1. Introduction to the History of Political Thought Papers

For several decades now, Cambridge has been an international centre for teaching and research on the history of political thought, a subject which has formed a substantial component of the undergraduate degrees in both History and Politics. On the Politics side, there is a widespread view among those who teach the subject here that the study of political ideas in their historical contexts offers an invaluable training for thinking critically and flexibly about politics more generally.

Much of the teaching for this paper is organised by the History Faculty. It is responsible for the production of the reading lists, and will have arranged the lectures that will be delivered throughout the academic year. Sometimes Politics students feel intimidated by the lectures—they worry that they don’t know enough about modern European history, for example, and they come to believe that the History students are better placed than they are to benefit from what’s being said. But if you have thoughts like this, it’s worth exploring the other side of the coin. It’s true that Historians may initially be more familiar with some aspects of the subject than Politics students. But Politics students (especially if they have taken the Part I paper, POL1) usually have considerably more experience at handling political argument at a decent level of sophistication by the time they come to study for this paper, and that gives them a very useful platform on which to build their engagement with the syllabus here—since taking political argument seriously is ultimately what this paper is about.
2. Introduction to the Period

Beginning with the Enlightenment and extending from the American and French revolutions to the wave of revolutions in 1848 and the challenge to capitalism in the thought of Karl Marx, this paper explains the formation of the fundamental concepts of modern politics. The line between the sacred and the civil, the relation between liberty and commerce, the transformations in the principles of political legitimacy which led to the notion of the modern representative republic, the nineteenth-century rise of the idea of nation-states and nationalism, the modern concept of empire, the demand for gender equality: all these and more form the content of this paper.

Like POL 7, this paper offers two kinds of intellectual exploration. In Part A, you will focus on a close reading of major texts within their political and intellectual contexts. This enables you to explore how political argument was articulated in texts by the greatest political philosophers of the period. In Part B, you will focus on groups of texts which are thematically and historically connected, developing your ability to understand the way that a given political language is inflected in different directions according to different demands of national and international debate in the modern period. For those who have done other papers in the history of political thought or are thinking of taking them, this paper provides an essential introduction to the understanding of all aspects of understanding political thought, including the foundations of truly modern politics in a global setting.

3. How to study for this paper

Lectures: because the material to be covered spans a wide chronological and thematic range, and also because many students will not have studied the history of political thought before, a comprehensive array of lectures is offered. This need not cause you alarm since you are not required or expected to attend them all. Lecturers are encouraged to place their outlines, bibliographies and other material on the paper’s Moodle site in advance of the lecture. Your id will be added to the list of site users by the course organiser at the start of the academic year, based on information received from the administrative offices of History and POLIS. If you have been omitted, you should contact the course organiser.

Supervisions: for this paper, the norm is to have six paired supervisions for the paper spread over the Michaelmas and Lent terms. In these supervisions, you should cover six of the twenty-three named authors (section A) and historical topics (section B) that make up the syllabus, in preparation for answering three questions in the examination (including at least one question from each of sections A and B). What you need to do, therefore, is to construct, in conjunction with your supervisor and supervision partner, your own intellectual pathway through this paper. Before you start, you should make an initial choice of, say, authors and topics; these will preferably have thematic or historical connections between them. You may change your choice as you proceed, but identification of a pathway is the key to making the most of this paper. The following page just indicates some possibilities, and is in no sense meant to be directive, simply illustrative, but there is of course considerable overlap between certain authors and themes.
### 4. Some Possible Pathways through this Paper (indicative/illustrative only)

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<tr>
<td>5. Socialism before 1848</td>
<td>5. Mill</td>
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5. Lectures

For guidance as to which lectures will be most relevant to your course of studies, you are advised to get in touch with your supervisor as early as possible in Michaelmas term. It is not expected that students will attend all the lectures advertised, but it is advisable to attend lectures on the topics that you are covering.

Lectures are organized by the History Faculty. Room locations will be made available via the online timetable, but if in doubt, consult the digital noticeboard in the lobby of the History Faculty building.

**Michaelmas Term (2022):**

DR C. BROOKE and DR T. HOPKINS  
Introduction to POL7 and POL8  
(One lecture, Thurs, wk 1, 12 noon)  
Lady Mitchell Hall, Sidgwick Site.

DR S. TOMASELLI  
Montesquieu. (Two lectures, weeks 3-4)  
W.10 Law Faculty, LG17

DR S. TOMASELLI  
Natural law, sociability and luxury. (Four lectures, weeks 1-4)  
M. 10 Law Faculty, LG17

DR S. TOMASELLI  
Wollstonecraft; Gender and political thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.  
(Four lectures, weeks 5-8)  
M. 10 Law Faculty, LG17

DR N. GUYATT  
The worlds of the American Founding, c. 1781-1790. (Four lectures, 5-8)  
M. 11 Law Faculty, LG17
DR R. SERJEANTSON
Hume (Two lectures, weeks 1-2)
W.10 Law Faculty, LG17

Dr A. LEBOVITZ
Smith
(Two lectures, weeks 5-6)
W. 10 Law Faculty, LG17

Dr C. JOHANN & DR J. PATTERSON
Culture and aesthetic politics in Germany (Two Lectures, Weeks 3-4)
M. 12 Law Faculty, LG17

DR J. PATTERSON
Marx (Two lectures weeks 5-6)
M. 12 Law Faculty, LG17

**Lent Term (2022):**

PROF. R. BOURKE
Rousseau, Kant and Hegel (A3, A7, A9) (Six lectures, weeks 1-6)
Monday 12 pm

PROF. R. BOURKE
Burke (A5)
(Two lectures, weeks 7-8)

DR M. SIEGELBERG
Nationalism and the State (B21)
(Two Lectures, weeks 5-6)
DR M. SIEGELBERG
Empire and Civilization (B22)
(Two lectures, weeks 7-8)

DR R. SCURR
Social science and political thought (B23)
(Two lectures, weeks 7-8)

DR. T. HOPKINS
Bentham and Mill (A8 and A12)
(Four lectures, weeks 1-4)

DR T. HOPKINS
Tocqueville (A11)
(Two lectures, weeks 5-6).

DR T. HOPKINS
Socialism before 1848 (B20)
(Two lectures, weeks 7-8).

DR A. LEBOVITZ
The political thought of the American Revolution (B16) (Two lectures, weeks 1-2)

DR A. LEBOVITZ
The political thought of the French Revolution (B17)
(Two lectures, weeks 3-4)

DR A. LEBOVITZ
Constant (A9)
(Two lectures, weeks 5-6)

_Easter Term (2022)_

PROF. R. BOURKE
Revision: Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Burke
(Two lectures, weeks 1-2)

DR A. LEBOVITZ
Revision
(Two lectures, weeks 1-2)
6. Structure of the Paper

The paper is divided into two sections. Section A focuses on some of the most prominent political thinkers of the period, and you will study their major texts in depth, to gain a detailed, contextual understanding of their thought. Section B offers a range of more thematic or historical topics, for which you will be expected to read across a range of primary texts, and reflect on the broader problems of historical and philosophical interpretation that confront historians of political thought and political theorists in studying this period. You will need to cover at least one topic from each section in the exam, but the precise balance you strike between the two sections is a matter for you to decide with your supervisor and supervision partner, although most students prefer to take a majority of their topics from Section A.

SECTION A

A1 Hume
A2 Montesquieu
A3 Rousseau
A4 Smith
A5 Burke
A6 Wollstonecraft
A7 Kant
A8 Bentham
A9 Constant
A10 Hegel
A11 Tocqueville
A12 John Stuart Mill
A13 Marx

Section B

B14 Natural Law and History
B15 Luxury and Commercial Society
B16 The Political Thought of the American Revolution
B17 The Political Thought of the French Revolution
B18 Culture and aesthetic politics in Germany 1770-1810
B19 Gender and Political Thought in the 18th and 19th centuries
B20 Socialism before 1848
B21 Nationalism and the State
B22 Empire and Civilization in nineteenth-century Political Thought
B23 Social Science and Political Thought
7. The Examination

POL8 and POL10 are examined separately, so second-year students will sit a different exam paper to third-year students. Both papers are marked by examiners in POLIS; students taking the History versions of the paper will sit the same exams, but they will be marked by examiners from the History Faculty. Students taking the History and Politics or History and Modern Languages Tripos are also examined by the History Faculty.

Past papers are most easily accessed via the History Faculty Moodle page:

https://www.vle.cam.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=199161

Access requires Raven. All Cambridge students and supervisors can self-enrol by following the links.

You will find past papers listed under Part I Paper 20 (POL8) and Part II Paper 4 (POL10).

Questions from past papers will also be found listed by topic in the guide below.

Examiners’ reports for the last few years will be found in the Appendix to this course guide (from page 77).

Candidates can expect that a question will be set on each of the prescribed authors in Section A and topics in Section B. But you should be aware that the guarantee of a question on each author and topic does not mean that examiners will set lowest common denominator, generic questions, open to a pre-prepared answer. They are much more likely to ask specific questions, approaching the author/topic from a particular perspective. Candidates are therefore strongly advised to prepare more than the minimum of required authors and topics.

The examination rubric is: Answer three questions, at least one from each section. (Overlap between answers must be avoided.)

