There is no moral obligation held by those who are not moral patients.
However, an argument that someone possesses a moral right is much more difficult to establish, as this is making a meta-ethical, cognitivist claim. Moral rights are not grounded in law, so we cannot look to the legal system in order to determine if we have them, nor the extent to which we have them or how they should be applied. We will now be looking at arguments about what moral rights are grounded in.

**Theories of how rights are grounded, and problems concerning their extent and application**

**Natural rights theory**

Natural rights theory argues that we naturally possess rights, regardless of whether the state or society we are in recognises them. Such rights are inviolable, meaning they cannot be morally broken or violated. For example, suppose we possess a natural right to life. If it is realised that killing someone will lead to the happiness and benefit of everyone else, this is not sufficient for violating their right to life. This is to say that rights ‘trump’ other concerns. Furthermore, such rights are held to be inalienable, meaning that they cannot be taken away from us by others, such as the state.

Looking at this from a moral philosophy perspective, it can be said that natural rights theory is an example of a cognitivist, deontological position.

Supporters of natural rights are also likely to be in favour of natural law theory, arguing it is morally imperative that the legal system uphold morality. Those who support this theory and natural rights theory hold that laws are only legitimate if they complement our natural rights.

This leads to the question of where our natural rights come from or, to put it another way, how our natural rights are grounded. We shall now look at two specific variants within natural rights theory:

1. **God-given rights theory**

God-given rights theory is the first variety of natural rights theory we are going to look at. John Locke argues our rights are grounded in God. This is the central principle of God-given rights theory. To determine what our rights precisely are, we should therefore consult a religious authority such as a priest or scripture, or (as Locke argues) use our God-given reasoning abilities to work it out.

Locke specifically argues that, if we use our God-given reasoning ability, we can see we possess such rights as the rights to life, liberty, and property.

Locke also argues we can, using our reason, see it is right to punish others who behave irrationally or immorally. The state should ensure this occurs, in its role of a neutral umpire. Therefore, when it comes to practically applying our rights, and working out the extent to which they apply in difficult cases, we need the classical liberal state in order to resolve any conflicts and disagreements people have regarding the violation of their God-given rights.

A key objection to God-given rights theory is the linking between rights and God. Arguing for the existence of a higher power, combined with the claim that this higher power is the source of our rights, is rather contentious.
2. Human rights theory

Human rights theory is the second variety of natural rights theory we are going to look at. In more recent times, it has become popular to argue we possess rights because we are human. More specifically, that certain facts about what it is to be human gives us a moral entitlement to certain rights. Simplifying this type of thinking slightly, it could be argued because it is a fact about humans they greatly value freedom and very much dislike being tortured, this grants us a right to be free and a right not to be tortured. This type of general argument regarding the source of our natural rights is typically known as human rights theory.

Reasons given to support human rights have often included reference to one or more of the following ‘human’ characteristics: self-awareness, sentience, emotionality, having past and future interests, self-control, rationality, need for relationships and security, communication and language skills.

One criticism that can be raised here is that made by the is/ought gap argument, which we previously encountered when studying meta-ethics. This can be made because a connection is being claimed between (natural) facts and moral properties.

Other critical questions can also be raised, relating more to problems concerning the extent and application of these rights. For example, if certain characteristics about our psychology/physiology grant us rights, then what of humans who lack these characteristics? What of non-humans who also possess these characteristics – do they have the same rights as the rest of us? If so, should the law be shaped accordingly? Also, if our human nature is plastic, could this lead to different rights existing in different societies and at different times?

Natural rights theories have sometimes been accused of ethnocentrism, meaning they impose the values of dominant groups and societies on others. In making this argument, it is often noted that the idea of human rights has been popularised by the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has been argued by some to be a predominantly North American/European moral perspective of how the world should be. Consequently, it has been criticised for leading to intolerance of other moral values, and to limit pluralism and tolerance. Its strongest critics have claimed it amounts to a form of moral imperialism, insisting that other cultures behave a certain way, abandoning their traditional practices and values.

Positive rights theory

Positive rights theory argues we do not have any moral rights. Instead, whatever rights we have are possessed by us because of what the law has decided to grant us. In other words, rights have no existence outside of the state, and are grounded in whatever legal system currently exists. There can be legal rights, but not moral rights. This contrasts strongly with natural rights theory, which claimed rights were universal and inalienable moral properties. Positive rights theory states that rights can only come about as a product of political society. In different societies, there will be different rights, depending on the nature of the government in that society.

It is important to note that positive rights theory does not necessarily come with a commitment to non-cognitivism. For instance, someone could agree with the view that the only rights which can exist are legal ones, and also support a cognitivist version of utilitarianism, or perhaps virtue ethics.

A possible benefit of positive rights theory is it avoids the problems associated with natural rights theory, in that no appeals to a religious or naturalistic source of morality are made.
Supporters of positive rights are also likely to be in favour of positive law theory, also known as ‘legal positivism’, which argues there is no need for the law to correlate with morality. It makes sense for those who agree with positive rights theory to also agree with this position, given they do not believe we have any moral rights in the first place. Legal positivism can arguably lead to a more adaptive system of law, as what is legal and illegal can reflect the individual requirements and circumstances of different states, rather than be tied down to any supposedly universal set of rights.

Edmund Burke vs Thomas Paine in 1790s rights battle

The traditional conservative philosopher Edmund Burke argues in ‘Reflections on the Revolution in France’ (1790) that it is incorrect to think we have natural rights. Instead, he argues for greater caution when claiming someone possesses a right to anything. He is concerned about any talk regarding universal rights, as he feels it is too generalising, and does not pay attention to important case-by-case details. For instance, he argues it is a mistake to say we all have a right to freedom, as whether someone should have freedom or not depends on the context. He writes:

Am I to congratulate a highwayman and a murderer, who has broke prison, upon the recovery of his natural rights?

Burke suggests good governance by the state is more important than appeals to natural rights. For instance, the shared tradition and wisdom of past generations about which freedoms are valuable should have precedence over abstract theories of rights. We should be pragmatic, test any rights empirically and pay direct attention to the lessons of history. The rights we grant each other should be the rights we have inherited from our ancestors in the legal system.

In saying this, Burke reveals a commitment to positive law theory, in that he does not think the law should be focused on upholding any particular ethical or religious code. Instead, the laws of a state should be those which have shown to be effective for that society. Burke argues any changes to the law should be gradual and well-considered, and not motivated by some grand underlying moral or political schema of how things should be – such as is argued for by other ideologies.

The classical liberal philosopher Thomas Paine (b. 1737 in Thetford, England d. 1809 in New York, USA) argues in ‘The Declaration of the Rights of Man’ (1791), a response to Burke’s publication, that human beings do possess natural rights. In this, he echoes the earlier ideas of Locke, who had stated we have rights which exist prior to our being in a society or state of any kind.

Paine states if we use our God-given reason, we can recognise that human beings are sovereign by nature – meaning that we are self-governing – and that we possess freedom and integrity. The law must respect these universal rights. Governments which fail to do so are failing to uphold vitally important moral principles.
Utility rights theory

An alternative answer to the question of how rights are grounded can be found in the theory of utility rights. As the name suggests, it is connected to utilitarianism. This may seem odd, as when we first studied utilitarianism, it notably made no reference to rights. Being a consequentialist theory, utilitarianism was presented as being in opposition to the deontological angle taken by rights theory. As we will now see, the theory of utility rights attempts to combine aspects of these two approaches.

As shown during our study of moral philosophy, utilitarianism argues that for our actions to be moral, we must choose among the available options the one which is most likely to bring about the most utility for the most people. Utility is defined as that which is useful, and many utilitarians argue that what is most useful for us is happiness. What is known as classical utilitarianism argues that the greatest happiness for the greatest number should be our guiding principal whenever we act. Adding further to the theory, the greatest happiness principle argues we should aim to maximise pleasure and minimise pain.

As well as being a theory of moral philosophy, utilitarianism has also been applied politically. Utilitarians often argue that in making political decisions – such as deciding on how groups and individuals are to be treated, and on what the laws of the state will be – the principle of the greatest utility for the greatest number should be upheld.

One thing that should be noted first of all is that not all utilitarians have made arguments in favour of rights, either legal or moral. What follows details how some have applied utilitarianism to the issue of rights, particularly in the legal sense.

Utility rights theory denies there are natural rights which are inviolable and inalienable. The reason for this is that, on some occasions, upholding particular rights will not promote the greatest utility for all. For example, if torturing a terrorist suspect were to reveal information that would save a great many people, this would produce more utility than not doing it. Consequently, utility rights theorists argue that whatever moral rights we possess (if any) should not be considered universal or inalienable.

Therefore, when determining which rights to give legal protection, a state should see which practices promote utility, and which do not. Those actions which do promote utility should have legal protection. In other words, our legal rights have grounding in the utility they produce. However, such legal protection can be bypassed in individual cases, where there is a utility-maximising reason to do so.

For example, utility rights theorists (such as John Stuart Mill) have often argued for, among others, the following rights:

- The right to freedom of speech, because being able to express ourselves leads to new ideas which can advance society, and allow for the development of individuality in our lives.
- The right to life, as people are happier when there are laws to protect them from the murderous intentions of other individuals, and also the state itself.

If we live in a legal system which grants us rights, utility rights theorists often argue this in itself has a utility value, as we feel protected. If these rights are founded on utilitarian principles, we can be confident the laws set are those which will maximise the greatest happiness for all.

In all this, utility rights theorists clearly reveal their consequentialist position, as what they are determining to be good is based on the outcomes or consequences of an action – in this case, the greatest utility for all. Other types of rights theories can be seen as taking a more explicitly deontological moral position, in which they are
arguing that there are particular universal, inalienable duties that are immoral to violate, regardless of the consequences.

Furthermore, utility rights theorists who make these arguments are clearly in favour of there being a strong correlation between morality and the law.

An advantage of utility rights theory could be that it is more flexible than other rights positions, as it claims there are circumstances in which it is morally correct that rights can be violated. Grounding rights in utility might also be considered a persuasive aspect of the theory, as it is making a connection between things which we value and that which is moral and requires legal protection.

However, utility rights theory can be criticised for making these very claims. To talk of a right that is violable could be said to go against the very idea of what a right is. This could be said to further undermine the claim of utility rights theorists that living in a state which organises its legal system around utility rights will make people happier, as they are confident the law will maximise utility for all. The problem here seems to be that while we might be confident that utility will be maximised for the inhabitants of the state overall, this could be at the expense of individual utility. For instance, if killing or torturing someone were calculated to produce gains in utility, their own rights would be violated by the state. For those living in such a system, this may well produce fear and unhappiness rather than anything more positive.

15. Create a clear diagram, outlining the main similarities and differences between theories of natural rights, positive rights and utility rights. Use examples to illustrate points made wherever possible, make use of all key terms raised in this section, and be sure to address the issue of how rights are grounded and problems concerning their extent and application.

**How may conflicts between the rights of individuals and social utility be resolved?**

The term **social utility** refers to that which is socially useful and beneficial for the majority of people. For example, this could include such things as freedom of action, having shelter and security etc. Social utility can be seen as the political goal of utilitarianism.

However, it can be argued that in some circumstances, it will be necessary to violate an individual’s rights in order to obtain social utility. The example given earlier of deciding to torture someone based on the certainty that they have important information that will save many lives is a clear case of this. Utilitarians and utility rights theorists will be likely to say this is acceptable, whereas someone who views rights as inviolable and inalienable will not do so e.g. those who support natural rights theory.

This highlights the tension between consequentialist and deontological positions in ethics. Simply put, utilitarians and other consequentialists will justify violating a right if it leads to desirable outcomes – which, in their view, is defined as maximised utility.

Conversely, deontologists who argue in favour of rights will state we have a duty not to violate these rights, regardless of the outcomes. Their motivation for such an argument may involve the position that rights respect the sanctity and worth of the individual and should not be broken. The deontologist will argue that if a right is
violated in order to bring about social utility, this is a bad thing, not a good thing. After all, if rights are not inalienable and inviolable, in what sense are they rights at all?

In defence of his utility rights position, Mill argues he is concerned with utility ‘in the largest sense’, where rights are established to protect our permanent interests, serving social utility over the long term. We should establish a system of rights that brings about utility defined in this way, and then defend these rights.

If you get an exam question on resolving conflicts between social utility and individual rights, it may well be useful to critically compare different theoretical approaches to rights – those which focus on inviolable and inalienable individual rights, and those which do not.

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**Justice**

**What contributes social, economic or distributive justice?**

Like many of the political terms we look at in this unit, justice is contested, meaning there are several accounts of what it means. Broadly speaking, if justice is said to be done in a society, there is the suggestion that people have got what they are due, or deserve. Clearly, there is a moral element to any use of the term ‘justice’.

Going further, many political philosophers draw a distinction between three types of justice. It is very important to note the exam will be focused on concerns of distributive justice (see below):

- **Retributive justice** – this relates to the justification given for the punishment of individuals. For example, some people argue the focus of retributive justice should be rehabilitation, where the focus is on ‘curing’ the person of their antisocial habits. Another example is the view that retribution should be the focus, where the individual is punished for what is taken to be their personal moral failing.