SAMPLE EXAMINATION PAPER

SECTION A

1. Why did Hume deny that ‘self-love’ provided the basis for political society?
2. On what basis did Montesquieu rest his criticisms of ‘despotic government’?
3. Why and with what consequences for his theories did Rousseau argue that man in a state of nature cannot perfect himself?
4. How compatible are the views about human motivation contained in Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments and his Wealth of Nations?
5. How important are Burke’s views about religion for his political theories?
6. Why did Wollstonecraft distinguish the rights of man from the rights of woman?
7. Why did Kant argue that governments should not aim to promote the happiness of the governed?
8. Why did Bentham give so much prominence to the analysis of human motivation in his political writings?
9. How did Constant reconcile his ‘great veneration for the past’ with his enthusiasm for the progress of enlightenment?
10. Why did Hegel believe that modern states differ from ancient states?
11. In what respects did Tocqueville believe that the American experience was instructive for Europe?
12. To what extent did the value of liberty of thought for Mill depend on its associations with liberty of action?
13. Why had Marx so little patience with the theories of so many nineteenth century socialists?

SECTION B

14. Why was Vico so insistent that the principles of his ‘New Science’ were different from those of the great Protestant exponents of Natural Law?
15. How far did theorists of commercial society believe that governments could and should promote the public interest?
16. How important to early American political thought was the British constitutional experience?
17. Can the origins of the Terror persuasively be located in French revolutionary patterns of thought?
18. How novel were German Romantics’ ideas about the nature of ‘freedom’?
19. Did the political language of nineteenth-century theorists of the condition of women differ from that used by their eighteenth-century predecessors?
20. Did early socialism possess a political theory?
21. Was nationalism entailed by the principle of nationality?
22. Is utilitarianism necessarily imperialist?
23. Explain the ambition of nineteenth-century positivists to replace politics by science.
8. READING LISTS

The aim of Section B is to allow students to consider the general context in political thought within which the ideas of major political thinkers developed. The primary texts suggested in Section B therefore have a different status from the set texts in Section A. Candidates need not master every one of the Section B primary texts, but need to show evidence of engagement with texts relating to each topic.

The Bibliography is designed to aid Lecturers, Supervisors, and students. Students are not expected to read every item on it, but should be guided in their reading by their supervisors. They may then return to the Bibliography for further reading in an aspect of an author or topic which particularly interests them, and for revision reading.

Works marked with an asterisk * are suggested as helpful introductions or as particularly important interpretations of the author or topic.

The reading list provided by the History Faculty is lengthy. In recognition of the fact that the structure of teaching and the timing of supervisions differs for HSPS students, it has been thought helpful to divide the secondary reading for each topic into two parts: suggested secondary reading and further reading. Under the first heading, students will find those texts thought to be most helpful as an introduction to the topic, and a range of significant interpretations of the chosen thinker or theme. Under the second, they will find further reading suggestions that will facilitate more in-depth study of topics. The division is by no means intended to be prescriptive, and individual supervisors may well recommend that students begin with texts from the ‘further reading’ sections.

In light of the closure of libraries in Easter term 2020, this guide was amended to indicate whether primary and secondary texts were available online. In a small number of cases, some of the set texts proved not to be accessible in any digital format. Where this was the case, possible alternatives have been suggested, allowing students to deepen their understanding of a given topic. These are not intended to replace the set texts, but to supplement available readings in those cases where digital access is limited.

As the possibility remains that at least some students, for at least some of the time, will need to access material online, these updates to the guide have been retained, and will be periodically reviewed to reflect any additional accessions to the university’s digital resources. Dead links can be reported to the paper organiser.

In the guide that follows, the specified (‘set’) texts are underlined.

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

10
Set texts:


Suggested secondary reading:

General

*J.A. Harris, Hume: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge, 2015) (E)

Philosophy, politics and history:

*A. C. Baier, A Progress of Sentiments: Reflection on Hume’s Treatise* (Cambridge MA, 1991) chapters 7-12. (E)

D. Forbes, *Hume’s Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge, 1975)


*J. Robertson, The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680-1760* (Cambridge, 2005), chapter 6, pp. 256-324. (E)


*J.P. Wright, Hume’s Treatise of Human Nature: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2009) (E)

Moral philosophy:


Politics and political economy:


J. Robertson, The Case for the Enlightenment (above), Ch 7, pp. 360-76. (E)

M. Schabas and C. Wennerlind, A Philosopher’s Economist: Hume and the rise of Capitalism, (Chicago, 2020)

Further secondary reading:

Philosophy, politics and history:
S. Blackburn, How to Read Hume (London, 2008)

Moral philosophy:
R.L. Emerson, ‘Hume’s Intellectual Development: Part II’, in Emerson, Essays on David Hume, Medical Men and the Scottish Enlightenment (Farnham, 2009), 103-126. (E)
J. Moore, ‘Hume and Hutcheson’, in M. A. Stewart and J. P. Wright (eds), Hume and Hume’s Connexions (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 25-37
L. Turco, ‘Hutcheson and Hume in a Recent Polemic’ in Mazza and Ronchetti (eds), New Essays on David Hume, 171-198.

Politics and political economy:
C. Wennerlind and M. Schabas (eds), David Hume’s Political Economy (London and New York, 2008): esp. the chapters by Wennerlind and Schabas on money; Berry on superfluous value (luxury); Charles and Cheney on French translations of Hume; Hont (above) on the rich country – poor country question.
Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. 'It is therefore, on opinion only that government is founded' [HUME, ‘Of the First Principles of Government’]. What, for Hume, followed from this proposition?

2. Why did Hume reject the idea that allegiance to government had a contractual basis?

3. Why did Hume think that the concept of property was fundamental to an understanding of politics?

4. According to Hume, what was required to establish large and lasting societies?

5. Did Hume’s political thinking change as he developed his interest in political economy?

6. Why did Hume believe commerce to be compatible with the virtue of justice on which all society depends?

7. ‘The sense of justice and injustice is not derived from nature, but arises artificially’ [HUME, Treatise of Human Nature]. How does the artificial virtue of justice emerge in society according to Hume?

8. What is the role of habit in Hume’s vision of society and politics?

9. ‘It is an infallible consequence of all industrious professions, to beget frugality, and to make the love of gain prevail over the love of pleasure.’ (HUME, ‘Of Interest’). Why did Hume believe ‘frugality’ to be advantageous to societies?

10. ‘We are, therefore, to look upon all the vast apparatus of government, as having ultimately no other object or purpose but the distribution of justice’ [HUME, Of the Origin of Government]. How do governments secure justice according to Hume?

11. What is the role of sympathy in Hume’s theory of justice?
A2. MONTESQUIEU

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Set Text:


Suggested secondary reading:


*R. Douglass, ‘Montesquieu and Modern Republicanism’, Political Studies 60 (2012), 703-19. (E)


D. Kelly, *The Propriety of Liberty: Persons, Passions, and Judgement in Modern Political Thought* (Princeton, 2010), chapter 2. (E)


Further secondary reading:


Particular topics:


D. Desserud, ‘Commerce and Political Participation in Montesquieu’s Letter to Domville’ *History of European Ideas*, 25 (1999), 135-151. (E)


Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. Why was Montesquieu confident that modern monarchies could adapt to commerce?

2. Explain Montesquieu’s confidence that despotism was unlikely to be established in Europe.

3. What scope did Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* allow for rulers to effect change by legislation?

4. Why was Montesquieu so hostile to ancient forms of government, republics in particular?

5. How did Montesquieu’s definition of liberty bear on his judgment of ancient and modern forms of government?

6. Why did Montesquieu suggest that the English needed to be particularly jealous of their liberty?

7. Did Montesquieu think that the republican form of government had a future?

8. Why did Montesquieu not consider rule by a nobility among the three principal species of government?

9. To what degree was Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of the Laws* a commentary on the French monarchy of his day?

10. What, according to Montesquieu, are the threats to modern liberty?

11. In what ways does Montesquieu employ historical and geographical comparisons to explain the workings of political life?

12. In what ways did Montesquieu believe the condition of women would vary with the form of government, and why?

13. In considering the forms of the political regimes in England and in France, which did Montesquieu think was more durable and why?

14. ‘It is better to say that the government most in conformity with nature is the one whose particular arrangement best relates to the disposition of the people for whom it is established’ [MONTESQUIEU, *The Spirit of the Laws*]. In what ways have governments adapted to popular sentiment according to Montesquieu?
A3. ROUSSEAU

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Set Texts:

‘Discourse on Inequality’, including Rousseau's notes, in The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings, ed. V. Gourevitch, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 113-239. (E)


Suggested secondary reading:

General and introductory

More particularly,
C. Brooke, Philosphic Pride. Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau (Princeton, 2012), Ch. 8: Jean-Jacques Rousseau. (E)
*F. Neuhouser, Rousseau’s critique of inequality: reconstructing the Second Discourse (Cambridge, 2014) (E)
M. Sonenscher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The division of labour, the politics of the imagination and the concept of federal government, (Leiden, 2020) (E)
R. Wokler, Rousseau, the Age of Enlightenment and their Legacies (Princeton, 2012) (E) collected articles, including:
pp. 1-28: ‘Perfectible Apes in Decadent Cultures: Rousseau’s Anthropology Revisited’, also in Daedalus, 107 (1978), 107-34;
Further secondary reading:

A. Abizadeh, ‘Banishing the Particular: Rousseau on Rhetoric, Patrie, and the Passions’, Political Theory 29 (1), 556-582. (E)
J. Hope Mason, The Indispensable Rousseau (London, 1979)
J. Hope Mason, “Forced to be Free”, in R. Wokler (ed), Rousseau and Liberty (Manchester, 1995), 121-38. (M)
C. Kelly and E. Grace eds., Rousseau on Women, Love and Family (Hanover NH, 2009) (M – chapter 5 only)
H. Rosenblatt, ‘Rousseau, the Anticosmopolitan?’ Daedalus 137 (2008), 59-67. (E)

Rousseau’s contexts
B. Kapossy, Iselin contra Rousseau (Basle, 2006), chapter 3, pp. 173-245.
R. Whatmore, “‘A lover of peace more than liberty’? The Genevan rejection of Rousseau’s politics’, in Avi Lifschitz (ed), Engaging with Rousseau. Reaction and Interpretation from the Eighteenth Century to the Present (Cambridge, 2016), 1-16. (E)

Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. How would Rousseau’s social contract rectify the inequality which he believed had corrupted modern society?

2. ‘In a word, I see no tolerable mean between the most austere Democracy and the most perfect Hobbesianism’ ['Letter to Mirabeau’, 1767]. What light does this comment by Rousseau throw on his Social Contract?

3. How important was religion in Rousseau’s Social Contract?

4. Did Rousseau suppose that amour propre could be turned to man’s moral and political advantage?

5. ‘Since the Lawgiver can use neither force nor reasoning, he must of necessity have recourse to an authority of a different order, which might be able to rally without violence and to persuade without convincing’ [ROUSSEAU, The Social Contract]. Why did Rousseau think this?

6. Why was the notion of perfectibility so important to the argument of Rousseau’s Second Discourse?

7. To what extent does the perfection of reason lead to the corruption of human nature in Rousseau?

8. How does Rousseau propose to reconcile justice and utility in the Social Contract?

9. How did Rousseau justify the right of the sovereign to punish, and the use of the death penalty in particular?

10. Why is the general will always right, according to Rousseau?

11. How did Rousseau distinguish between nature and artifice in his account of the origins of inequality?
A4. SMITH

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Set Texts:


Suggested secondary reading:

Major interpretations:
**N. Phillipson, _Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life_ (London, 2010)
*D. Winch, _Adam Smith’s Politics_ (Cambridge, 1978) (E)

_The Theory of Moral Sentiments_
C. Griswold, _Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment_ (Cambridge, 1999) (E)

_The Wealth of Nations_

Further secondary reading:
D. Kelly, The Propriety of Liberty: Persons, Passions, and Judgement in Modern Political Thought (Princeton, 2010), chapter 3 (E)


The Theory of Moral Sentiments
F. Forman-Barzilai, Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy: Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory (Cambridge, 2010) (E)


R.P. Hanley, Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue (Cambridge, 2009) (E)

The Wealth of Nations


E. Rothschild, Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet and the Enlightenment (Cambridge, Mass, 2001), chapters 4, 8


K. Tribe, ‘Natural Liberty and Laissez Faire: How Adam Smith became a Free Trade Ideologue’, in S. Copley and K. Sutherland (eds), Adam Smith’s “Wealth of Nations”: New Interdisciplinary Essays (Manchester, 1995), 23-44. (M)

The ‘Adam Smith Problem’

K. Tribe, ‘“Das Adam Smith Problem” and the Origins of Modern Smith Scholarship’, History of European Ideas 344 (2008), 514-525. (E)

Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. Did Adam Smith provide commercial society with a moral justification?

2. What did Adam Smith take to have been the consequences of the ‘unnatural and retrograde order’ of Europe’s historical development?

3. To what extent did Adam Smith believe that governments should intervene to prevent particular economic interests from disadvantaging others?

4. Did Adam Smith believe that the pernicious consequences of international commercial competition could be satisfactorily contained?

5. Which was more basic to Smith’s theory of moral sentiments, sympathy or propriety?

6. Why did Adam Smith regard justice as a more important virtue than benevolence for commercial society?
7. Why was Adam Smith confident that moral values stemming from the human capacity for sympathy would be compatible with economic relations based on self-interest?

8. Is virtue for Smith more a question of nature or of artifice?

9. What is the significance for Smith’s theory of sociability of his distinction between praiseworthiness and the love of praise?

10. What is the role of fellow-feeling in Smith’s moral thought?

11. What is the role of the division of labour in Smith’s account of the progress of society?

12. ‘Civil government supposes a certain subordination. But as the necessity of civil government gradually grows up with the acquisition of valuable property, so the principal causes which naturally introduce subordination gradually grow up with the growth of that valuable property.’ (SMITH, *Wealth of Nations*, Bk. V). What implications does this have for Smith’s theory of government?

13. What is the relationship between beauty and utility in Smith’s social thought?

14. What is the role of sympathy in Smith’s account of the relationship between social ranks in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*?
A5. BURKE

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Set Texts:

Pre-Revolutionary Writings, ed. I. Harris, (Cambridge, 1993) (E)

Suggested secondary reading:

R. Bourke, Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke (Princeton, 2015) (E)
W. Selinger, Parliamentarism from Burke to Weber, (Cambridge, 2019), chs 1-2. (E)

Further secondary reading:

P. Bullard, Edmund Burke and the Art of Rhetoric (Cambridge, 2014) (E)
Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. Did Burke think of civilization as fragile?

2. What in Burke’s view made the revolution in France so very different from all previous political upheavals?

3. ‘A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation’ [BURKE, *Reflections on the Revolutions in France*]. When and how did Burke think such change would or should come about?

4. Given his view of the need to be governed by men of ability, why did Burke not argue for meritocracy?

5. What role did religious institutions play in Burke’s political thought?

6. Did Burke entirely reject the idea that men had rights?

7. According to Burke, what role do passions and sentiments play in politics?

8. Given his support of trade, why did Burke not think of the relation between governed and governors in contractual terms?

9. ‘Burke’s political writings are better as public interventions in response to immediate circumstances than as works of philosophical contemplation.’ Discuss.

10. Is Burke’s *Reflections* an attack on moral equality?

11. What is the role of prescription in Burke’s political thought?

12. Why did Burke fear the independence of ‘men of letters’, and how did he believe it could be checked?

13. What justifies revolution according to Burke?

14. Are there natural rights according to Burke?
A6. WOLLSTONECRAFT

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Set Text:


**Recommended additional primary texts:**


**Suggested secondary reading:**


**Further secondary reading:**


J. Conniff, ‘Edmund Burke and His Critics: The Case of Mary Wollstonecraft’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60 (1999), 299-318. (E)


W. Gunther-Canada, Rebel Writer: Mary Wollstonecraft and Enlightenment Politics (DeKalb, Illinois, 2001)


Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. What was Wollstonecraft’s ultimate ambition for women?
2. Did Wollstonecraft believe that women were enslaved by their passions?
3. Did Wollstonecraft want women to be more like men?
4. How did Wollstonecraft justify her usage of the language of rights in her Vindications?
5. Did Mary Wollstonecraft believe in the progress of civilization?
6. Was Wollstonecraft more concerned with emancipation than with rights?
7. What did Wollstonecraft see in the French Revolution?
8. Why was Wollstonecraft so concerned with property?
9. How important is Wollstonecraft’s view of marriage to her overall conception of the good life for women?
10. How did Wollstonecraft conceive of progress?
11. ‘Nature having made men unequal, by giving stronger bodily and mental powers to one than to another, the end of government ought to be to destroy this inequality by protecting the weak.’ [WOLLSTONECRAFT, Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution.] How consistent is this claim with the arguments Wollstonecraft advanced in the Vindication of the Rights of Men and the Vindication of the Rights of Woman?

12. Is Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Men just the prelude to A Vindication of the Rights of Woman?

13. If Wollstonecraft believed that humans were naturally benevolent, how did she explain what she thought of as the ills of her society?
A7. KANT

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)  

Set Texts:


*Political Writings*, ed. H. Reiss, (2nd edn., Cambridge, 1991) (E), which includes the following texts:

‘Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim (1784)

‘An Answer to the Question, ‘What is Enlightenment?’ (1784)

‘On the Common Saying: ‘That may be correct in theory, but is of no use in practice’ (1793)

‘Towards Perpetual Peace’ (1795)

‘Metaphysics of Morals’ (1797) (‘Introduction to the doctrine of right’ and ‘The doctrine of right, Part II: Public right’).

‘The Conflict of the Faculties’ (1798) (Second Part: ‘An old question raised again: Is the human race constantly progressing?’