- **Legal justice** – this relates to how the law distributes penalties to people. There are two central concerns in legal justice. Firstly, procedural justice, which relates to the way in which legal decisions are made. For example, a common view of procedural justice is it involves the guilty being punished rather than the innocent, that trial by jury is used, court procedures are followed, someone is innocent until proven guilty, appeals are possible, and so on. Secondly, substantive justice, which relates to the specific content of the legal decisions made. For example, it could be argued that procedural justice has been done – i.e. all the right legal procedures have been followed – but there is still substantive injustice, because the very law being used is unjust.

- **Distributive justice** – this relates to how ‘goods’ are divided among everyone in a society. Such goods include material objects such as food and housing, services such as health and education, wealth such as money, and also status and honours such as particular jobs and positions of influence and power. Distributive justice is also known as ‘social justice’ or ‘economic justice’. However, if an exam question specifies ‘economic justice’, it would be appropriate to place your focus away from concerns of the distribution of status and honours, and concentrate on the more ‘wealth-focused’ aspects.
Competing principles for a just distribution of political goods

Various attempts have been made by philosophers to explain what distributive justice involves. In other words, what distribution of political and economic goods is justified? On what principles should it be organised? We will look at examples of theories of distributive justice of the following broad types:

Desert – where such things as a person’s actions and/or personal qualities are acknowledged, and distribution of goods is organised accordingly – they literally get their ‘just deserts’. For example, it could be argued it is just that harder working people get more resources. Another example is that people of virtuous character are rewarded more than the vicious.

Need – where distribution of goods is organised according to what people need. Note that talking of people’s ‘needs’ can be different to talking of people’s ‘desires’ and ‘wants’.

Equality – where distribution of goods is organised to achieve some level of equality. The focus could one or more of such things as formal equality, equality of opportunity, equal rights, economic equality etc. For example, classical liberals are likely to argue in favour of the first three types of equality listed here, but not the last one. A theory which argues that justice requires equality (of any kind) is egalitarian. A theory which argues for people having exactly the same amount of a particular good (e.g. rights, wealth, food) is arguing for ‘strict equality’ in that area.

Theories of distributive justice

John Rawls – justice as fairness

John Rawls provides an example of a modern liberal theory of distributive justice, which is also an example of a social contract theory founded on a hypothetical agreement. His central work on this topic is ‘A Theory of Justice’ (1971). In it, he presents a theory known as ‘justice as fairness’. Following the publication of fellow Harvard University professor Robert Nozick’s ‘Anarchy, State and Utopia’ in 1974 (see below), the two have often been depicted as strongly opposed rivals on this topic.

As we will see, overall, the main focus of Rawls’ theory of justice is equality, although elements of desert and need also play a role.

In keeping with modern liberalism, Rawls holds human nature is rational and self-interested. In order to work out a list of moral rules that would most benefit everyone’s self-interest, we must rid ourselves of any prejudices we might have that would influence our decisions in making such a list in the first place.

For example, if one person were very rich, and another very poor, and they were asked what moral rules society should live by, their personal situations are likely to affect what they consider to be morally appropriate constraints for all.

Because we are self-interested, argues Rawls, the moral rules people agree to are likely to be those which provide them with the most advantage. For instance, the very rich person is unlikely to agree to there being a welfare system funded through high taxation of the wealthy, and the very poor person is unlikely to agree to its absence.

John Rawls

5 Formal equality is where individuals are treated the same based on their having relevantly similar characteristics. In other words, treating one x how you treat another x.
To help us work out what a truly fair and just moral system actually is, Rawls requires we should only decide what ethical rules should be followed in a society from behind what he calls the **veil of ignorance**. To do this, we have to forget the following types of details about ourselves:

- Intellectual abilities
- Skills and talents
- Educational level
- Race
- Gender
- Cultural background and social class
- Religion
- Economic wealth
- Special interests
- Beliefs and values (e.g. moral, political, social)
- Family and social connections
- Other factors that may advantage or disadvantage us

Although we put these details out of mind, it is important that we do retain knowledge of the following:

- Human nature is rational and self-interested
- We would like to economically comfortable – we wish to avoid poverty
- Resources are limited – not everyone can be rich

Rawls then asks us to consider, from this impartial position of ignorance, what moral rules we would want society to run by. Rawls’ argument can be compared to setting out the rules of a game among all those involved in it before you start playing.

Rawls argues it is a good idea to consider what we think would be just from a wholly impartial point of view, where we are not influenced by our own personal situation. After all, if we were to focus on ourselves when considering distributive justice, it is likely our conclusions would be ones that would benefit us, or at least not significantly disadvantage us.

Rawls argues as we are rational, self-interested people, we will choose moral rules that are to the best possible benefit of everyone, no matter what personal, social or economic position they might be in. We would do this not out of a concern for the well-being of other people, but a recognition that doing so provides us with advantages. Among others, he argues that we would argue in favour of the following moral rules:

- Equal treatment of different genders and races, because that way we will not find ourselves disadvantaged, no matter what gender or race we discover we are once we come out from behind the veil of ignorance.
- Equal opportunities in education and employment, because that way if we find we have particular disadvantages, and regardless of the kind of person we are, we will still have access to these things.
- Support for a form of progressive taxation, in which welfare is provided to ensure the worse-off people in society are in the best position it is possible for them to be in. That way, if we discover we are economically disadvantaged, we will still be in a good position. However, it is worth mentioning that while Rawls says we would argue in favour of more economic equality than we currently experience, we would not go so far as to say that there should be strict economic equality, as this would mean people would no longer have an incentive to work harder to achieve more wealth.
- Given that we are self-interested, we should not be given complete freedom, because laws are needed to regulate our behaviour and protect us from each other. Because of this, Rawls does not come to any anarchist conclusions. He argues that a state is necessary, to ensure that the equal freedoms of everyone
are protected. Therefore, we will lose some freedom in being answerable to the law of the state, but this will mean everyone has the maximum amount of freedom possible.

- Furthermore, anyone should be free to enter any working or governmental position, for which laws enforcing equality of opportunity are necessary. Discrimination based on such things as race, sex, religion, age or cultural background will not be permitted.

Note that, in each case, the rules we come out with are motivated by self-interest, as we wish to avoid an undesirable situation for ourselves once we come out from behind the veil of ignorance. People are likely to opt to live in a broadly egalitarian society because although the possibility of being rich may be enticing, the fear of being poor and disadvantaged outweighs it.

Rawls’ argument is a case of hypothetical agreement because he claims that they are rules that rational people – i.e. ones who think in an impartial and fair manner, which the veil of ignorance makes sure they do – would agree to.

Assessing Rawls on distributive justice

Firstly, right-wingers are likely to criticise Rawls for holding back individuals from attaining truly exceptional wealth, as the redistributive policies he supports will prevent anyone reaching such heights, as the more they earn, the more they are taxed. This may well be a disincentive to work particularly hard.

Secondly, another criticism that has been made against Rawls is to question whether people actually would choose such laws from behind the veil of ignorance. For example, someone who thinks further economic risk is a good thing is likely to argue for less welfare than Rawls feels justified to support. In other words, a rational person may well conclude that greater economic inequality is an acceptable, just situation for a society to be in.

Thirdly, another potentially damaging is the criticism that Rawls may be wrong about human nature, which he holds to be rational and self-interested. If we have a different conception of it, we are highly likely to support different principles. For example, if we thought that human nature is irrational and self-interested, we are likely to argue in favour of increased state control, and not the freedoms which Rawls defends.

Fourthly, on a more practical level, Rawls has also been criticised for setting up an impossible thought experiment, in that we cannot put out of mind the many features of ourselves that he asks us to. In addition, if we are ignorant of the values we currently hold, how are we supposed to decide what will make a just society? Weren’t we asked to forget our current conceptions of ‘good’ and ‘just’?

Fifthly, it has also been argued that Rawls’ thought experiment coerces us to value equality, as by ridding us of all knowledge of our individual selves, we are forced to come to conclusions while in a position of equality with everyone else. But, the criticism states, to be in a position of equality with everyone else is very different to how the world actually is. Therefore, it is irrelevant what rules of morality and distributive justice we would come out with when considering ourselves to be in a position of mutual equality with others.

Nonetheless, Rawls’ arguments have attracted considerable support. In response to some of these criticisms, it could be said that forcing people into a position of artificial equality is a good idea, as it prevents us from being influenced by a wide range of factors about our current lives. The fact that equality does not exist ‘in the real world’ is precisely the problem, and looking at things from an impartial point of view will make us realise why.
Rawls could also respond that preventing people from achieving incredible amounts of wealth is a fair sacrifice if it means that those at the bottom of society are comfortable. For a response to this, see Nozick’s theories. And here they are.

**Robert Nozick – the entitlement theory**


As we will see, Nozick’s conception of justice in his **entitlement theory** is focused on desert, with an element of (non-economic) equality. However, economic justice based on need and equality is something he argues strongly against.

A central point of Nozick’s argument is that it is unjust to violate a person’s rights. If people’s rights have been violated, the situation which follows cannot be said to be just.

Nozick argues our property rights are particularly important, and should not be violated. He states that people are entitled to the wealth they produce through their own individual efforts. He sees little difference between a burglar taking your material goods from you, or the government doing the same under the label of ‘taxation’.

Along with the principle that people are entitled to the wealth they have produced from their labour, Nozick argues people are not entitled to the wealth produced by other people’s efforts. If someone voluntarily gives you some of their wealth, which they have gained by just means – e.g. they worked for it, or were voluntarily given it by someone else – then that is a just transaction. But nobody should be coerced to give their wealth to anyone else.

Nozick argues that theories of distributive justice tend to have one of the following two approaches:

1. **End state or patterned principles.** Theories of justice which follow these principles focus on achieving a particular outcome or end state. Such theories argue justice has occurred when the end state is reached. Furthermore, if this end state or ‘pattern’ is not reached, then the society fails to be just.

   For example, Rawls’ theory aims for a particular end state or pattern, claiming justice will have come about when the worst off in society are in the best economic position possible for them to be. Another example of a theory which follows these principles is communism. Supporters of communist economic theories claim distributive justice has been achieved when the ruling class and the inequalities of wealth that goes with them have been removed, leaving a more (perhaps strictly) economically equal society.

2. **Historical principles.** Theories of justice which follow these principles focus on past actions, with no concern placed on the outcome or end state this leads to. Such theories argue justice has occurred if previous events have been just. Unlike in the other type of theory, there is no end state or ‘goal’ to be working towards. Nozick’s theory is an example of this type.

Nozick states that for a society to be considered just, we must look back at how it has come to reach its current point. He uses the following thought experiment to illustrate his point:

First of all, imagine the current distribution of wealth in society is whatever you want it to be. Let us call this situation **D1**.
Now, imagine the basketball player Wilt Chamberlain has come to an agreement with his employers that everyone wanting to see a game he is playing in has to put 25c in a box at the gate of the sports arena, in addition to the standard ticket price. Everyone knows that Wilt keeps all the 25c for himself. Following this agreement, and due to Wilt’s popularity with the fans, at the end of the season he has gained $25000 through these voluntary contributions.

So, we have reached a new distributive situation – $D2$ – in which Wilt now has $25000 more than he did at $D1$.

The transition from $D1$ to $D2$ has resulted in significant economic inequality, as Wilt is now considerably better off than the other players on the team. Given the amount he has earned, he is also likely to have greater wealth than many other people in general.

Nozick argues we cannot claim any injustice has occurred in moving from $D1$ to $D2$. Wilt has gained a large sum of money, but he has acquired it through others voluntarily giving it to him. He has not deceived or coerced anyone, and all people involved in these transactions entered into them willingly. No one has any cause for complaint over Wilt’s behaviour, so we cannot say this economically unequal state of affairs is unjust.

Nozick claims this shows distributive justice is unconnected to the end state which is reached. This example details a case of economic inequality, but there is nothing unjust about it. Whether a situation is just or not depends on how it has been reached.

However, an important point to note here is Nozick is not arguing in favour of economic inequality. His argument is whether a society has economic equality or not is essentially irrelevant to the issue of whether there is distributive justice. To determine whether justice has been done, we should look back over the transactions between individuals, rather than compare the current situation we are in to a preferred economic distribution in our minds.

Furthermore, Nozick adds that if we try to impose on people an end state or pattern to which society is directed towards achieving, this will have an impact on their freedom. For instance, if the goal is to achieve a particular level of economic equality, this may well lead to people like Wilt Chamberlain not being free to acquire wealth in the way described in the example. As Nozick says, ‘The socialist society would have to forbid capitalist acts between consenting adults’.

Nozick presents the following ‘justice-preserving’ rules, needed to ensure distributive justice:

1. **Justice in acquisition**: wealth has to be justly acquired in the first place – e.g. voluntarily given, not stolen, not taken through infringement of others’ rights.
2. **Justice in transfer**: wealth has to be justly transferred from one responsible person to another – e.g. not through deceiving the bewildered or mentally undeveloped.
3. **Justice in rectification**: if wealth has been acquired or transferred unjustly this injustice should be rectified – e.g. returning wealth to those who have had it stolen from them.