‘Review of J.G. Herder’s *Ideas for the philosophy of the history of humanity. Parts 1 and 2* (1785),

‘Conjectures on the beginnings of human history (1786)

‘What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?’ (1786)

Suggested secondary reading:

*P. Guyer, Kant* (London, 2006)


On Moral Theory:


*A. Wood, Kant’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge, 1999) (E)

On Kant’s Political Theory:
*E. Ellis, Kant’s Politics (New Haven, 2005), chapters 1-3
*A. Ripstein, Force and Freedom: Kant’s Legal and Political Philosophy (Cambridge MA, 2009) (E)

On Anthropology & Human Nature:

On Revolution:

On Cosmopolitanism:
O. Höffe, Kant’s Cosmopolitan Theory of Law and Peace (Cambridge, 2006)
C. Meckstroth, ‘Hospitality, or Kant’s Critique of Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights,’ Political Theory, 46 (2018), 537-59. (E)

Further secondary reading:
J. Habermas, ‘Kant’s Idea of Perpetual Peace, with the Benefit of Two Hundred Years’ Hindsight’ in J. Bohman and M. Lutz-Bachmann, Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant’s Cosmopolitan Ideal (Cambridge, MA, 1997), pp. 113-154. (M)
M. Kuehn, Kant: A Biography (Cambridge, 2001) (E)
J. C. Laursen, ‘The Subversive Kant: The Vocabulary of “Public” and “Publicity”’, Political Theory, 14 (1986), 584-603 (E)
R. Malikis, Kant’s Politics in Context (Oxford, 2014) (E)
R.J. Sullivan, An Introduction to Kant’s Ethics, (Cambridge, 1994) (E)

Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. Why did Kant argue that no state should forcibly interfere in the constitution and government of another state?

2. How did Kant reconcile the claim that rebellion is never justified with his insistence that the only good reason for a state is to secure citizens’ freedom?

3. ‘Kant betrayed his moral principles by denying a right to revolution.’ Discuss.

4. Why did Kant think we must strive gradually to approximate the idea of perpetual peace, even though we cannot be certain ever to attain it?

5. Did Kant’s view of individual freedom as the central political value lead him to advocate a minimal state?

6. Why did Kant’s moral and political theory place freedom above other values?

7. Why did Kant argue that whatever a people cannot decide for themselves also cannot be decided for them by a legislator?

8. What role did progress play in Kant’s political thought?

9. According to Kant, every previous theory of morality had to fail because in them ‘one saw the human being bound to laws by his duty, but it did not occur to anyone that he is subjected only to his own lawgiving, insofar as it is also general’ [KANT, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals]. What did he mean by this?

10. Why did Kant argue that the establishment of hereditary nobility was inconsistent with his theory of the state?

11. ‘It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be taken to be good without limitation, except a good will’ [KANT, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals]. What is the role of the good will in Kant’s moral theory?

12. ‘Since every restriction of freedom through the arbitrary will of another party is termed coercion, it follows that a civil constitution is a relationship among free men who are subject to coercive laws, while they retain their freedom within the general union with their fellows’ [KANT, Theory and Practice]. Discuss the significance of this statement for Kant’s political thought.
A8. BENTHAM

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Set Texts:


Suggested secondary reading:

*R. Harrison, Bentham, (London, 1983)
J. Waldron, Nonsense upon Stilts: Bentham, Burke and Marx on the Rights of Man, (London, 1987)

Further secondary reading:


Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. What implications did Bentham’s view of ‘fictions’ have for politics?

2. Is it appropriate to describe Bentham’s ideas as philosophically and politically ‘radical’?

3. Why did Bentham think the principle of utility offers a more secure foundation for politics than natural rights?

4. Do Bentham’s utilitarian principles support or compete with democracy?

5. Why was Bentham more concerned with the consequences of decisions than the rightful authority to make them?

6. How did Bentham’s criticisms of Blackstone inform his view of politics?

7. ‘The community is a fictitious body... The interest of the community then is, what? – the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it’ [BENTHAM, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation]. What role did this claim play in Bentham’s political theory?

8. What was the significance of Bentham’s commitment to ‘official aptitude maximised, expense minimized’?

9. Why was Bentham so critical of the view that government was founded on an original contract?

10. ‘Pain and pleasure, at least, are words which a man has no need, we may hope, to go to a lawyer to know the meaning of’ [BENTHAM, A Fragment on Government]. What is the significance of this point for Bentham’s thought?

11. ‘That is my duty to do, which I am liable to be punished, according to law, if I do not do: this is the original, ordinary, and proper sense of the word duty’ [BENTHAM, A Fragment on Government]. What role did this theory of duty play in Bentham’s political thought?

12. For Bentham, what, if anything, distinguished private ethics from the art of legislation?
13. ‘That which is Law, is, in different countries, widely different: while that which ought to be is in all countries to a great degree the same’ [BENTHAM, A Fragment on Government]. Discuss the significance of this statement for Bentham’s political thought.

14. Why, according to Bentham, was the French Declaration of Rights in fact a declaration of ‘the Rights of anarchy—the Order of chaos’ [BENTHAM, Nonsense upon Stilts or Pandora’s Box Opened]?
A9. CONSTANT

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Set Text:

*Political Writings*, ed. B. Fontana, (Cambridge, 1988)

The above edition is not available online. It comprises three texts:

*The Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation and their relation to European Civilization* (1814) [No digital edition of this text in English translation appears to be available at this time (29.6.20)]

*Principles of Politics applicable to all Representative Governments* (1815) [No digital edition of this text in English translation appears to be available at this time (29.6.20)]. N.B. This text is not to be confused with the *Principles of Politics applicable to all Governments* (1806-10) listed in the section, ‘Suggested additional primary texts’.

*The Liberty of the Ancients compared with that of the Moderns* (1819) [available online at https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/constant-the-liberty-of-ancients-compared-with-that-of-moderns-1819]

Candidates intending to revise this topic, but without access to the Fontana edition, are encouraged to direct their attention to the section, ‘Suggested additional primary texts’ in order to expand their understanding of Constant’s political thought.

Suggested additional primary texts:

B. Constant, *Principles of Politics Applicable to all Governments* [1806-10], ed. by E. Hofmann, trans. by D. O’Keefe, (Indianapolis IN, 2004) [https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/constant-principles-of-politics-applicable-to-all-governments]. N.B. notwithstanding Capaldi’s erroneous suggestion to the contrary, this is not the text published by Constant in 1815 and translated by Fontana, but an earlier and larger manuscript. Though there are substantial differences between the two texts, readers of this earlier work will gain an understanding of what underpins Constant’s constitutional thought.


Suggested secondary reading:

*B Fontana, Benjamin Constant and the Post-Revolutionary Mind* (New Haven, CT, 1991)

*B. Garsten, ‘Religion and the Case against Ancient Liberty: Benjamin Constant’s Other Lectures’ Political Theory 38* (2010), 4-33. (E)
Suggested further reading:


A. de Dijn, *French Political Thought from Montesquieu to Tocqueville: Liberty in a Levelled Society?* (Cambridge, 2008), chap. 4 (E)

G. Dodge, *Benjamin Constant’s Philosophy of Liberalism: A Study in Politics and Religion*, (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980)


A. Ghins, ‘Benjamin Constant and the politics of reason’, *History of European Ideas* 44 (2018), 224-243. (E)

S. Holmes, *Benjamin Constant and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (New Haven CT, 1984) (M – Chapter 1 only)


Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. According to Constant, how had the rise of commerce in the modern world made the protection of individual liberty both possible and necessary?

2. Did Constant’s view of liberty depend on a critique of democracy?

3. ‘It is not to happiness alone, it is to self-development that our destiny calls us’ [CONSTANT, The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns]. What consequences did Constant believe followed from this maxim?

4. Why did Constant explain the politics of his day in terms of a contrast between ‘modern’ and ‘ancient’ societies?

5. Why did Constant defend the inviolability of property rights?

6. Why did Constant argue that representative assemblies should be formed by property holders?

7. ‘Variety is life; uniformity is death’ [Constant, The Spirit of Conquest and Usurpation]. What implications did this claim have for Constant’s political theory?

8. Why did Constant argue that political authority should yield to public opinion the right to judge questions of morality?

9. Why did Constant believe that the exercise of political rights brought the moderns less pleasure than the ancients, and what consequences did he draw from this?

10. What limits did Constant seek to place on ‘the empire of the legislator’ and why?

11. Why did Constant argue that modern governments must exercise a ‘lighter and more prudent’ touch [CONSTANT, The Liberty of the Ancients compared with that of the Moderns] when handling customs and affections than those of the past?

12. What role does the concept of ‘usurpation’ play in Constant’s political thought?

13. What role does ‘self-interest’ play in Constant’s political thought?
A10. HEGEL

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Set Texts:

*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. A. Wood (Cambridge, 1991) (especially Preface, Introduction, and Ethical Life); [not available online; see alternatively Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, ed. by T.M Knox, (Oxford, 1952) (E)]


Suggested secondary reading:

General and introductory

*F.C. Beiser, Hegel (London, 2005) (E)*


Hegel’s Social and Political Theory

*S. Avineri, Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State, (Cambridge, 1972) (E)*


*D. Knowles, Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hegel and the Philosophy of Right (London, 2002) (E)*

*F. Neuhouser, Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom (Cambridge MA, 2000) (E).*


*C. Taylor, Hegel and Modern Society, (Cambridge, 1979) (E)*


Specifically on the philosophy of history:


On Religion:


Further secondary reading:

*E.M. Dale, Hegel, the End of History, and the Future (Cambridge, 2014) (E)*


J. Stewart (ed), The Hegel Myths and Legends, (Evanston IL, 1996)
A. Wood, Hegel’s Ethical Thought, (Cambridge, 1990) (E)

Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. If Hegel’s state was supposed to be based on the freedom of the citizens, why was he so critical of democracy?

2. Explain the relation between Hegel’s view that society is in one sense always free and his argument that it has become more truly free in the course of history.

3. Why did Hegel think the modern state succeeded at realizing freedom where ancient models had failed?

4. ‘Hegel sacrifices the individual to the state.’ Discuss.

5. Why did Hegel begin his discussion of ethical life with the family?

6. What did Hegel’s political thought owe to his view of the ancient Greek polis?

7. ‘It is the march of God in the world, that there be a state’ [Hegel, Philosophy of Right]. What did Hegel mean by this?

8. Why did Hegel describe reason as ‘cunning’?
9. According to Hegel, what is the proper role of civil society?

10. ‘I interpret Hegel as a moderately progressive reform-minded liberal’ [RAWLS, Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy]. How apt is this characterisation?

11. What was the significance of ‘the ethical moment of war’ [HEGEL, Elements of the Philosophy of Right] for Hegel’s theory of the state?

12. In what ways were Hegel’s Lectures on the Philosophy of World History complementary to his political thought?

13. What is the difference between civil society and the state in Hegel?
A11. TOCQUEVILLE

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Set Texts:


Suggested secondary reading:

*M. Richter, ‘Tocqueville and Guizot on Democracy: From a Type of Society to a Political Regime’, History of European Ideas 30 (2004), 61-82. (E)

Further reading:

Additional primary texts:
**Tocqueville on America after 1840: Letters and Other Writings**, eds. A. Craiutu and J. Jennings (Cambridge, 2009) (E)


**Secondary literature:**


A. de Dijn, *French Political Thought from Montesquieu to Tocqueville: Liberty in a Levelled Society?* (Cambridge, 2008), chap. 6 (E)


W. Selinger, *Parliamentarism from Burke to Weber*, (Cambridge, 2019), ch. 5. (E)


**Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):**

1. Did Tocqueville think that the political dangers facing France and the United States required similar or different responses?

2. Why did Tocqueville think ‘mores’ (*moeurs*) were so important for protecting liberty?

3. How important to Tocqueville’s account of liberty and the threats it faced in a democratic society was his understanding of the historical role of the aristocracy?

4. Why did Tocqueville distinguish between a ‘federal’ and an ‘incomplete national government’, and consider the latter ‘one of the great discoveries of political science in our age’?

5. Why did Tocqueville suggest that great revolutions would happen less often in a democratic society?

6. Why did Tocqueville argue that the French Revolution had created governments ‘more fragile, but a hundred times more powerful than those that it toppled’ [Tocqueville, *The Ancien Régime and the Revolution*]?
7. ‘I am convinced that anarchy is not the principal evil that democratic centuries will have to fear, but the least’ [TOCQUEVILLE, *Democracy in America*]. Discuss.

8. ‘One must beware of confusing the fact of equality itself with the revolution that serves to introduce it into the social state and the laws’ [TOCQUEVILLE, *Democracy in America*]. Why?

9. Why did Tocqueville believe that democratic peoples showed a more ardent and enduring love of equality than of liberty?

10. ‘You know my ideas well enough to know that I accord institutions only a secondary influence on the destiny of men’. [TOCQUEVILLE, Letter to Claude-François de Corcelle, 17 September 1853]. If not institutions, what did Tocqueville think determined the destiny of men and why?

11. What role did Tocqueville believe personal honour would play in democratic societies?

12. What role did class divisions play in Tocqueville’s account of the end of the Ancien Régime in France?

13. What did Tocqueville believe the student of American democracy could learn from the study of American slavery?
A12. J.S. MILL

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Set Texts:


All these texts can be found online in the Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, ed. J.M. Robson et al., at Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, in 33 vols. | Online Library of Liberty (libertyfund.org).

Volumes II and III = Principles of Political Economy (Volume III for Books IV and V)
Volume XVIII = Essays on Politics and Society I (‘On Liberty’)  
Volume XIX = Essays on Politics and Society II (‘Considerations on Representative Government’)  
Volume XXI = Essays on Equality, Law, and Education (‘The Subjection of Women’).

Suggested secondary reading:


G. Claeys, Mill and Paternalism (Cambridge, 2013) (E)
W. Selinger, Parliamentarism from Burke to Weber, (Cambridge, 2019), ch. 6. (E)
N. Urbinati, Mill on Democracy: From the Athenian Polis to Representative Government (Chicago, 2002).

On Economics:


On the Subjection of Women:


Further secondary reading:

D.O. Brink, Mill’s Progressive Principles (Oxford, 2013) (E)


G. Conti, Parliament the Mirror of the Nation: Representation, Deliberation, and Democracy in Victorian Britain, (Cambridge, 2019), esp. parts 3-5. (E)


F. Hayek, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: Their Correspondence and Subsequent Marriage (London, 1951)


D. Kelly, The Propriety of Liberty: Persons, Passions, and Judgement in Modern Political Thought, (Princeton, NJ, 2010), Ch. 4 (E)


D.E. Miller, Mill’s “Socialism”, Politics, Philosophy & Economics 2 (2003), 213-238. (E)

A. Pyle ed., Liberty: Contemporary Responses to John Stuart Mill (Bristol, 1994)
Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. How important to Mill’s political theory was faith in the progress of civilization over time?
   ‘I regard utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being’ [On Liberty]. What followed from this definition of utility for Mill’s theory of liberty?

2. Were Mill’s arguments against the subjection of women consistent with the qualifications he would place on rights to self-governance and equal suffrage in Considerations on Representative Government?

3. Why was Mill’s distinction between ‘true’ and ‘false’ democracy important for his larger theory of the connection between liberty and representative government?

4. How did Mill understand the political challenges posed by economic progress?

5. To what extent did Mill’s political thought support the authority of elites?

6. How did Mill’s theory of representative government reflect his claim that everyone deserves ‘to have his opinion counted at its worth, though not more than its worth’ [MILL, Considerations on Representative Government]?

7. ‘The term duty to oneself...means self-respect or self-development; and for none of these is anyone accountable to his fellow-creatures’ [MILL, On Liberty]. What was the significance of this claim in Mill’s political thought?

8. Why did Mill insist that the doctrine of free trade rested on grounds different from the principle of individual liberty?
9. Was Mill’s argument in *On the Subjection of Women* consistent with his comments on colonial rule in *Considerations on Representative Government*?

10. ‘Society… [may practise] a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression’ [J.S. MILL, *On Liberty*]. What is the significance of this claim in Mill’s thought?

11. How did J.S. Mill understand the relation of liberty to utility?

12. ‘It is not, also, to be forgotten, that the absorption of all the principal ability of the country is fatal, sooner or later, to the mental activity and progressiveness of the body itself.’ (MILL, *On Liberty*). How did Mill propose to remedy this problem?

13. In what ways, if any, did Mill remain a utilitarian?

14. What was the place of equality in Mill’s political thought?
Set Texts:

*The Communist Manifesto*, ed. G. Stedman Jones, (London, 2002) [edition not available online, but text also included in *Later Political Writings*, ed. by Carver, as below].


Suggested secondary reading:

General and introductory

*T. Carver, Marx* (Cambridge, 2018) (E)

*J. Elster, An Introduction to Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1986). (E)


More particularly,


*A. Wood, Karl Marx, 2nd ed.* (Abingdon, 2004)


Further secondary reading:
J. Maguire, Marx’s Theory of Politics (Cambridge, 1978)
S. Lukes, Marxism and Morality (Oxford, 1987).
J. Sperber, Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life (New York, 2013)
F. Wheen, Karl Marx (New York, 1999)

Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

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1. Why and in what way did Marx think human emancipation required abolishing the state?

2. What role did ‘alienation’ play in Marx’s discussions of religion, the state, and the capitalist economy?

3. Why was Marx so insistent in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* that the Lassallean socialists were mistaken in identifying socialism with a ‘fair distribution’ of goods?

4. ‘The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it’ [MARX, ‘On Feuerbach’]. So why did he write more about history and economics than about plans for change?

5. Why did Marx distinguish political emancipation from human emancipation?

6. Was Marx a democrat?

7. Did Marx agree with anything in the philosophy of German idealism?

8. What did Marx understand by the ‘fetishism’ of commodities, and what role did this play in his thought?

9. ‘Communism is for us not a state of affairs to be established, an *ideal* to which reality must conform. We call communism the *real* movement that supersedes the present state of affairs’ [MARX, *The German Ideology*]. What did Marx mean by this?

10. Why did Marx believe that the Paris Commune of 1871 represented a new departure in the history of revolutionary movements, and what significance does this judgement have for interpretation of his theory of revolution?

11. ‘Under the current bourgeois relations of production freedom means free trade, freedom to buy and sell’ [MARX & ENGELS, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*]. Why was this concept of freedom inadequate for Marx?