With regard to the idea of the third rule – the rectification principle – Nozick adds it is difficult to establish how extensively applied it should be. For instance, he asks ‘If past injustice has shaped present holdings in various ways… what now, if anything, ought to be done to rectify these injustices?’ and ‘How far back must one go in wiping clean the historical slate of injustices?’
As already suggested, in connection with his emphasis on property rights and negative economic freedom, Nozick is against taxation. However, it is very important to emphasise that he is specifically against taxation for welfare purposes. In other words, he is against the redistribution of wealth with the aim of helping those who are economically worse off than others. Nozick is a neoliberal, not an anarcho-capitalist – he argues in favour of a minimal state. He reasons the state is necessary in order to protect us from the rights violations of others (e.g. theft, murder), and must therefore be funded in achieving these aims. Consequently, he is not against taxation if and only if it is to be used for these things. Therefore, the amount of tax we would pay in Nozick’s society might be very low.

The reason why taxation might be very low can be argued to depend on how far we are to take Nozick’s third rule of ‘justice in rectification’. As we just saw, while Nozick is supportive of it as a principle, it raises a number of key questions. For instance, if it was determined that a large number of transactions in the past needed rectifying, as they were not wholly voluntary and just, then it would follow that the state should go about rectifying this. Potentially, this could be an enormous task for states to take on, which may require a great deal of public funds.

Furthermore, it is conceivable that if a state seriously pursues the rectification principle, the end result may be an economically egalitarian one, or certainly more egalitarian than we might expect. Nonetheless, on Nozick’s view of justice, the end state reached is not what determines whether justice has been done, it is the way in which transactions have historically taken place.

**Assessing Nozick on distributive justice**

Firstly, an anarcho-capitalist is likely to take issue against Nozick, arguing that by maintaining the existence of a state, even a minimal one, he is arguing in favour of something which inhibits people’s (negative) freedom. The anarcho-capitalist could argue that if Nozick were consistent with his capitalist, laissez-faire arguments, then he would be in favour of no state at all.

As stated, Nozick’s response to this is that the minimal state is necessary if we are to have our fundamental rights protected. His writings suggest the state to be a form of protection agency, which has a monopoly on lawful force (with the exception of individuals rightfully acting in self-defence). He argues that from anarcho-capitalist beginnings, a minimal state such as this would naturally occur, as people would seek protection from those organisations which can offer it. These organisations would ultimately end up as a de facto state.

Secondly, by disregarding end-state principles and any concern of need in his theory of distributive justice, Nozick presents a theory in which it is conceivable that life-destroying levels of economic inequality could be reached, and the situation still regarded as ‘just’. As stated at the beginning, Nozick has some concern with equality, but it is the typical classical/neoliberal focus on things such as formal equality rather than economic equality.
However, it is clear that Nozick is well aware that such an economically inegalitarian situation may indeed be the result of following these principles. He would reiterate that justice is not about the end state, but about whether transactions were voluntarily carried out. The Wilt Chamberlain thought experiment illustrates this. What injustice has Wilt perpetrated? Surely that money is his, not anyone else’s. Why would anyone else have a just claim to his earnings?

This response is likely to particularly annoy those on the left. A typical tactic in arguing against unrestrained capitalism is to point to how it produces enormous economic inequality, suggesting that it promotes great suffering among the poor. To Nozick, these issues are irrelevant when considering distributive justice.

Thirdly, Nozick has been accused of possessive individualism, a criticism which could also be placed to anyone whose economic views are on the far right. What this means is Nozick is wrong to think of individuals as the sole source of the output they create. Instead, it should be recognised more that any individual is only able to produce goods thanks to the support of the society they are part of. For example, a doctor needs to be educated and trained by others, guided through the job by others, and is likely to rely on some kind of support network in their personal life in order for them to carry out their working role successfully.

This objection to Nozick comes from a communal point of view on human relations, in opposition to his self-reliant, atomist perspective. If it is the case that the goods we produce are not solely due to our individual efforts, then it could be said that we are not entitled to the entire production of ‘our’ labours.

Nozick (and the right-wing in general) could respond by either denying this, or accepting it is true that other individuals have helped us ‘get where we are today’. However, if the second response is taken, this may suggest nothing more than that we should give those individuals who have directly assisted us some form of reparation or acknowledgement. It does not suggest that we should embrace socialism, or the welfare state. For example, if Wilt Chamberlain’s talents can be linked back to his high school gym coach, his supportive parents and his team mates, this might be a case for dividing the products of his earnings among those people, but not the wider society.

In response to this, the left could argue that we have been supported and helped more than just by our immediate contacts. Many more people have helped us in ways we may not recognise or be conscious of. Therefore, it is appropriate to distribute beyond our immediate circle.

The right may well counter this point by stating it is a vague response, as it talks of unquantifiable, possibly unfalsifiable things. And even if we were to accept this argument, what reason is there to think that we need to pay back anything to society as a whole?

Fourthly, a further objection to Nozick that can be made is to criticise the primacy he places on property rights. If other rights are argued for, such as the right to health or education, then it could well be argued the state has a duty to provide these for us. Alternatively, a utilitarian approach to justice could be argued for, in which the case could be made that a state needs to promote utility rather than uphold rights, and so a state which does not provide utility-maximising services is damaging to utility. Whatever approach is used – and others are possible – it should be noted that the discussion between Nozick and his opponents is now a moral as well as a political one, in that it is questioning what normative ethical principles we should live by.6

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6 This dispute highlights the connections between moral and political philosophy, and how supporting a particular ethical system can have political implications for your thought.
Fifthly, Nozick could also be criticised for how he regards freedom. Given his minimal state arguments, and his focus on individualism, he clearly favours the conception of freedom in negative terms. In short, arguments relating to positive liberty being a preferable conception could be made against him. These would argue that people are only free when they are assisted in particular areas of life. Statists who support this view would claim that only the government can ensure positive freedom.

Sixthly, another criticism that can be made of Nozick, and anyone else who argues against taxation for welfare and public services, is that it does provide you with benefits, even if you yourself choose to have such things as private healthcare and education. These benefits may not be as noticeable and quantifiable as the difference you notice on your wage slip, but they can still be observed. For example, if welfare keeps people out of desperate poverty, it can be argued there will be less crime – which is good for you. If the state supports education, this will lead to more people completing qualifications, who will then go on to benefit society as a whole – which is good for you. If the state takes a role in regulating working practices, then everyone could experience benefits in a number of areas, such as job security, a minimum wage, a safe working environment, and so on – which is good for you.

This criticism is perhaps a little odd, as it gives reasons to support communality and welfare from an individualist perspective. This is because the answer to the question ‘Why should I help others?’ is ‘Because it will benefit you’.

Nozick could respond to this objection in a number of ways. (i), he could again reiterate his point that the end state reached – e.g. lowered crime rates and work-related injuries, happier proletarians, more state-funded scientists – is not what distributive justice is about. Distributive justice is about the historical circumstances of the transactions that have occurred, he might say. Must I keep repeating myself?

(ii), Nozick could make common right-wing arguments on economics and welfare. For example, that a welfare system encourages dependency on the state and discourages hard work. That a society focused on communality deters people from taking individual responsibility for their own lives. That people do not provide an equal contribution to society, and so they should not be treated equally.

Seventhly, and following the previous criticism, another objection can be raised relating to Nozick’s belief that capitalism is the best system for giving people their just deserts. If we are committed to the view that the focus of distributive justice should be desert, we may still object to the free market system. For example, it can be argued that the free market does not reward what is most socially useful and beneficial, only what is most profitable. And what is most profitable may well have negative social effects. For instance, it can be very profitable for businesses to pay low wages, ignore environmental concerns such as pollution and exhausting limited resources, or saturate the print, online and physical landscape with intrusive advertising. In the free market system, whether profit is being raised by the selling of cream buns, anti-depressants, DVDs, AK-47s, air travel, education or hardcore pornography, is irrelevant. The market value is all that really matters, not the social value. Therefore, how can it be just to reward a person for something which does not necessarily have any worth?

In response to this, Nozick and other free marketeers could make the following responses. (i), that other systems of desert, such as rewarding people by the amount of sacrifice or level of effort they put in, or how nice a person they are, are much harder – if not impossible – to quantify. How do you measure such things as sacrifice, effort, or virtue? By focusing instead on the monetary worth of something, it is clearly measurable. Simply, something is worth whatever people are willing to pay – its market value.

(ii), it could be argued the capitalist system does appropriately reward people. For those who provide desirable goods and services that people are willing to pay for, they get more money. For those that don’t, they get less – or nothing. This social arrangement promotes entrepreneurial thinking, which
brings about new inventions, innovative product designs, and competitive prices. Individuals spend money on the services that they recognise, as rational individuals, will make them happier and more satisfied. Therefore, the market worth of a good is an excellent indication of its social value.

Left-wing perspectives on distributive justice

As we’ve seen, Rawls and Nozick have their differences. However, both of them are, to varying degrees, supportive of capitalism as an economic mechanism for the distribution of goods. Nozick’s theories get near to the ‘pure’ capitalism we found in right-wing anarchism, whereas Rawls supports a reformist approach of capitalism. They can be said to occupy opposing ends of liberal thought.

But as we’ve also seen, not everyone is a liberal. In this section, we will be looking at a number of other perspectives on distributive justice, which find more support from those on the left. In studying Marxism and left-wing anarchism, we have been introduced to arguments on the economic organisation of society which argue a significantly different arrangement to capitalism.

A key point to raise is that more left-wing theories of distributive justice place a greater emphasis on economic equality than theorists like the centre-right Rawls or far-right Nozick do. Left-wing theories argue that one of the primary failings of capitalism is that, if left unchecked, it results in unacceptable economic inequality.

As well as being motivated by equality in this way, left-wing distributive justice arguments can also be seen to have a focus on need. This can explicitly be seen in this declaration by Karl Marx:

*From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.*

Marx argues as people are equally valuable and important, having the same formal equality, then justice requires the basic needs of everyone should be satisfied. It is unjust to allow anyone to fall below this level.

Marx would claim it is not enough to continually redistribute goods from the privileged to the needy, as this does not rid society of class divisions and the alienating experience of working life under capitalism. In a communist society of common ownership, the aim is not simply to redress the balance of economic inequality, but to root out the causes of this inequality.

So far in this handbook, we have already considered a number of arguments against capitalist principles of distributive justice, such as:

- Capitalism does not give adequate recognition to the damaging effects of economic inequality for those who are worst off.
- Capitalism is wrong to hold a viewpoint of possessive individualism.
• Capitalism incorrectly places a primacy on property rights.
• Capitalism does not recognise the wider positive effects of welfare and redistributed wealth beyond those who directly receive it.
• Capitalism is not a system which necessarily rewards people for hard work.
• Capitalism is not necessarily a system that produces goods which have positive effects for others and/or promote their happiness.

Now, let’s look at some further arguments which have found support from left-wing theories of distributive justice:

Firstly, left-wingers sometimes argue capitalism creates false needs, and this can be a damaging thing. For a society to be successful in capitalist terms, it is necessary that there is continual economic growth. For this to occur, people need to keep purchasing goods. It is not enough for these purchases to be linked solely to products and services which are actually needed, so it is necessary for capitalism to encourage false needs.

Capitalism’s prime tool in promoting false needs is often argued to be the public relations and advertising industry, whose main function is to encourage people to purchase goods which are not essential. It can be claimed this is an example of power as thought control.

Some false needs can be argued to be especially damaging. For example, the value many capitalist societies place on having a certain body type, clothing and cosmetics style in order to be considered attractive. For some people it is difficult or impossible to attain these things, and their failure to do so can be psychologically damaging.

Secondly, when there is trade between two parties, capitalism focuses primarily on how much the buyer has spent, and how much profit the seller has acquired. In other words, capitalism’s focus is on the financial effects for the two parties involved – this is all that is measured.

But there can be further effects that result from a transaction which capitalism does not adequately take into account. These further effects are known as externalities, and often have an impact on third parties, not (just) the buyer and seller.

For example, consider when a car is purchased. Capitalism would focus on the amount of money which exchanges hands between buyer and seller. But there are further results of such a transaction, such as the pollution which the car causes, the traffic it adds to, the danger it creates for pedestrians, and so on. Admittedly, these are all ‘negative’ externalities, and there can be argued to be ‘positive’ externalities as well. For instance, if people own cars, this is likely to increase demand for such things as mechanics and sellers of car parts and fuel, meaning increases in employment in those areas.
Where externalities are more negative than positive, this can be considered a serious problem, as it ignores the damaging impact that transactions between two parties can have on others. Producers will always aim to externalise as many negative things as possible, so they do not have to pay them.

The problem of negative externalities is one reason why left-wing theories of justice have argued they should be taken into account. One such theory that promotes this view is referred to as true cost economics. For example, if the use of a product – such as a car – is likely to produce pollution on the environment, then the cost of this should be included in the car. In other words, goods which create negative externalities should cost more, in order to discourage people from making use of them. Equally, it could also be argued goods with positive externalities should cost less.

One implication of this can be considered with regard to goods which are (currently) cheap because they have been produced through more exploitative labour methods, such as sweatshops. These negative effects could be argued to be a negative externality, whose cost should be included in the price.

One difficulty of including the price of externalities in transactions is they are often hard to measure. For example, even if you felt it was right to ‘add on’ the effects of the pollution caused by air travel onto a plane ticket, how would this amount be worked out?

Supporters of an ‘externality charge’/’externality tax’ may respond that this points to a key problem with capitalism, in that the only thing it measures is direct financial value. For instance, how can a system which doesn’t place a higher cost on negative externalities be said to be just? The fact that taking into account wider effects of transactions is difficult does not mean it shouldn’t be done.

Thirdly, some supporters of capitalist economics have described it as a ‘science of happiness’. It is argued that people make purchases because they have identified goods that will make them happy. Capitalism is keen to portray the consumer as someone who is knowledgeable of the various goods on offer, and is therefore able to make an informed decision as to what they buy. Because capitalism is very good at providing people with options of things to buy, and the fact that people buy them, shows that it is good at promoting happiness.

(i), a left-wing criticism here is that this model of an informed consumer rarely exists in reality. It is not the case that people are fully informed about the range of capitalist transactions open to them. In fact, those who are selling the goods may well seek to limit what is known about the products and services they offer. For example, if the goods have any negative effects on health, if they were produced using particularly exploitative labour conditions, if there are better alternatives available. The presence of oligopolies and monopolies can further ensure consumers are limited in the information they are able to gather, due to their market dominance.

(ii), the presence of oligopolies and monopolies can be said to have negative effects on other businesses as well, particularly smaller ones. Although capitalist economics often writes about a situation of ‘perfect competition’, in which no business is large enough to have excessive market power, such as the ability to fix prices, such a state of affairs does not exist. For businesses which are already successful, they are far more likely to continue to be successful, given they have the resources to defeat their competitors, regardless of who is producing the best products and services. This further ensures the market dominance of wealthier companies, enabling them to increase their hold and power further.

Taking into account externalities is not a view which is unique to left-wing theories. Some liberal thinkers, such as the economist Tim Harford, have also expressed support for this reformist measure to capitalism.

7 Taking into account externalities is not a view which is unique to left-wing theories. Some liberal thinkers, such as the economist Tim Harford, have also expressed support for this reformist measure to capitalism.
(iii), also, there is no clearly observable connection between an individual’s wealth and consumption of material goods and their level of happiness and fulfilment. In fact, some philosophers, economists and social scientists have argued that a form of negative correlation between spending and happiness can be observed. Once people have reached the position where their basic needs are met, they are not made any happier in the long run by greater levels of wealth and material possessions. Instead, it could be suggested that this provides an ultimately unsatisfying goal in life, with the need for more and more money and possessions one being one which can never be fulfilled, or fulfilling. Look back at Marcuse on ‘repressive desublimation’ in AS.

Fourthly, the left typically argue that more economically equal societies have many benefits. For example, in ‘The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone’ (2010), Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett focus on the economic equality rates in the richer countries around the world, and conclude that in states with higher levels of economic inequality this is correlated with:

1. lower child wellbeing (a UNICEF measure)
2. higher anxiety levels
3. less trust among people
4. lower status for women (e.g. political participation, employment and earnings)
5. less spending on foreign aid
6. higher proportion of mental illness
7. higher proportion of drug use
8. lower life expectancy
9. higher infant mortality
10. higher obesity rates
11. lower maths and literacy scores
12. higher percentages of high school drop outs
13. lower aspirations in work
14. higher teenage pregnancy rates
15. higher murder rates
16. higher proportions of children experiencing conflict
17. higher percentages of imprisonment
18. lower social mobility
19. lower rates of patent applications
20. lower recycling rates

Note the correlation here is between all of these things and economic equality, not poverty levels or average income. For each of the points on the list, various arguments are put forward as to why this link with equality exists, but I’m not typing all that out. Go look at the book.

Fifthly, as we have seen, there is a disagreement between centre-left ideologies such as social democracy, and far-left ideologies such as communism with regard to the extent to which capitalism needs to be altered in order to bring about distributive justice. Centrist thinkers, including modern liberals and social democrats, argue that capitalism can function well, provided it is regulated. Centrist will have a reformist approach to dealing with capitalism, emphasising a variety of methods such as protectionism, progressive taxation, using the legal system to bring about equality of opportunity, and so on.

However, far-left theorists believe capitalism cannot be satisfactorily reformed. It can be argued the only reason some states are able to run on social democratic or modern liberal economics is because they rely on the ‘outsourced’ labour of workers in states which do not have such restrictions on capitalism. For instance, it might be claimed that first-world countries are able to be more centrist, because of their exploitative relationship with third-world countries. In practice, this results in a form of socialism for the rich, and capitalism for the poor. Therefore, even though capitalism may be of benefit to some in some parts of the world, it is at the disadvantage of the majority.
Furthermore, capitalism is committed to continual growth and profit. Far-left critics argue this is impossible and unsustainable. In the demand for more and more use of natural resources and labour from workers, capitalism is a system which will continually resist any attempts to reform it. There are limits on how much resource and labour extraction can be made from the world and from us. While reforms might hold this off for a time, the relationship capitalism creates between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is one grounded in conflict and difference of interests, and cannot persist forever.

**Nation states**

**States**

A state has the necessary property of being a particular territory or section of land. In other words, it will have physical borders. However, not any piece of land can be called a state, so this cannot be a sufficient property of states.

Building further on this definition, it can be said another necessary property of states is they are a politically organised society. Specifically, states are an institution which has a centralised body which makes, executes and interprets laws across a particular territory. This governmental body could take a number of forms. For example, a monarchy, dictatorship, tribal elder, or representative democracy.

Another definition of the state is that it has sovereignty, meaning it is the only institution to have supreme power over all other institutions within a particular territory.

Max Weber (b. 1864 in Erfurt, Prussia d. 1920 in Munich, Bavaria) defines the state as ‘a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’. Therefore, the only use of physical force which a state accepts is the physical force which it carries out itself.

States could be argued to use physical force in a number of ways. Most obviously, through the directly assaultive actions of their armed forces and law enforcement services. However, other examples could include the carrying out of punishments, from extreme cases like execution, through imprisonment, deportation, extradition, house arrest, and enforced community service. Therefore, it can be said Weber’s use of the term ‘physical force’ refers to any case where the state is exerting its will on others, forcing them to do something they would otherwise not do, be that get killed, be removed from the country, incarcerated, or be placed in unacceptable living conditions.

In any case, the state does not accept the legitimacy of any groups or individuals not attached to it carrying out such actions. For instance, those who do not work for the armed services or police force are not permitted to invade other countries or arrest people, while individuals not attached to the judiciary or prison services are not permitted the right to imprison others. Equally, other states are not permitted to carry out similar actions within their territory, unless express permission is given.

Another key feature of states that has been argued for is that, within their territory, any individual who lives there should submit to their rule. They have political obligation to obey the state’s laws, and it is not permitted for them to simply ‘opt out’.

Finally, it can be said that the properties which states are composed of – e.g. borders, institutions which have authority over people – only exist because we have decided they exist, they are relational to us. In other words, if there were no people, there would be no states. Note how this is not the case for land masses and geographical features such as coasts, rivers, mountain ranges and causeways.
Nations

A more difficult term to define is ‘nation’. Whereas ‘state’ refers to an area of land with a particular political system, nation is a term that refers more to a group of people.

To start with, one commonly argued necessary property of nations is they are a people who have a shared identity, which might be called a national sentiment or ‘patriotism’. People who are united by patriotic feelings of national sentiment have positive feelings towards their nation, and regard their nationality as an important part of their (shared) identity.

Adding further detail to this definition of ‘nation’, there is some disagreement over to what extent we are able to choose our nationality. Some of the different conceptions of what a nation is include:

(1), it can be argued that someone’s nationality is voluntary. For example, Weber claims a nation is nothing more than a group of people who support or aspire to have a shared state-like organisation with each other. Because of this, the nationality a person has is down to their individually chosen bonds with others, and they have the liberty to choose which nation they are a part of.

For example, if there is a group of people who are united in the view that having their own state is a good thing, and Heathcliff shares this sentiment with them and wants to be a member of that state, this definition would argue that Heathcliff can now be said to be part of this nation of people.

This definition could further be used to argue that if at a later time Heathcliff no longer feels such connections, he could legitimately switch his national identity to a different group.

(2), it can alternatively be argued that our nationality is not so voluntary. Arguments of this type frequently claim that we are effectively ‘born into’ our national group. Because we have a shared identity with others in our culture – which could include such things as commonly held values and practices, membership of a particular ethnic group, use of the same language(s), common religious beliefs etc. – this similar experience we have determines what nation we are members of.

This definition is not necessarily against the view that we can choose or change our nationality, but to do so legitimately requires a change in our shared cultural life, rather than our simply deciding to associate with one nation over another.

For example, if a group of people exists which has its own cultural identity, and Veronika lives within this culture, this definition would argue she is part of this nation of people. This can still be the case even if Veronika herself does not feel any particular national sentiments herself – she is still part of the nation through merit of being immersed in its culture. In other words, because she is embedded in the nation’s cultural life, she is a part of that nation.

It could further be said if Veronika were to fully enter into the culture of another nation, then she could legitimately change her nationality. However, her nationality cannot change simply based on her feelings.

16. Do you identify as being part of one or more national groups? If not, why not? If so, do you think your being part of that nation is something you could voluntary opt in or out of? Why?
**Difficulties with nations**

However we approach the definition of ‘nation’, the term raises some problems:

Firstly, while it is typically straightforward to determine whether or not a state exists, where it exists, and who is a member of it, none of these things are as simple with regard to nations. A key reason for this difficulty is related to there being (a) more disagreement over the meaning of ‘nation’ compared with the term ‘state’, and (b) problems with defining terms such as ‘culture’ and ‘cultural identity’.

Secondly, we can ask whether it is possible for someone to be part of more than one nation, or even no nation at all. This is not such a problem for considering whether someone is the member of a state, as states will basically choose for you. That is, if you live within a state, because it claims a monopoly on legitimate force, then you are required to follow its laws. If you wish to be a member of more than one state, the final decision is essentially up to the states involved. And if you wish to be a member of no state, this will often receive a (firmly negative) response from the state whose borders you happen to be living within.

But as we saw above, your membership of a nation depends more on you – your attitudes, and perhaps also your involvement with a particular culture. Could it be possible that someone is connected, through their sentiments and/or cultural connections, to more than one nation, or no nation at all? Also, could someone’s national identity be different to the one of the majority of people living around them?

Thirdly, if we accept the definition of nation which insists that people of the same nationality have a shared cultural identity, it is unclear how much similarity is required for the group to be rightly considered a ‘national’ one, as opposed to, say, simply a bunch of people with broadly similar backgrounds or upbringing.

Fourthly, and in connection with this, what is a national identity, really? What does it mean exactly to speak of a group of people having a ‘shared cultural heritage’? How useful is the definition given, and should it be further refined?

To illustrate this criticism, consider the USA. It contains a great number of languages, backgrounds and cultural traditions. Is it right to say the USA is a nation as well being a state? What commonality is there between the citizens of the USA, beyond the unrevealing and tautological fact that they are all USA citizens? Looking elsewhere, even for a smaller country such as the UK, or a nominally more monocultural one such as North Korea, can it ever be said that the people possess a shared national consciousness? In the case of the UK, is it just one nation? Can the Scots, Welsh, English, and Northern Irish be rightly described as independent nations? Can it break down even further than this? For example, could any religious, migrant, political or regional community meet the criteria for nationhood?

Elaborating further, imagine some list of national characteristics were written up, and it was argued a certain number had to be fulfilled for someone to rightly claim to be part of that nation. It is difficult to think of any criterion which could be argued for which (a) did not appear on any other nation’s ‘list’, and (b) said something true of all within the group who are argued to be members of that particular nation. To take a simplistic example, think of tea-drinking and the ‘English’ nation. Tea-drinking is not exclusive to ‘the English’, and nor is it something which all ‘English’ people engage in or value.

If features such as a shared language or history are argued to be defining properties of what makes a nation, these are both things that will have been shaped through interaction and influence with other cultures. For
instance, consider the various sources of words in the English language, and the role that other groups and immigrant communities have played in shaping English history.

17. Do you think ‘nation’ is a clear and/or useful concept? Explain why.

## Nation states

We can therefore define a nation state as a combination of both of these things, whereby the population of a state shares the same national sentiments or consciousness. It might be said that there is one very culturally important thing that all people living in the same state have – i.e. that they live in the same state. This fact alone could be what also makes them a nation.

It is worth noting that not all nations are states, and also that not all states are nations. For example, it can be argued that the Kurdish people are a nation, sharing a common cultural life, history, and ethnicity. However, they do not have their own state, and their population, despite being centred around a particular geographic area, occupies several existing states, such as Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq.

To take another example, it can be argued that the UK is a state, but not a nation. Rather, it is composed of several national identities, including English, Scottish and Welsh nations.