12. How significant is it that the subtitle of Marx's *Capital* is ‘A Critique of Political Economy’?
B14. NATURAL LAW AND HISTORY

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Suggested primary reading:


Suggested secondary reading:

*M. Goldie and R. Wokler (eds), The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought (Cambridge, 2006) (E), Part III: Natural Jurisprudence and the Science of Legislation, including:
   9. K. Haakonssen, ‘German Natural Law’,


More particularly, on Natural Law in Germany:
*T.J. Hochstrasser, Natural Law Theories in the Early Enlightenment (Cambridge, 2000) (E)

On Natural Law in Scotland:


*J. Moore, ‘Hume and Hutcheson’, in M.A. Stewart and J.P. Wright (eds), Hume and Hume’s Connexions, (Edinburgh, 1994), 23-57. (M)

On Vico’s response to Natural Law:


Further secondary reading:
Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. Why was Natural Law still so important for political thought in the early eighteenth century?

2. Why did Vico think that his ‘rational civil theology of divine providence’ held the key to understanding the historical development of human societies?

3. Did the increasingly historical approach to Natural Law in the eighteenth century make it less ‘natural’?

4. Were eighteenth-century theories of sociability responses to a weakening of faith in natural reason?

5. To what extent did post-Hobbesian natural law take a historical turn?

6. Why did Vico think that the Protestant natural lawyers had failed to explain human sociability?

7. If sociability had a history, why was it deemed natural?

8. Why were natural law theorists concerned to show that society preceded the institution of government?

9. What did eighteenth-century natural law theorists hope to achieve by arguing that humans were naturally sociable?

10. To what extent did theological convictions shape the views of natural law theorists in the eighteenth century?

11. What role did the imagination play in eighteenth-century theories of natural sociability?

12. How natural was the sociability posited by natural law theorists?

13. How justified was Vico in his critique of natural law theorists?
B15. LUXURY AND COMMERCIAL SOCIETY

(S) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Suggested primary reading:

Jean-François Melon, A Political Essay upon Commerce, transl. David Bindon (Dublin, 1738, repr. 1739) chs 1-9, 15-18 (available on Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO); access through http://libguides.cam.ac.uk/eresources)

Suggested secondary reading:

The luxury debate and political economy:

On Mandeville:
E.J. Hundert, The Enlightenment’s Fable (Cambridge, 1994) (E)

The French debate:
N.O. Keohane, Philosophy and the State in France: The Renaissance to the Enlightenment (Princeton NJ, 1980), Parts III and IV. (E)


**On Ferguson:**


**Further secondary reading:**

H.C. Clark, *Compass of Society: Commerce and Absolutism in Old Regime France*, (Lanham, MD, 2007), chapters 2-8. (E)


R. Hamowy, ‘Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and the Division of Labour’, *Economica*, n.s. 35 (1968), 244-259. (E)


D. Kettler, ‘History and Theory in Ferguson’s *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, *Political Theory* 5 (1977), 437-60 (E)


Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. Why was Fénelon’s critique of luxury so enduringly provocative to those who would defend commercial society in the eighteenth century?
2. Was the eighteenth-century luxury debate about the town versus the country?
3. Where did Adam Ferguson’s Essay on the History of Civil Society leave the luxury debate?
4. Why did Mandeville’s defence of luxury convince so few in the eighteenth century?
5. Why did both defenders and critics of commercial society use the language of vice and corruption?
6. Why was Fénelon’s utopia of agrarian self-sufficiency so persistent a reference point for participants in the eighteenth-century luxury debate?
7. What was luxury thought to corrupt?
8. Were eighteenth-century critics of luxury critical of inequality?
9. To what degree was the eighteenth-century luxury debate a quarrel between partisans of the ancients and of the moderns?
10. Why were both Fénelon and Mandeville so influential in shaping discussions of luxury on both sides of the Channel?
11. Were eighteenth-century critics of luxury necessarily critics of the liberty of commerce?
12. Was there any common ground between critics and proponents of luxury?
13. To what extent was there a debate about luxury in the first half of the eighteenth century?
(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Suggested primary reading:


Thomas Paine, Common Sense, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) [edition unavailable online]; or see online (3rd ed., 1776) (E)


Supplementary primary reading:


Want of access to the Pole collection presents problems for the interpretation of anti-federalist positions. Several of the texts included in Pole’s edition are not otherwise available. For the Federalist Papers, see above. For a selection of anti-federalist writings, see the following, as well as the Letters of Brutus, included by Ball in his edition of The Federalist.


**Suggested secondary reading:**


*P.S. Onuf, ‘Reflections on the Founding: Constitutional Historiography in Bicentennial Perspective’, *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (1989), 341–75 (E)*


**Further secondary reading:**

*J. Appleby, ‘What is Still American in the Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson?’, *William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (1982), 287–309. (E)*

*T. Ball and J.G.A. Pocock (eds), *Conceptual Change and the Constitution* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1988)*

*R. Beeman et al. (eds), *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1987)*

*H. Belz, R. Hoffman and P. Albert (eds), *To Form a More Perfect Union: The Critical Ideas of the Constitution* (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1992)*


R.K. Matthews, *If Men Were Angels: James Madison and the Heartless Empire of Reason* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1995)

*Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):*

1. Did the Constitution purchase national stability at the expense of democracy in the United States?
2. ‘Neither wholly national nor wholly federal’ [*The Federalist*, number 39]. What did James Madison mean by this characterization of the Constitution of 1787?
3. Was the Constitution of 1787 the fulfilment or a repudiation of the Declaration of Independence?
4. Why did John Adams think that the word Republic ‘may signify any-thing, every-thing, or nothing’ [ADAMS to J. H. Tiffany, April 30, 1819]?
5. ‘*Divide et impera* [divide and rule], the reprobated axiom of tyranny, is under certain qualifications, the only policy, by which a republic can be administered on just principles’ [MADISON, 1787]. Discuss with reference to the U.S. federal constitution.
6. Did the Anti-Federalists and the Federalists share a common vision of America?
7. Were the Anti-Federalists the only true republicans among theorists of the American Revolution?
8. Given their many grievances with the federal Constitution, why were the Anti-Federalists mollified by the promise of a Bill of Rights?
9. Was the American Revolution a repudiation of the idea of monarchy?

10. ‘The differences between Federalists such as James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Adams were as stark as those separating them from the Antifederalists.’ Discuss.

11. Who, if anyone, writing in America during the period between 1776 and 1788 can be classified as a ‘Democrat’?

12. Is the Constitution of 1787 best understood as a blueprint for continental empire?

13. Does the American constitution owe more to the legacy of the Whigs or of the royalists?

14. Did Federalists and Antifederalists hold differing views about the concept of ‘representation’?
B17. POLITICAL THOUGHT OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Suggested primary reading:

Sieyès, Political Writings, ed M. Sonenscher (Indianapolis, 2003) [unavailable online]:
‘Views of the Executive Means available to the Representatives of France in 1789’ [not otherwise available];
‘An Essay on Privileges’, available in eighteenth-century translation – search under this title (E)

Condorcet, Political Writings, ed. S. Lukes and N. Urbinati (Cambridge, 2012) (E)

Saint-Just, Robespierre, Speeches, in K.M. Baker (ed.), The Old Regime and the French Revolution: Readings in Western Civilisation (Chicago, 1987), pp. 304-7 (Saint-Just), 368-84 (Robespierre); also in M. Walzer (ed), Regicide and Revolution: Speeches at the Trial of Louis XVI (New York, 1992) (Saint-Just); R.T. Bienvenu (ed) The Ninth of Thermidor: the fall of Robespierre, (New York, 1968), pp. 32-49 (Robespierre) [none of these editions are available complete online].

However, for Robespierre, see the speech of 17 Pluviôse from the Bienvenu edition (M); and further, see: https://pages.uoregon.edu/dluebke/301ModernEurope/Robespierre.pdf (available as of 20.3.20).

For Saint-Just, see https://revolution.chnm.org/exhibits/show/liberty--equality--fraternity/item/525 (available as of 20.3.20).

Paine, The Rights of Man, ed. G. Claeys (Indianapolis, 1992); or in two parts (London, 1791-2) (E)

Additional primary reading:

G. de Staël, Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution (1818), ed. A. Craiutu (Indianapolis IN, 2008) (E)

Suggested secondary reading:

M. Forsyth, Reason and Revolution: The Political Thought of the Abbé Sieyes, (Leicester, 1987)


Further secondary reading:

K.M. Baker, Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics (Chicago, 1975)

H.C. Clark, Compass of Society: Commerce and Absolutism in Old Regime France, (Lanham MD, 2007), chapters 8-10. (E)

B. Fontana, Germaine de Staël: A political portrait, (Princeton, NJ, 2016) (E)


*Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):*

1. Did the political theorists of the French Revolution re-define the concept of a republic?

2. In what sense, if any, did the political thinkers of the French Revolution believe the nation to be ‘sovereign’?

3. ‘Political unity was the central problem facing political thinkers in the French Revolution.’ Discuss with reference to two or more authors.

4. Did any French Revolutionary thinker explain how to reconcile respect for universal ‘rights of man and citizen’ with the constituent power of the people?

5. Which was more important to thinkers of the French Revolution, reason or virtue?

6. How important was the concept of equality to the political theorists of the French Revolution?

7. ‘There must not be any confusion between a constituting power and a constituted power’ [SIEYÈS, *Views of the Executive Means*]. Why did subsequent political thinkers of the French Revolution struggle to avoid this confusion?