A key issue for the term ‘nation state’ relates to the criticisms we saw above regarding the definition of ‘nation’. As noted, it is difficult enough defining what a nation is, including where it can be said to begin and end. In attempting to combine the state with the nation, the concept of a nation state is claiming the physical and legal borders of the state are, or should be, equivalent to the more ‘mental’ borders of the nation. In other words, those who are part of the same nation are part of the same state.

There are already problems in clearly defining and separating one culture or nation from another. We have an incredible variety of connections, backgrounds, interests, values and lifestyles. The argument that those living within a state share the same nationality with the other people living within that state is a problematic one to make.

For example, those who live in England may have in common with other English people that they also live in England. But it can be said that ‘living in England’ does not provide an experience which is uniquely similar for all those who do it. As noted above, there is no one set of national characteristics that can be drawn up, particularly one that will be significantly different to that of other ‘nations’.
In connection with this, communist arguments, particularly more libertarian ones, may be used here. As we saw earlier in the course, communism argues we have more in common with our class than we do other classes, in terms of shared experience and interests. An extremely common, perhaps inevitable, feature of states is that they have more than one class. This fact alone could suggest the idea of a ‘nation state’ has problems. Additionally, libertarian communists may claim that any state only exists in whatever form it is in as the result of ruling class activities – e.g. war, colonisation, expansion, conquest. Furthermore, these activities are spectacularly damaging for the working class. Therefore, for the working class to align themselves and their ‘national identity’ with the products of the activities of their rulers is not in their best interests.

18. Pick a state you are familiar with. To what extent, if at all, would you describe it as a nation state? Explain why.

Nationalism, national sentiment and liberty

The issues raised by all of these terms ties in with nationalism. This is a type of political ideology which, although it comes in a number of varieties, has the following common features:

- Nationalists support statism – the view that states should exist. Therefore, nationalism is incompatible with anti-statist ideologies such as anarchism.

- Nationalists often support the view that each nation is entitled to the liberty of self-determination. This means national groups should be free to decide for themselves that they want to form a state, and, as far as possible, the boundaries of the nation and those of their state should coincide.

- Nationalists often believe someone’s nation has more importance in terms of who we have moral commitments to than the wider population. Nationalism frequently claims people in a nation have strong connections to each other, and therefore have particular obligations to those in their nation. These obligations are less strong compared to those we have to people outside of our nation, because of comparatively weaker communal ties.

- Nationalists often argue the nation state is the ideal environment to bring about the best kind of life for people, it being needed for humans to have the proper freedom to flourish. The nation we are part of will determine the particular nation state we require to meet our fullest potential. Typical reasons for making such arguments will focus on such things as social cohesion, and a shared set of cultural values and purpose binding a national community together.

- Nationalists commonly argue the highest form of political organisation is the nation state – in other words, each nation is or should be a sovereign entity. A key reason for this is the claim that if each nation is represented and secured by a state, then national sentiments will be protected.
Nationalists are supportive of national sentiment or patriotism, arguing it is good and right to have love and pride for one’s nation. It is argued that our nation significantly contributes to our identity, tying us to others in cultural commonality.

Another important point is how, in everyday discussion, nationalist attitudes are often described as right-wing. However, this labelling can be seen to have its root in the left-right linear ideological spectrum. As we have seen, this spectrum places conservatism and fascism on the right, which helps to explain why nationalism and ‘right-wing’ are thought to be connected. However, with regard to the two-dimensional spectrum, nationalist beliefs are found more at the authoritarian end of the scale. Left-wing nationalism is not an oxymoron.

Beyond this, there is a great variety of different attitudes in nationalist thought. For example, one way in which different forms of nationalist thought distinguish themselves from each other is with regard to their attitudes and treatment of those who are not part of their nation (state). In everyday language, it is common to associate nationalism with hostility towards those who are members of different nations, but it can be argued that such overt aggression is not a necessary feature of a nationalist perspective.

Nationalism can certainly be combined with some other ideologies, such as conservatism and liberalism. As noted above, anarchism and nationalism do not go together. Furthermore, socialism and communism can be anti-nationalist, particularly if it is felt that class membership is more politically and morally important than nationality. As a general tendency, it can be argued that nationalist feelings are more pronounced at the authoritarian end of the political spectrum, and less so at the libertarian end.

In the variety of nationalist thought sometimes referred to as exclusive nationalism, we do clearly see hostility towards other nations. Exclusive nationalists are characterised by intolerance towards those of other national groups, combined with a view that their own nation is superior. Therefore, they will not necessarily argue that all nations should have the liberty of self-determination. What is most important is that their nation has a state, and that this state is strong and secure.

Exclusive nationalism is usually a response to the perception that the nation is under threat internally and/or externally, a perception that provokes a heightened sense of unity and is often expressed in hostility and sometimes violence. The integrity of the nation can be challenged by a broad variety of factors, such as rapid socio-economic change, political instability, communal rivalry, an upsurge in immigration, or the growing power of neighbouring states. In such cases, nationalism offers a vision of an ordered, secure and cohesive community. Exclusive nationalism invariably rejects liberal-democratic principles, and is the most authoritarian of nationalist ideologies. Therefore, it is particularly compatible with fascism.

19. What arguments can you think of in favour of (i) nationalism, and (ii) exclusive nationalism?
**Difficulties with nationalism**

Firstly, as acknowledged above, there is the difficulty in determining which groupings of people qualify as nations in the first place. Reasons for this include the question of how many people in a national group need to feel this connection, and to what degree. Given such arguments, it may be problematic to support the nationalist position that we should be motivated by national sentiments.

Secondly, whichever definition of ‘nation’ we accept, we can criticise nationalism’s claim that we should feel stronger moral ties to those of our own nation rather than those from other nations. (This criticism will apply to an even stronger degree in cases of exclusive nationalism.)

As indicated above, a possible response for the nationalist here is the argument that a nation state is required in order to protect the interests of the members of that nation, the state being the only environment in which the nation can flourish to its fullest potential. Such a claim, of course, relies on certain assumptions that other political viewpoints could take exception to. For example, anarchists would be quick to dismiss the view that living under a state is the best environment for a rich and rewarding life. If this state is a capitalist one of any description, Marxists would be happy to join in with this objection as well. Furthermore, libertarians of all varieties could argue it is better to focus on the freedom of the individual and their autonomy to find their own identity and values, rather than their being tied to considerations of the nation state.

However, opposition to nationalism on this point does not necessarily require acceptance of anarchist, Marxist or libertarian principles. For instance, cosmopolitanism argues our moral obligations should be directed towards all persons, regardless of geographical or cultural distance, and that political arrangements should reflect this universal moral obligation.

Cosmopolitanism comes in statist as well as anti-statist varieties. Cosmopolitans who argue in favour of there being states might also support the existence of regulatory *supra-national* bodies, a term used to describe organisations which have power or influence above individual states. For example, a body that polices other states through an international legal system.

Thirdly, in addition to providing a definition of ‘nation’, Ernest Gellner (b. 1925 in Paris, France d. 1995 in Prague, Czech Republic) makes the following argument which can be directed against the nationalist idea that nations should have their own nation states:

> [There are] a very large number of potential nations on earth. Our planet also contains room for a certain number of independent or autonomous political units. On any reasonable calculation, the former number (of potential nations) is probably much, much larger than that of possible viable states. If this argument or calculation is correct, not all nationalisms can be satisfied, at any rate not at the same time. The satisfaction of some spells the frustration of others. This argument is furthered and immeasurably strengthened by the fact that very many of the potential nations of this world live, or until recently have lived, not in compact territorial units but intermixed with each other in complex patterns. It follows that a territorial political unit can only become ethnically homogenous in such cases if it either kills, or expels, or assimilates all non-nationals.

Fourthly, multiculturalism can be said to present problems for nationalism, and also the related problem of defining what a nation is. The reason for this relates to whether such a thing as a ‘multicultural nation’ can actually exist. After all, if a nation is defined by a shared culture, this makes it difficult to conceive of a multicultural ‘nation’. If such a thing exists, why would its cultural boundaries stop at any point short of everyone who is alive? It could be argued that, if nations exist, most, and possibly all of them, are
multicultural, particularly when considered from a historical point of view. Which nations can’t claim to have taken on and been influenced by other nations, and/or be composed of peoples from a variety of different backgrounds?

Fifthly, although nationalists often make the argument that nations provide unity and common purpose for people, at the same time this can be criticised as setting up boundaries and divisions against anyone who aren’t part of their nation. After all, if someone is encouraged to culturally and morally identify with a particular group, then they are not identifying as much (if at all) with those outside that group. Such sentiments can be argued to develop and strengthen other attitudes, such as xenophobic, anti-immigrant and racist feelings.

It is not uncommon to hear left-libertarians argue that appeals to nationalism are in the interests of the ruling elite, and to the detriment of working class solidarity. Not only does nationalism divide workers from their comrades in different states – e.g. English, French, Iraqi and Afghan workers – but can also divide workers within states – e.g. negative attitudes to migrant workers or those perceived to be ‘other’ in terms of nationality.

Sixthly, nationalist-approved sentiments such as patriotism and national pride or loyalty can be further criticised. (1), it can be argued such feelings are incoherent, as they can call on people to feel pride and satisfaction over activities that they did not take part in – e.g. successes in international sporting contests and wars fought by previous generations. (2), these feelings can further cement divisions and hostility to those of other nations. (3), the history of any state or nation is rarely, if ever, one that can be looked at without criticism. For example, the atrocities nations have committed against each other throughout history can be considered an unusual focus for positive sentiments.

Nationalist responses to these criticisms are likely to focus on the argued-for positives of national sentiments. For instance, the camaraderie of having a common feeling with others in our nation, which does not necessarily have to be divisive against other nations. Furthermore, a claim that the nation has done many positive and impressive things throughout history, and should be celebrated accordingly.

Seventhly, along with support for patriotism and national pride, those in support of nationalism – particularly state leaders – also commonly talk of ‘the national interest’. This term, and related criticisms, will be returned to later on in this handbook.

**Nationalism and liberty**

As we saw, part of the controversy over the definition of ‘nation’ relates to the extent to which we are free to choose our nationality. For instance, if we accept our nationality is something we can decide upon voluntarily, then it can be said we have considerable freedom with regard to what our nation is. Conversely, if we accept the alternative view that our nationality is firmly tied to the culture we are currently immersed in, then we have less freedom with regard to what our nation is.
If, as nationalism argues, our moral connections are stronger to those within our nation than those who are outside of it, then it can be said that we have fewer ethical obligations, and therefore more freedom in our actions, to people who are not part of our national group.

Exclusive nationalism can be said to have particular implications for liberty, because it argues for strong national and state divisions between people. As exclusive nationalists commonly seek to exert their will over other nations, this also has a restricting impact on the freedom of others. Furthermore, if someone is part of an exclusive nationalist grouping, there will be very firm expectations regarding their behaviour and conduct, including the demand that they strongly identify with the national character.

Exclusive nationalism is likely to have significant effects on a nation’s behaviour in this respect. For example, immigrants and those regarded as ‘them’ rather than ‘us’ are likely to be treated poorly, possibly with violence, perhaps up to the level of ethnic cleansing or genocide.

Other forms of nationalism have less extreme implications for liberty. For example, liberals have traditionally argued that nationalism can be tolerant and democratic, perfectly reconcilable with international peace, diversity and multiculturalism. For instance, liberals have sometimes argued one of the many positive aspects of free trade between nation states is it will promote international understanding and economic interdependence, ultimately making war impossible. The hope is that a stable and peaceful world order will emerge as sovereign nations come to cooperate for mutual benefit. Indeed, liberals believe that if the central goal of nationalism is achieved – i.e. that each nation becomes a self-governing entity – then the principal cause of international conflict will have been removed. As a result, nations will have no incentive to go to war against one another.

However, arguments like these are unconvincing to anti-statists. States, it may be argued, are unavoidably expansionist, meaning they seek to enlarge their powers and resources. Even if every nation acquired a state, there is little to suggest that the size and strength of the state they received would be one they wouldn’t seek to increase further. And when states try to grow, they do so to the detriment, and loss of liberty, of other states. Additionally, conflicts between states have a disproportionately negative effect on the working classes – e.g. casualties in war, and being on the receiving end of oppressive government policies such as restrictions on ‘subversive’ anti-war expressions of speech, military conscription, and the prioritising of funding away from welfare programmes and towards the military. It can be argued such factors are oppositional to freedom.

**Whether rights apply to groups and nations**

We have discussed rights earlier in studying moral and political philosophy, so make sure you know this material when tackling a rights-focused exam question on nations. This includes various positive and negative evaluative points that can be made in relation to the topic of rights – e.g. regarding their inviolability, conflicts between competing rights, how rights entail responsibilities etc.

Although the material which follows will directly make reference to whether nations can be said to have rights, it is important to note that a number of the following arguments can also be applied to the question of whether groups of any kind can have rights. For example, the rights of ethnicities, races, genders, businesses, governments and communities.
The right to self-determination

One right which is sometimes argued for is the right of a nation to self-determination. This means the nation has the right to form their own independent, sovereign state. This would therefore involve them being separate from other states, with their own laws and practices.\footnote{In the specifications, AQA picks out the right to self-determination as their one specific example of a right which nations can be argued to have, so it’s probably worth knowing about.}

Along with the argument that it is reasonable to allow people to associate with others they wish to, we have already seen reasons why it may be considered persuasive to grant nations the right to self-determination. For example, people of that nation will flourish best under their own statehood, global diversity will improve etc.

Problems with the right to self-determination

A nation (a difficult term in itself, as we have seen) arguing for the right to self-determination may be controversial for a number of reasons.

Firstly, an anarchist would claim that given the oppressive nature of states, no nation has such a right, as there is no reason to permit the violent and oppressive institutions that are states to exist in the first place.

Secondly, there may be disputes over the territory the nation wishes to be their own, in that it may already be occupied by another state. States are not well known for voluntarily giving up their territory, so such a dispute over land may well lead to violent conflict. This is likely to be a particularly difficult situation if two or more national groups claiming the right to self-determination occupy the same territory they each desire for their own state. In such cases, concluding which national group (if anyone) has the right to self-determination in a territory is very difficult to resolve. Should it be decided on a ‘first come first served’ basis? Based on numbers? Strength of desire/need?

Thirdly, it could also be questioned how much territory any group can legitimately lay claim to. What reasons could be given by a national group laying claim to an area of land any larger than is sufficient for their necessary requirements? As things currently stand, it cannot be said that every nation has been granted territory on an equal basis. For instance, there is no correlation between population size and area/access to resources.

Fourthly, communists would be particularly keen to question the legitimacy of claiming anything as being the private property of a group or individual, and perhaps the idea of ownership of ‘the land’ is most puzzling of all. One way of thinking about what having a right to property actually means is that it prevents those who do not have that right to access the thing which is owned. If it is felt that the land of the Earth should be accessible to all, then the notion of splitting it up into owned territories, thereby denying access to all but those claiming the right to it as property, is a highly distasteful position to hold.

Other rights of groups and nations

Along with the right to self-determination, it can be argued groups and nations could possess other rights. Popular suggestions include:

- The right to secure their national interests (see Appendix III)
- The right to self-defence
• The right to protection without discrimination in international law
• The right of its citizens to move freely into other states
• The right to determine its own laws for its citizens and businesses
• The right to use of their own resources
• The right to prevent individuals from entering their borders
• The right of sovereignty
• The right to secure their territory
• The right to enter into economic agreements/military alliances with other states
• The right to redress past injustices against themselves

20. Pick three of these rights of groups/nations, and provide at least one argument in favour of each one.

Problems with groups and nations claiming rights

The claim that nations can have other types of rights also comes with some difficulties:

Firstly, a key difficulty here, as we have seen with rights on an individual level, is the question of how to resolve conflicts between rights. A number of these rights are to do with international relations – in other words, how nations act towards each other. When suggesting that groups or nations should have rights, it can be said that the focus is no longer on the rights of people, but on the rights of peoples. Given the far wider scope of rights of peoples, the chances of conflict between their rights and the rights of other peoples is arguably much greater.

Secondly, this gets even more contentious when nations or states argue that their citizens, businesses and armed forces have rights determined by their nation, even when they themselves are in other states. For example, the USA could argue their troops and businesses in other states should have the same rights as they do in the USA, because they are part of that nation state. But on what basis, if any, can a state rightly argue that individuals, groups and organisations who have left its borders are nonetheless bound by their rights rather than the rights which are recognised in the foreign state they are occupying?

Thirdly, it can well be argued that problems identified with the rights of individuals become magnified on the scale of nations, states and international relations. For instance:

• The communalist criticism that rights promote individualism at the expense of cooperation with others. If this applies to states and nations, it could lead to them denying aid and assistance to those in great need.
• Rights which are argued for by a state or nation may favour the interests of the ruling classes, and so conflict with the interests of other states, classes and individuals – see Marxism.

Fourthly, the assumption so far is that a state or nation can be a subject of rights, in the same way as individuals. Talk is sometimes made of such things as ‘crimes against the state’, someone being ‘a credit to’ or ‘drain on’ the nation, or of ‘serving the community’, suggesting the rights of states can be upheld or violated, in the same way the rights of individuals can. However, it can be claimed that ‘nation’ and ‘state’ are merely a collective term for the individuals that compose them. If so, when we talk of the rights of the nation or state, we actually mean the rights of the complex jumble of individuals and groups which compose it. And if this is the case, then there is no clear rational interest that a nation or state has, over and above its citizens. In other words, why not just focus on the rights of individuals rather than complicate matters further by reference to the rights of states or nations?

One response to this is that, if we use the analogy of the state or nation to a body – as conservatism does in its organicist arguments – then the welfare of the whole body is more important than any of the parts. If this line is followed, it could be argued that the state or nation has rights relating to its overall security and welfare, which takes priority over individuals.

Also, it could be said it is ultimately states who are the protectors of the rights of their citizens. Furthermore, it is only states which have the power and resources to ensure this protection is carried out. Rights have to be implemented by government policies and actions. Therefore, if the rights of nation states are undermined, then the rights of citizens will also be undermined.

**Whether distributive justice applies globally**

In the ‘Justice’ section, we looked at theories of distributive justice, all of which put forward arguments on what has to be the case for the distribution of goods in a society to be just. In this section, we see if such arguments can be extended to have a global reach.

An immediate problem for distributive justice being applied globally is the issue of societies, (be they nations, states, or otherwise) operating on different principles. For example, consider a world in which some societies are completely *laissez-faire*, others guided by concerns for varying levels of regulation and redistribution, and others embracing communist economics.

A mixture of approaches from across the left-right spectrum is likely to lead to conflict. Right-wing societies will be reliant on access to material and labour resources so that they can experience economic growth, while left-wing societies will be resistant in the use of people and planet for free market purposes. For this reason alone, a world in which there are competing economic systems may well result in war.

As we have seen, John Rawls puts forward a modern liberal argument known as ‘justice as fairness’, placing a principal focus on equality, and some concern for need and desert as well. Some of the key features of Rawls’
argument are the veil of ignorance, the use of a social contract theory based on hypothetical agreement, and a commitment to redistribution to benefit the worst off in society through progressive taxation.

The question of whether his arguments can apply to nation states raises further concerns, a key point being whether nation states could operate behind a veil of ignorance and choose the same principles of justice as individuals. While Rawls could perhaps expect individuals to discount such things as personal talents and preferences, could the same be expected of nation states? For example, that they ignore their cultural, economic, military and geographical characteristics? It’s possible Rawls’ arguments may be even more difficult to apply to states than to individuals.

Furthermore, it may be unreasonable to expect wealthy states to distribute resources and other goods to other states which lack them – possibly more so than expecting individuals to do the same within a state.

Also, a self-sufficient state may argue that they have no need to become part of an international social contract, as they can function very well by themselves. In other words, they may accept Rawls’ arguments, but only applied within the borders of their own state.

We also looked at the ‘entitlement theory’ of Robert Nozick, in which he presents a neoliberal argument, placing a principal focus on desert, along with a concern for equality (although not in the economic sense). Some of the key features of Nozick’s argument are an emphasis on property rights, and a rejection of ‘end state’ principles in favour of ‘historical’ principles.

As with Rawls, evaluation of Nozick’s position is complicated further when we question how his arguments might apply globally. Perhaps the biggest area of practical difficulty centres on the application of Nozick’s ‘rectification principle’, in which he argues that if wealth has been acquired or transferred unjustly, then this injustice should be rectified. As indicated in the ‘Justice’ section, it could be argued that, in a number of cases, states have unjustly acquired goods – i.e. through non-voluntary transactions – which would take a great deal of thought and effort to untangle and rectify. How could such coordination be carried out?

Finally, we also looked at more left-wing arguments of distributive justice, which focused more on need and equality. Key features of such arguments include significant levels of economic redistribution in order to achieve greater egalitarianism.

Theories taking a more left-wing perspective will certainly face this same practical problem that might apply to Nozick – i.e. redistribution of wealth on a grand scale.

However, these criticisms of theories of distributive justice – for Rawls, Nozick and the left – largely focus on issues of practicality. If what they are arguing for truly is justice, then it could be firmly stated that even if carrying them out on a global level is going to be difficult, it is nonetheless the right thing to do, and so should be done.

**Whether restrictions on cross-border movement and association are just**

States frequently place controls on who can cross their borders, meaning liberty is restricted with regard to cross-border movement and association with others. The question this raises is whether such state action is just. In looking at this topic, it can be useful to know the different ways in which states such as this one place different categorisations on those wishing to cross borders. For example:
• **Asylum seekers** are people fleeing from persecution or danger in another state.
• Such individuals are often distinguished from **refugees**, a term generally used for those who have been given permission to stay, as the state they are wishing to move to accepts that where they are coming from is a dangerous place for them to remain. If a person is still going through the process of seeking permission to stay, they are more likely to be labelled 'asylum seeker' than 'refugee'. In other words, they were seeking asylum, and they have found it.
• **Economic migrants** are those who move to another state in order to seek employment. This includes all different 'skill levels' of work.
• **Environmental refugees** are individuals who wish to move state because of natural disasters where they currently live.
• **Undocumented migrants** describes those who don't fit into any of the state-authorised categories above. This includes asylum seekers who have been denied their request to stay, people who overstay the limits of their student or work visa, and those who have arrived in the state 'unofficially'.

**Ideological perspectives on migration**

Liberals are likely to be sympathetic to the free movement of people between nations, since they argue in favour of such things as individual negative freedom, along with placing value on diversity and multiculturalism, claiming they have positive benefits such as the introduction of new ideas, increasing intellectual progress etc.

Marxists have also often argued in favour of immigration. One of their concerns is that the ruling classes are quite happy for the workers of a nation to have oppositional and hostile attitudes to immigrant workers. The reason for this is it serves the interests of the ruling class very well, as the working class (immigrants and residents) are fighting amongst each other, rather than uniting against their common enemy – the bourgeoisie. This can be seen as an effective example of 'divide and rule'. Note Marxists do not necessarily argue this is a deliberate manipulation by the ruling class. However, as it serves their interests, the ruling class make little concerted effort to stop it, thereby allowing it to continue.

Anarchists are even more likely to be in favour of – or at least unconcerned with – the migration of individuals and groups from one place to another, given they do not recognise any state boundaries, and place even greater emphasis than liberals on the importance of individual freedom. State borders are seen as the products of conquest and oppression caused by those with the power to exert their political and military will on others – why is it just to restrict people’s movement and association in line with these boundaries? Anarchists in particular are hostile to the notion of 'illegal' immigrants, questioning firstly how a person can be illegal, and secondly the entire legitimacy of a legal system that brands individuals in such a manner.

Conservatives are more likely to argue that our identity derives from a framework of social relationships and institutional practices, and so progress and fulfilment are dependent on strong communal bonds and agreed values. In other words, we benefit more from monoculturalism more than we do multiculturalism. Therefore, conservatives and those with strong nationalist beliefs are more likely to argue immigration can pose a threat to these important social ties, and consequently to our identity. Although it might be accepted that a moral case can be made for assisting those escaping persecution and intolerable living conditions, it can also be argued the inclusion of other groups into a state can upset the balance of the organism of society. Simply put, allowing other cultures free entry into a state could upset social cohesion.

Nationalisms may, in certain circumstances, by very keen on migration and the association of particular peoples. For instance, if someone is part of a nation, and elsewhere in the world there is a nation state which contains other people of their nation, it can be argued it would be in their interests to become part of it. It would also be in the interests of their nation state, as nationalist arguments claim the people of a nation...
flourish best when combined together in their own state. The flip side of this is nationalists are likely to be oppositional to people of other nations being within a nation state which is not ‘their own’.

Exclusive nationalism is even more likely to insist on strong border controls, in order to keep people of other nations out of their state. Furthermore, it is likely to support the view that people of differing nations within their state should be removed from it, so as to enable/preserve national monoculturalism.

**Should some types of migrant be favoured over others?**

Some who have concerns about immigration nonetheless argue that asylum seekers have a stronger case for immigration than others might. For instance, it could be argued that an individual wishing to live in another country because they are facing persecution and threats in their politically unstable homeland has a greater claim than an economic migrant, because their need is likely to be greater.

However, someone taking a more pro-immigration position could argue that while the asylum seeker has a stronger claim, this does not mean that the economic migrant’s wish to live elsewhere should be considered particularly weak or illegitimate. After all, people move to get jobs all the time – what does it matter if this is across a state border? Furthermore, although it is often argued that immigrants ‘take’ jobs from the resident population, it should be remembered that anyone entering a country is a consumer as well as a worker. What this means is they will be spending their wages on goods and services in the state they live in, which is precisely what creates jobs in the first place. Little outcry is made when residents produce children who then go on to enter the job market about them taking jobs from others. Their presence and purchasing activities create jobs, just as the presence of economic migrants does.

A further point which can be raised in favour of economic migrants is they typically arrive in their country of choice when they are of working age, and typically leave before they retire to return to their homelands. This means that they do not make much use of two particularly expensive public services – public education for children and public healthcare for the elderly (if the state they are working in offers them, of course). Consequently, it could be argued that the young and old residents of a state who were born there can well provide a greater ‘drain’ on resources than economic migrants do.