8. Why did the political thinkers of the French Revolution object to the existence of ‘privileges’?

9. Why did many theorists of the French Revolution believe it necessary to ‘ingraft representation upon democracy’ [PAINE, *The Rights of Man*]?

10. Why was the British political model rejected by many leading thinkers of the French Revolution?

11. What, if anything, distinguished the rights of man from the rights of the citizen, for the political theorists of the French Revolution?

12. What role did the political theorists of the French Revolution believe political theory should play in revolutionary politics?

13. Did any of the political thinkers of the French Revolution give a plausible account of how it could be ended? Answer with reference to two or more of the following thinkers: Sieyès, Condorcet, Paine, Robespierre, Saint-Just.

14. What role did anti-religious sentiment play in the political thought of the French Revolution? Answer with reference to two or more of the following thinkers: Sieyès, Condorcet, Paine, Robespierre, Saint-Just.
B18. CULTURE AND AESTHETIC POLITICS IN GERMANY 1770-1800

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Suggested primary reading:


J.G. Fichte, ‘Some Lectures concerning the Scholar’s Vocation’, in *Early Philosophical Writings*, ed. D. Breazeale (Ithaca, 1993), 144-84 [this edition is much to be preferred, but is unavailable online; see, alternatively, the older trans. by W. Smith, available at https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Vocation_of_the_Scholar ]


Suggested secondary reading:


*D. James, *Fichte’s Social and Political Philosophy: Property and Virtue* (Cambridge, 2011) (E)


*D. Moggach, ‘Schiller’s Aesthetic Republicanism’, *History of Political Thought* 28 (2007), 520-41. (E)


*J. Zammito, K. Menges, and E.A. Menze. ‘Johann Gottfried Herder Revisited’ *Journal of the History of Ideas* 71 (2010), 661-84. (E)

Further secondary reading:


**Herder:**


F.M. Barnard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity, and History* (Montreal, 2003)


S. Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton, 2003), chap. 6 (E)


**Humboldt:**


**Fichte:**


A.J. La Vopa, *Fichte, The Self and the Calling of Philosophy*, 1762-1799 (Cambridge, 2001)

R.R. Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany, 1992), chap. 3. Novalis:

Novalis
Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):

1. What political implications follow from the view of German thinkers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that freedom is the development of individuality?

2. How did German thinkers at the turn of the nineteenth century understand the relation between culture and politics?

3. Why did a number of German thinkers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries come to argue that a rational state was an insufficient guarantee of freedom? Did the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German thinkers who emphasized the political role of culture reject reason?

4. What role did the notion of history play in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German theories of culture and politics? Answer with reference to two or more of the authors you have read.

5. Were German theorists of culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries seeking a substitute for religion?

6. ‘Thus what Rousseau and the ancient poets put behind us, under the names “state of nature” and “golden age”, lies ahead of us instead… What we have to achieve is represented as something we have lost’ [FICHTE, Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar’s Vocation]. Why was this difference so important to Fichte?

7. Why did so many German theorists of culture at the turn of the nineteenth century argue that society should be understood as organic rather than mechanical?

8. What did German theorists of culture at the turn of the nineteenth century see in the thought and politics of France?

9. What role did the notion of ‘individuality’ play in German theories of culture and aesthetic politics around the turn of the nineteenth century? Answer with reference to two or more authors.

10. How did German theorists of culture and aesthetic politics understand education and its political significance?

11. What was it that late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German theorists of culture hoped to cultivate? Answer with reference to two or more thinkers.

12. Why did so many German theorists of culture at the turn of the nineteenth century reject the centralised state as a political model?
13. To what extent were German theories of aesthetic politics and culture at the turn of the nineteenth century also accounts of human progress?
Suggested primary reading:


W. Thompson and A. Wheeler, *Appeal of One-Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men &c.*, ed. M. Foot and M. M. Roberts (Bristol, 1994); [edition unavailable online, but see https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:cik442nul?id=lse%3Acik442nul#page/1/mode/2up ]


Suggested secondary reading:

Arianne Chernock, *Men and the Making of Modern British Feminism* (Stanford, California, 2010) (E)


***S. Knott and B. Taylor (eds), *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (Basingstoke, 2005), Part 2, Sections 6, 8, 9 and 10 (E).


Further secondary reading:
Mary Astell and the early eighteenth century
chapters 1, 3, 5, 13 (E).

The Enlightenment

The Revolutionary period

Mill and Victorian Britain

Engels and the later nineteenth century
1. Was the happiness of women or of society foremost in the considerations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theorists of the condition of women?

2. Did eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theorists of the condition of women think of women as history’s victims?

3. Did eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theorists of the condition of women believe in progress?

4. What changes, if any, in the condition of men were envisaged by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century commentators on the condition of women?

5. To what extent did the arguments of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century commentators on the condition of women rest on the natural equality of the sexes?

6. What importance, if any, did the history of women have in eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century theories of women’s condition?

7. Why did so few eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critics of the condition of women rely on arguments about justice?

8. Did the language of rights transform the nature of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates about the condition of women?

9. In what ways, if at all, did the debate about the condition of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries change?

10. In what ways did property feature in debates about the condition of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?

11. How did eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theorists of the condition of women conceptualise the equality between the sexes?

12. From what did eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theorists of the condition of women argue women should be freed?
(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Suggested primary reading:


Suggested secondary reading:


Further secondary reading:


Owen & Britain:

G. Claeyss, Machinery, Money and the Millennium: From moral economy to socialism, 1815-1860 (Cambridge, 1987)


Saint-Simon & Early French Socialism:


E. Durkheim, Socialism and Saint-Simon, A. W. Gouldner (ed), (London, 1959) (E)

F.E. Manuel, The New World of Henri Saint-Simon (Cambridge, 1956)


Fourier:

J. Beecher, Victor Considérant and the Rise and Fall of French Romantic Socialism (Berkeley CA, 2001)

Proudhon:

Blanc:

Marx & Engels’ Views:
D. Leopold, ‘The Structure of Marx and Engels’ Considered Account of Utopian Socialism’, *History of Political Thought* 26 (2005), 443-466. (E)

Herzen & Russia:

*Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):*

1. Were the early nineteenth-century socialists’ critiques of commercial society forward- or backward-looking?

2. What significance did socialist authors before 1848 attach to the French Revolution?

3. Were early socialist doctrines egalitarian?

4. ‘Early nineteenth-century socialism was a rejection of politics.’ Discuss.

5. Did early socialists regard the state as a potential ally or as an enemy?

6. ‘Industrial competition was the central problem that early socialist theorists sought to confront.’ Discuss with reference to two or more authors.

7. Did early socialist thinkers seek to destroy Christianity or to reform it?

8. Was early socialism more concerned with social harmony than with justice?

9. ‘Early socialism was less concerned with the redistribution of property than with the organisation of labour.’ Discuss.
10. What role, if any, did early socialist thinkers envisage for the working class in government?

11. What, if anything, do we gain by describing early nineteenth-century socialist thinkers as ‘utopian socialists’?

12. How did socialist writers before 1848 conceive of the relationship between humanity and nature? Answer with reference to two or more thinkers.

13. What was the relationship between socialism and republican political thought in the first half of the nineteenth century?

14. What was the role of the family in socialist thought before 1848?
B21. NATIONALISM AND THE STATE

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Suggested primary reading:


Suggested secondary reading:


E. Kedourie, *Nationalism* (New York, 1960), chapters 5-7


*S*. Recchia & N. Urbinati, ‘Giuseppe Mazzini’s International Political Thought’ in Recchia and Urbinati (eds), *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations*, pp. 1-30 (E)

Further secondary reading:

H. Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York, 1944), Chapters 4-8. (M – chapter 4 only)

*Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):*

1. When and how did the idea of nationality enter into European theories of the state?
2. What criteria were used by nineteenth-century thinkers to identify national communities worthy of political freedom?
3. Why was nationalism a vehicle for liberalism in the nineteenth century?
4. Why were many nineteenth-century conservatives sceptical of nationalism?
5. To what problems were nineteenth-century theories of nationality and nationalism thought to be solutions?
6. Are nineteenth-century theorists of nationality best understood as supporters or opponents of the French Revolution?
7. Did nationalism in the nineteenth century support or compete with republicanism?
8. What was the relationship between nationality and civilization in nineteenth-century political thought?
9. How did nineteenth-century theorists of nationalism understand its relation to democracy?
10. Was the doctrine of nationality antagonistic to cosmopolitanism in the nineteenth century?
11. Explain the relationship between nationalism and federalism in nineteenth-century debates with reference to two or more thinkers.
12. To what extent did nineteenth-century accounts of the nation depend upon a concept of civilization?
13. Were cosmopolitanism and nationalism at all compatible for nineteenth-century theorists? Discuss with reference to two or more authors.
Suggested primary reading:


The following primary texts, published around 1900, are also important:

J.A. Hobson, Imperialism: A Study (1902); available at: https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.39648/page/n3/mode/2up


Suggested secondary reading:

C. Bayly, Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire (Cambridge, 2012) (E)


*D. Bell (ed.), *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2008), esp. chs 6, 8, 9 and 10 (E)


S. Muthu (ed.), *Empire and Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2012), esp. chs. 8-13 (E)


**International Law**


**Further secondary reading:**


D. Kelly (ed.), *Lineages of Empire: The Historical Roots of British Imperial Thought* (Oxford, 2009), esp. chs 1 and 5.


J. Levy and I. M. Young (eds), *Colonialism and its Legacies* (Lanham, 2011), esp. chs. 2, 7, 8, 10, 12 (E)


**Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):**

1. Were Liberal theories of empire proof against the Marxist critique of imperialism?

2. Was Liberalism necessarily imperialist?
3. To what extent did nineteenth-century accounts of empire depend upon arguments about civilization?