Some states place an emphasis on ‘high-skilled’ economic migrants. This is often done to fill up areas where there is a skills shortage e.g. doctors, teachers, miners, or whatever is identified as being an economic necessity. One impact of this is it can create a ‘brain drain’ in other states, as highly skilled workers from elsewhere come in high numbers. Another impact is it can create an unbalanced employment structure, as there are a high number of ‘skilled workers’, but an insufficient amount of ‘low-’ or ‘unskilled’ workers to cater for the society as a whole. For instance, if there is a high number of doctors, but a low number of service personnel, this can be a problem.

**The notion of a just war**

War can be seen to have extremely significant and far-reaching effects on such things as freedom, liberty and rights – of states as well as individuals – so it is often argued going to war requires special justification. Just war theory is the name which has been given to a ‘family’ of similar arguments made by a number of philosophers in both ancient and modern times, from Western and Eastern traditions. Just war theory puts
forward certain conditions which have to be met in order for a war to be just. In the various forms it has appeared, it typically focuses on the following concerns:

- The justice of resorting to war – *jus ad bellum*
- Just conduct in war – *jus in bello*
- Justice at the end of the war – *jus post bellum*

It is worth noting that just war theory is not tied to any particular normative ethical approach – e.g. consequentialist, deontological, or virtue ethics. The reasons the following positions might be held could potentially be justified with reference to any of these methods of ethical argument.

**Jus ad bellum**

The following six criteria have been suggested for resorting to war to be just.

1. The war must have ‘just cause’. There is disagreement over what this involves, but typically it is argued that self-defence, protecting the innocent, righting humanitarian catastrophes, and corrective punishment for aggressive action are likely to be just causes.

2. The war must be fought in ‘right intention’, meaning that it is the just cause that motivates the war, not other concerns – e.g. financial gain, increasing territory etc.

3. The decision to go to war must be made by a legitimate authority – e.g. the legitimate rulers of a state – and be publicly declared.

4. War must be a ‘last resort’, with all other methods of resolving conflict exhausted. This includes attacking an enemy who is not a threat, or likely to be in the near future.

5. There must be a ‘probability of success’. Violence without likely gain cannot be justified. Otherwise, you are likely to be sending people to their deaths, without anything to make such a sacrifice worthwhile.

6. The result of declaring war must be ‘proportionate’. This means that the good that can be secured through war must outweigh the bad that is likely to occur. In other words, the end must justify the means. Everyone affected by the war, including enemy soldiers and civilians, should be taken into account in this calculation.

**Jus in bello**

The following six criteria have been suggested for just conduct in war – i.e. the actions of the forces involved while the war is taking place.

1. No use of weapons prohibited by international law.

2. Non-combatants must not be targeted. This includes locations as well as people – e.g. civilian dwellings and highways.

3. Proportional force must be used i.e. proportionate to achieve the end result, with the minimum amount of necessary force employed.
4. No weapons or means of war that are ‘evil in themselves’ are permitted – e.g. ethnic cleansing/genocide, starvation tactics, and rape.

5. These rules may not be broken just because the enemy has broken them.

6. Prisoners of war must be treated well.

**Jus post bellum**

There is less agreement over what just activity following a war involves. However, we can apply a number of the values expressed in *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* to form an outline.

1. If the war was waged in order to secure particular rights or freedoms, then these should be secured – e.g. if it was argued that the war would bring liberty and democracy to the people, then this is what must happen once the war is over.

2. In the same way to the declaration of war being public, the declaration of peace should be as well.

3. Any peace settlement should be reasonable, and not a form of revenge, as this would most likely fuel resentment and further aggression.

4. The distinction between combatants and non-combatants still applies when considering punishment. Trials for war crimes should be public and international.

21. Pick at least three of the points above, and explain why it might be reasonable to include them in the necessary requirements for a just war.

**Some objections to just war theory**

Firstly, demanding a ‘legitimate authority’ initiates the war raises the question of what a legitimate authority is. This is an issue we looked at back in ‘Why should I be governed?’
Secondly, arguing that going to war must be a last resort faces the problem that it is difficult to know when such a situation has arisen. How long, for instance, should more diplomatic methods be attempted? Could it be said non-violent response is always an option, meaning war is never just?

Thirdly, stating that war can only be justly initiated when there is the probability of success requires that what is meant by ‘success’ is made clear. For example, does success necessarily involve the reclaiming of territory, the expulsion of the enemy, their complete destruction...?

Fourthly, there is some difficulty in determining which targets count as civilian and which as military. For example, a bridge that is used by both ordinary people and the army, or a residential building which also houses enemy combatants.

Fifthly, just war theory has also been criticised in terms of how realistic it is. It can be argued that states simply are not guided by it. If a state deems it in their interests to go to war, they will do so. Admittedly, states often make public declarations that they are guided by ethical principles in war – e.g. state leaders provide moral justification for initiating or joining a conflict, emphasise how ‘smart’ weaponry is used to avoid civilian casualties, stress at all times their good intentions etc. – but such moves can be accused of being little more than a public relations exercise.

Sixthly, supporters of pacifism argue that violent conduct to resolve disputes is always unjust. Aggression by a state does not need to be resisted by war, they argue, as there are other means, less destructive but no less effective, such as a very widespread campaign of civil disobedience, international sanctions, or negotiations.

Seventhly, the claim can be made that because it is not realistically possible for any war to meet all of the criteria in the theory, therefore no wars are truly justified.

**How the notion of a just war applies in asymmetric wars**

An asymmetric war is one in which the two sides differ significantly in military resources or tactics. It may differ from ‘normal’ or symmetric war only in that one state is significantly weaker than the other, or it may involve one side not being a state or even a politically recognised body. It may also involve unconventional tactics, such as guerrilla warfare. A number of asymmetric wars are revolutionary, in that a group of people seek to overthrow or secede from a political authority. In any case, in an asymmetric war, one of the sides involved has a significant advantage over the other e.g. numerically, tactically, technologically, geographically.

Examples of asymmetric warfare are very wide-ranging, from the American Revolution of 1776 (a people versus an imperial force), World War II once the USA acquired the nuclear bomb, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and the two wars in Iraq of 1990 and 2003.

As might be expected, this definition contrasts with symmetric war, referring to a conflict in which the competing sides are more evenly matched.

The existence of asymmetric war suggests that changes should be made to just war theory:

Firstly, it is commonly held that the only legitimate authorities, and therefore the only groups who can legitimately initiate war, are states (of course, anarchists would disagree here). If this principle is insisted on, it means no rebellious or revolutionary war could ever be considered just.
Secondly, just war theory’s demand that war should only be initiated if there is a good chance of success also means many asymmetric wars could not be begun by an ‘underdog’ group. Such a disadvantaged group could use certain tactics to level the playing field, but this is likely to involve violating other requirements of just war theory, such as the use of non-conventional weaponry and the targeting of civilians.

Thirdly, a further implication is that a superior force would find it easier to justify initiating war against less powerful groups, as their chance of success is greater.

Fourthly, just war theory argues there should be discrimination in selection of targets – in particular, non-military targets should be avoided. However, underdog groups may find their limited resources make this impossible, and may argue there is justification in attacking whatever enemy-related targets they are able to. For instance, it might be felt that civilian targets are legitimate, given it is these civilians who support the power and actions of their states.

Fifthly, the dominant force in an asymmetric war may find it impossible to distinguish between military and civilian targets, particularly if they are fighting against an armed citizenry rather than a conventional army.

Appendix I: Joel Feinberg’s ‘A Ride on the Bus’

One of the main objections made against Mill is how clear his distinction of ‘harm’ is, particularly when compared to what he means by ‘offence’. Mill holds that offensive speech and actions are acceptable. As stated above, when speaking of harm, Mill means physical harm, and only harmful other-regarding actions can justifiably be made illegal.

However, if this definition of harm were broadened to include psychological, moral and even spiritual harm, it could be used to outlaw a far greater range of other-regarding actions. For example, abusive speech, verbal bullying, the portrayal of violence, pornography or blasphemy on television might all be regarded as harmful in the sense that they are especially corrupting and offensive, so much so that harm is caused. In other words, some expressions of views might be characterised not as just offensive, but harmful.

The same confusion occurs when ‘harm’ is taken to include economic or social disadvantage. For instance, the imposition of a pay cut by an employer may not (directly) harm their employees in a physical sense, but does harm their interests.

There seem to be clear advantages and disadvantages to widening the definition of harm in this way. In its favour, it would allow for there to be laws set against expressions of speech or other non-physically harmful actions that can be said to still cause harm (in this broader sense) to people. However, this could be considered a disadvantage, as it may lead to censorship and regulation in all areas of our lives – so much so that conservative worries about the excesses of the nanny state and political correctness could be justified.

Complicating matters further, Joel Feinberg (b. 1926 in Michigan, USA d. 2004 in Arizona, USA) presents the following argument:

This selection is taken from Professor Feinberg’s four-volume work on the moral limits of the criminal law. In it, he imagines a trip on a bus in which the rider suffers from extremely unpleasant, offensive acts. In no case, Feinberg suggests, is the person ‘harmed’.

A RIDE ON THE BUS

There is a limit to the power of abstract reasoning to settle questions of moral legitimacy. The question raised by this chapter is whether there are any human experiences that are harmless in themselves yet so unpleasant...
that we can rightly demand legal protection from them even at the cost of other persons’ liberties. The best way to deal with that question at the start is to engage our imaginations in the inquiry, consider hypothetically the most offensive experiences we can imagine, and then sort them into groups in an effort to isolate the kernel of the offense in each category. Accordingly, this section will consist of a number of vividly sketched imaginary tales, and the reader is asked to project himself into each story and determine as best he can what his reaction would be. In each story the reader should think of himself as a passenger on a normally crowded public bus on his way to work or to some important appointment in circumstances such that if he is forced to leave the bus prematurely, he will not only have to pay another fare to get where he is going, but he will probably be late, to his own disadvantage. If he is not exactly a captive on the bus, then, he would nevertheless be greatly inconvenienced if he had to leave the bus before it reached its destination. In each story, another passenger, or group of passengers, gets on the bus, and proceeds to cause, by their characteristics or their conduct, great offense to you. The stories form six clusters corresponding to the kind of offense caused.

Therefore, the purpose of each of these stories is to present situations which are not harmful, but are offensive. Furthermore, Feinberg holds that at least some of these situations are ones we might consider are so offensive that they should be made illegal. If we believe that even one of these stories shows a situation which is non-harmful, but offensive, and should be illegal, this presents a strong argument against Mill’s Harm Principle, which argues only other-regarding harmful actions should be outlawed.

**A. Affronts to the Senses**

Story 1. A passenger who obviously hasn’t bathed in more than a month sits down next to you. He reeks of a barely tolerable stench. There is hardly room to stand elsewhere on the bus and all other seats are occupied.

Story 2. A passenger wearing a shirt of violently clashing orange and crimson sits down directly in your forward line of vision. You must keep your eyes down to avoid looking at him.

Story 3. A passenger sits down next to you, pulls a slate tablet from his brief case, and proceeds to scratch his fingernails loudly across the slate, sending a chill up your spine and making your teeth clench. You politely ask him to stop, but he refuses.

Story 4. A passenger elsewhere in the bus turns on a portable radio to maximum volume. The sounds it emits are mostly screeches, whistles, and static, but occasionally some electronically amplified rock and roll music blares through.

**B. Disgust and Revulsion**

Story 5. This is much like story 1 except that the malodorous passenger in the neighboring seat continually scratches, drools, coughs, farts, and belches.

Story 6. A group of passengers enters the bus and shares a seating compartment with you. They spread a table cloth over their laps and proceed to eat a picnic lunch that consists of live insects, fish heads, and pickled sex organs of lamb, veal, and pork, smothered in garlic and onions. Their table manners leave almost everything to be desired.

Story 7. Things get worse and worse. The itinerant picnickers practice gluttony in the ancient Roman manner, gorging until satiation and then vomiting on to their table cloth. Their practice, however, is a novel departure from the ancient custom in that they eat their own and one another’s vomit along with the remaining food.


Story 9. At some point during the trip the passenger at one’s side quite openly and nonchalantly changes her sanitary napkin and drops the old one into the aisle.

**C. Shock to Moral, Religious, or Patriotic Sensibilities**

Story 10. A group of mourners carrying a coffin enter the bus and share a seating compartment with you. Although they are all dressed in black their demeanor is by no means funereal. In fact they seem more angry
than sorrowful, and refer to the deceased as "the old bastard," and "the bloody corpse." At one point they rip open the coffin with hammers and proceed to smash the corpse's face with a series of hard hammer blows.

Story 11. A strapping youth enters the bus and takes a seat directly in your line of vision. He is wearing a T-shirt with a cartoon across his chest of Christ on the cross. Underneath the picture appear the words 'Hang in there, baby!'

Story 12. After taking the seat next to you a passenger produces a bundle wrapped in a large American flag. The bundle contains, among other things, his lunch, which he proceeds to eat. Then he spits into the star-spangled corner of the flag and uses it first to clean his mouth and then to blow his nose. Then he uses the main striped part of the flag to shine his shoes.

**D. Shame, Embarrassment (Including Vicarious Embarrassment), and Anxiety**

Story 13. The passenger who takes the seat directly across from you is entirely naked. On one version of the story, he or she is the same sex as you; on the other version of the story, he or she is the opposite sex.

Story 14. The passenger in the previous story proceeds to masturbate quietly in his or her seat.

Story 15. A man and woman, more or less fully clothed to start, take two seats directly in front of you, and then begin to kiss, hug, pet, and fondle one another to the accompaniment of loud sighs and groans of pleasure. They continue these activities throughout the trip.

Story 16. The couple of the previous story, shortly before the bus reaches their destination, engage in acts of mutual masturbation, with quite audible instructions to each other and other sound effects.

Story 17. A variant of the previous story which climaxes in an act of coitus, somewhat acrobatically performed as required by the crowded circumstances.

Story 18. The seat directly in front of you is occupied by a youth (of either sex) wearing a T-shirt with a lurid picture of a copulating couple across his or her chest.

Story 19. A variant of the previous story in which the couple depicted is recognizable (in virtue of conventional representations) as Jesus and Mary.

Story 20. The couple in stories 15—17 perform a variety of sadomasochistic sex acts with appropriate verbal communications ('Oh, that hurts so sweet! Hit me again! Scratch me! Publicly humiliate me!')

Story 21. The two seats in front of you are occupied by male homosexuals. They flirt and tease at first, then kiss and hug, and finally perform mutual fellatio to climax.

Story 22. This time the homosexuals are both female and they perform cunnilingus.

Story 23. A passenger with a dog takes an aisle seat at your side. He or she keeps the dog calm at first by petting it in a familiar and normal way, but then petting gives way to hugging, and gradually goes beyond the merely affectionate to the unmistakably erotic, culminating finally with oral contact with the canine genitals.

**E. Annoyance, Boredom, Frustration**

Story 24. A neighboring passenger keeps a portable radio at a reasonably low volume, and the sounds it emits are by no means offensive to the senses. Nor is the content of the program offensive to the sensibilities. It is, however, a low quality "talk show" which you find intensely boring, and there is no possible way for you to disengage your attention.

Story 25. The two seats to your left are occupied by two persons who put on a boring "talk show" of their own. There is no way you can avoid hearing every animated word of their inane conversation, no way your mind can roam to its own thoughts, problems, and reveries.
Story 26. The passenger at your side is a friendly bloke, garrulous and officious. You quickly tire of his conversation and beg leave to read your newspaper, but he persists in his chatter despite repeated requests to desist. The bus is crowded and there are no other empty seats.

F. Fear, Resentment, Humiliation, Anger (from Empty Threats, Insults, Mockery, Flaunting, or Taunting)
Story 27. A passenger seated next to you reaches into a military kit and pulls out a "hand grenade" (actually only a realistic toy), and fondles and juggles it throughout the trip to the accompaniment of menacing leers and snorts. Then he pulls out a (rubber) knife and "stabs" himself and others repeatedly to peals of maniacal laughter. He turns out to be harmless enough. His whole intent was to put others in apprehension of harm.

Story 28. A passenger sits next to you wearing a black arm band with a large white swastika on it.

Story 29. A passenger enters the bus straight from a dispersed street rally. He carries a banner with a large and abusive caricature of the Pope and an anti-Catholic slogan. (You are a loyal and pious Catholic).

Story 30. Variants of the above. The banner displays a picture of a black according to some standard offensive stereotype (Step 'n Fetchit, Uncle Tom, etc.) with an insulting caption, or a picture of a sneering, sniveling, hook-nosed Fagin or Shylock, with a scurrilous anti-Jewish caption, or a similar offensive denunciation or lampooning of groups called "Spicks," "Dagos, 'Polacks", etc.

Story 31. Still another variant. A counter-demonstrator leaves a feminist rally to enter the bus. He carries a banner with an offensive caricature of a female and the message, in large red letters: "Keep the bitches barefoot and pregnant."

Appendix II: More anarchist infighting

As we saw previously, anarchists on the left and anarcho-capitalists have some significant areas of disagreement. However, it is worth noting that a number of leftist anarchists argue anarcho-capitalism should not even count as an anarchist philosophy in the first place.

In defence of this view, leftist anarchists can argue that in a stateless, capitalist society it is inevitable that monopolisation will occur.

In his book ‘Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism’, Peter Marshall (b. 1946 in Bognor Regis, England) writes the following:

In the utopias of the anarcho-capitalists, there is little reason to believe that the rich and powerful will continue to exploit and oppress the powerless and poor as they do at present. It is difficult to imagine that protective services could impose their ideas of fair procedure without resorting to coercion. With the free market encouraging selfishness, there is no assurance that ‘public goods’ like sanitation and clean water would be provided for all. Indeed, the anarcho-capitalists deny the very existence of collective interests and responsibilities. In his relationship with society, the anarcho-capitalist stands alone, an egoistic and calculating consumer; society is considered to be nothing more than a loose collection of autonomous individuals.

The anarcho-capitalist definition of freedom is entirely negative. It calls for the absence of coercion but cannot guarantee the positive freedom of individual autonomy and independence. Nor does it recognise the equal right of all to the means of subsistence. [Friedrich] Hayek speaks on behalf of the anarcho-capitalist when he warns: ‘Above all we must recognise that we may be free and yet miserable’. Others go even further to suggest that liberty and bread are not synonymous and that we have ‘the liberty to die of hunger’. In the name of
freedom, the anarcho-capitalists would like to turn public spaces into private property, but freedom does not flourish behind high fences protected by private companies but expands in the open air when it is enjoyed by all.

Appendix III: The national interest

As noted above, reference can be made to the right of a nation or state to secure its national interest. This is typically appealed to when arguing that it is good for the state or nation that it acts a particular way, and should have a right to do so.

Such a claim raises the question of whether or not it is meaningful to talk about what is ‘good’ for a nation or state. Is this any different from what is good for individual citizens? One example where this is an issue is in the topic of war. Wars can, and often are, argued by governments to be in the national interest. However, they may not necessarily be in the interests of the individual people – for example, because they are being killed. Perhaps, though, it could be argued in some cases that war is at least not in their immediate interest, but their sacrifice is benefiting the survivors and/or the next generation.

In opposition, Chomsky argues that whenever ‘the national interest’ is referred to, this means little more than economic and financial interest. As an anti-capitalist anarchist, Chomsky holds that states are unavoidably violent and unnecessary institutions, the level of violence they commit in correlation to their power. He argues the power a state has is related to its economic wealth. Therefore, it can be said the wealthier the state, the more violent it is likely to be. (This wealth can be enhanced and/or secured by the support of other states.)

Chomsky claims there is little distinction in modern capitalist states between the interests of the government leaders and the interests of the state’s business leaders. Simply put, governments serve the capitalist class far more than the working class. He draws on a number of leftist arguments in support of this, which we should all be quite familiar with at this point. Such criticisms align with arguments see saw earlier, on the false consciousness of workers who take their identity to be connected to their state or nation, rather than their class.

Given the view he has of states and what is meant by ‘the national interest’, Chomsky is therefore unconvinced by the argument that a nation or state has any right to act motivated by this particular principle. He would claim that nation states acting in this way has caused a great deal of unnecessary suffering and rights violations of millions of individuals, which is far more important than the economic concerns of the ruling classes. The interests of government and business leaders are in no way the same as the interests of the general population of a state. Consequently, it is wrong to equate – as sometimes occurs – criticism of a state’s government with criticism of a state’s people:

If you identify the country, the people, the culture with the rulers [then] it’s anti-Semitic to criticize the Israeli policy, and anti-American to criticize the American policy, and it was anti-Soviet when the dissidents criticized Russian policy. You have to accept deeply totalitarian assumptions not to laugh at this.
Appendix IV: Nationalism, anti-immigration and right-wing politics

We saw above how although in everyday political discussion nationalism is described as being ‘right-wing’ or even ‘far right’, if we make use of the two-dimensional spectrum rather than the linear, this is a misapplication of the term. On the two-dimensional spectrum, nationalism can be left- or right-wing. Instead, what characterises it more is its connection with authoritarian views.

A related point is how, in everyday discussion, attitudes which are more oppositional to immigration are also often described as ‘right-wing’. Again, this labelling can be seen to have its root in the left-right linear ideological spectrum. However, with regard to the two-dimensional spectrum, anti-immigration beliefs are found at the authoritarian end of the scale. Such views are compatible with either left- or right-wing beliefs.

Those on the right, including the far right, are perfectly able to hold pro-immigration views. For instance, the libertarian right-wing. Being supporters of capitalism, those of this political viewpoint are likely to argue in favour of the freedom of businesses to employ who they wish, and for employees to work where they will be best able to use their skills. State borders can be argued to be a restriction on economic freedoms. Although it is currently extremely common for businesses to conduct their affairs across many borders – e.g. globalised companies such as Wal-Mart, Nike, HSBC, Apple – the people who they employ find themselves facing much greater restrictions on their capitalist activities. It can be seen as inconsistent for states to happily allow foreign businesses into their borders, but not foreign workers.

Appendix V: Is there a distinction between freedom from and freedom to?

The argument that there is a difference between negative and positive liberty has come under criticism. Philosophers such as Gerald MacCullum (b. 1925 in Washington, USA d. 1987 in Kansas, USA) have argued there is no substantial difference between the two. For example, having the freedom to gain an education can also be expressed as having freedom from ignorance, while being free from excessive taxation can be expressed as being free to spend your money as you wish.

MacCullum suggests that reference to these two different types of liberty should be dropped. Individual cases of freedom should be expressed in the following way:

\[ x \text{ is free from } y \text{ to do or be } z \]

\[ x = \text{agent} \]
\[ y = \text{obstacle to freedom} \]
\[ z = \text{what we are free to do or be} \]

The question ‘Are we free?’ is therefore too simplistic, MacCullum argues, as we must specify what we are free from, and what we are free to do. MacCullum feels this distinction helps to explain why people disagree about freedom. For instance, they disagree about what counts as an obstacle to liberty.
In response to such arguments, it could be said although different types of freedom can be worked into this schema, Berlin holds that the definition of negative liberty focuses on restrictions of law and interventions in our private lives, and positive liberty centres its definition of freedom on seeing legal intervention as potentially empowering and enabling. In other words, negative freedom is about the absence of intervention, and positive freedom is about there being the *right kind* of intervention. Consequently, it can still be useful to make a distinction between these different types of liberty.

### Appendix VI: Fascism

From ‘A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy’, explaining the differences between fascism and more general authoritarianism, as in Hobbes:

**Fascism** is the youngest of ideologies and... combines an intense nationalism, which is both militarily aggressive and resolved to subdue all aspects of public and private life, to the pursuit of national greatness. It asserts that a supreme leader is indispensable, a heroic figure in whom the national spirit is incarnated. It seeks to organise society along military lines, conceiving war as the fullest expression of the national will as brought to consciousness in the leader. It sees the nation not primarily as a cultural entity, defined by a common language, traditional customs, perhaps a shared religion, a history of heroes and great events, but also in questionably biological terms.

Where authoritarianism is primarily defensive [against perceived threats], fascism is aggressive and militant. Authoritarianism does not seek to mobilise the community and to exercise total control over every aspect of human life; fascism is totalitarian without qualification. Both see the mass of the population as incapable of contributing to the state except through obedience, and fascism calls for active, self-sacrificing obedience.

...In less ferocious hands than Hitler’s, such as those of [Oswald] Mosley, it is a kind of elitism of the resolute, taken to be made necessary by the weakness of will in the public in general, including democratic politicians. It makes little appeal to personal self-interest, except to the extent that the political strength of the nation enhances its economic vigour... The organicist doctrine can be called on to justify [submersion of individuality]... to imply that the whole raison d’être of the individual is the service of the state, in the way that the function of a particular organ is to contribute to the well-being of the body of which it is a part.

From the same text, comparing fascism to conservatism, and also the kind of political elitism found in Plato:

**Fascism** is... non-conservative in a number of respects. It is radical, and even revolutionary, to start with, calling for a wholesale replacement of existing institutions and an immense enlargement of the functions of government. It has no respect whatever for customary law, for constitutions and, indeed, for the rule of law in general. The inspired leaders it calls for are self-taught political virtuosi, from the remote margins of the ordinary political life. In [Max] Weber’s terms, the fascist leader claims charismatic authority, where the authority of the conservative ruler is traditional.

...Elitism, with its Platonic ancestry, is perhaps the oldest political ideology. It is non-conservative in respect of all three of conservatism’s central doctrines. It does not take human beings and the societies they compose to be theoretically impenetrable. It contends that the best elite is an intellectual one, composed of those who are particularly qualified by abilities and training to understand the workings of society. It can accord respect to tradition, but not reverence, seeing tradition as the surviving residue of the work of past elites. Unlike most conservatives, the elitist attaches little importance to people’s inherited position.
# Glossary

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### PHIL3 Key Themes in Philosophy: Political Philosophy

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### True cost economics

- Two-dimensional spectrum
- Undocumented migrant
- Utility rights theory
- Utopianism
- Veil of ignorance
- Waive (re. rights)
- Welfare state

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