4. Did nineteenth-century thinkers believe empire was promoted or undermined by modern commercial relations? Answer with reference to two or more of the thinkers you have read.

5. Were nineteenth-century theorists of empire more concerned with the colonies or with the metropole?

6. Were arguments about the British presence in India significantly different from those about European imperialism elsewhere in the world?

7. What role did political economy play in British liberal critiques of empire?

8. ‘In the empire, one might say, liberalism had found the concrete place of its dreams’ [UDAY SINGH MEHTA, Liberalism and Empire]. Is this an accurate portrayal of the relationship between liberalism and imperialism in the nineteenth century?

9. Did nineteenth-century thinkers prioritise settler colonialism over other forms of empire?

10. What role did ideas of backwardness play in nineteenth-century accounts of empire?

11. What role did arguments about legal order play in nineteenth-century debates on empire?

12. Is ‘anti-imperialism’ a useful category of analysis for thinking about critics of empire in nineteenth-century Britain?

13. To what extent did nineteenth-century theorists of empire see European imperial possessions as extensions of the metropole?

14. What was the purpose of imperial government according to nineteenth-century theorists of empire? Answer with reference to at least two or more authors.
B23. SOCIAL SCIENCE AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

(E) = e-book available from iDiscover
(M) = Available via Moodle (see under ‘Library Resources’)

Suggested primary reading:


Suggested secondary reading:


Further secondary reading:


D.G. Charleton, *Positivist Thought in France during the Second Empire, 1852-70* (Oxford, 1959)


Saint-Simon:


R. Wokler, ‘Saint-Simon and the Passage from Political to Social Science’, in A. Pagden (ed), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1987), 323-38 (E)

Specifically on Comte:


Durkheim:


S. Lukes, *Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work, a Historical and Critical Study* (Stanford CA, 1973)

*Suggested supervision questions (from old Tripos papers):*

1. Did nineteenth-century Social Science represent a turn away from political philosophy?

2. Did positivist ideas in Social Science depend upon an assumption of progress in history?

3. Why was reflection on the French Revolution so important to the development of social science in the nineteenth century?

4. Did nineteenth-century contributors to the rise of social science agree on the meaning of ‘science’?

5. ‘Nineteenth-century social science was motivated by a social and practical goal, not merely by the pursuit of knowledge.’ Discuss.

6. How did nineteenth-century social scientists understand the relation of society to nature?

7. Why was the idea of the division of labour so important to nineteenth-century social scientists?
8. Was nineteenth-century social science antagonistic to political pluralism?

9. What role did religion play in nineteenth-century attempts to model social understanding as science?

10. Was nineteenth-century social science politically anti-revolutionary?

11. To what degree was nineteenth-century social science modelled on the natural sciences?

12. To what extent was social science in the nineteenth century connected to a teleological vision of history?

13. How and why did nineteenth-century social scientists seek to distinguish their discipline from political economy? Answer with reference to two or more thinkers.

14. Was nineteenth-century social science committed to a specific political programme?

15. Was social science in the nineteenth century a form of historical understanding?
Appendix: Examiners’ Reports

N.B. POL8 and POL10 are examined and marked separately. Past papers are most easily accessed via the History Faculty website:

https://www.vle.cam.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=199161  [requires Raven login]

where you will find them listed under Part I Paper 20 (POL8) and Part II Paper 4 (POL10).

POL8 Examiners’ Reports

2021-22
Examiner: Dr Tom Hopkins

One hundred and five candidates sat this paper, working remotely on an open-book basis, and with a three-hour time limit.

Overall, the general standard of answers was lower than in previous years. Eighteen candidates were awarded a mark of 70 or above; seventy-eight candidates received a mark in the 60-69 range; seven in the 50-59 range; one in the 40-49 range; and one received a mark below 40. The median mark was 66; the mean was 65.4. The shorter time allotted for the exam may have played a role in this, but it was also noticeable that a number of candidates were making extensive use of material that did not directly bear on the question asked. In at least some cases there was evidence to suggest the use of material from supervision essays or notes with little regard to its relevance to the question. As ever, it cannot be emphasised enough that strong answers focus closely on the question posed; a generic overview of the topic is not sufficient. The best candidates displayed in-depth, first-hand knowledge of the set texts and provided analytical rather than merely descriptive answers to the questions.

There were 177 answers on Section A topics and 138 on Section B topics. All questions received at least one answer. Overwhelmingly, the most popular A topic was Wollstonecraft (46 answers), followed by Rousseau (27), Mill (21), Marx (18), Burke (13), Bentham (11), Constant (9), Kant (7), Hegel (7), Hume (5), Smith (5), Montesquieu (4) and Tocqueville (4). For Section B, Gender and Political Thought was most popular (40 answers), followed by Empire and Civilization (34), Nationality and the Theory of the State (17), the French Revolution (14), the American Revolution (10), Luxury and Commercial Society (9), Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany (7), Socialism before 1848 (3), Social Science (3) and Natural Law and Sociability (1). The spread of marks across topics was less than it has been in some previous years, though candidates outperformed the mean mark on Natural Law and Sociability, Kant, Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany, Luxury and Commercial Society, Hume, Burke, Bentham, American Revolution, and Wollstonecraft. On average, candidates performed marginally better on Section A than Section B. The three topics with the lowest average mark were (in descending order): the French Revolution, Nationality and the State, and Montesquieu.

Turning to individual topics, I begin with Hume. This was a relatively straight-forward question; weaker answers seemingly relied on lecture notes and were not fully in control of the conceptual
linkages in Hume’s argument; the better answers were more textually grounded. The Montesquieu question caused problems, with a number of candidates taking the reference to ‘popular sentiment’ as a warrant to restrict their discussion to republican forms of government, rather than think about the broader implications of the quotation. The Rousseau question received a few conceptually sharp answers, but there were rather too many instances of candidates giving a generic overview of Rousseau’s thought with insufficient focus on the concept of the general will. On Smith, most candidates had a sense of what was at stake in the question, but answers engaged less closely with Part IV of the Theory of Moral Sentiments than would have been desirable. Burke attracted some solid answers, confident in the contrasts they drew between his treatment of the Glorious Revolution and the French Revolution. Several candidates were able to draw on Burke’s pre-revolutionary writings to elaborate their answer. The best answers gave a sophisticated account of his thinking about the foundations of political society, political judgement and the politics of necessity, drawing variously on Bourke, Bromwich, Pocock and Armitage. There were some very strong answers to the Wollstonecraft question, which combined full treatment of the first Vindication with thoughtful, and in some cases rather original, discussion of its relation to Wollstonecraft’s wider œuvre. Conversely, some candidates displayed only a limited knowledge of this text, and their answers suffered accordingly. For Kant, the standard of answer was generally high, though some candidates could have been clearer in distinguishing between the set texts. The question on Bentham gave scope for some nuanced treatment of the relationship between the principle of utility and variations in the positive law of different countries; the best answers took the opportunity to present Bentham as a more complex thinker than he sometimes appears. The question on Constant attracted a surprisingly large number of candidates who could not adequately define the word ‘usurpation’, and one or two whose knowledge of the primary texts did not appear to extend much beyond the lecture of 1819. Answers to the Hegel question tended towards the basic; it would have been good to see more discussion of the institutions of civil society and state. There were some good responses to the Tocqueville question, suggesting a decent knowledge of the text, though some candidates missed the significance of his comments about the homogeneity of opinion in the upper echelons of French society. The best answers on Mill gave a clear explanation of the ways in which his utilitarianism differed from that of Bentham and proceeded to investigate tensions within his thought. Some candidates displayed an impressive knowledge of the intellectual context of Mill’s works. Answers on Marx were typically constructed around a contrast between the discussion of alienation in the 1844 manuscripts and the analysis of commodification in Capital vol. 1. Done well, this could take answers quite far, but what was striking was that few candidates showed any awareness of the break with Feuerbach in 1845-6, or its implications for interpretation of the later works in the light of the early writings.

On Section B, leaving aside those topics for which the number of answers precludes meaningful generalization, we turn first to Luxury and Commercial Society. There was a pleasing breadth of material brought to bear on the question, with some good discussion of Melon and Ferguson. Over-reliance on Hont’s essay on the early Enlightenment Luxury debate, often an issue in the past, was less evident this year. The American Revolution attracted some strong answers, many of which made effective use of material from lectures. Weaker answers failed to give sufficient attention to the constitutional debates of the 1780s, focusing instead on the 1760s and 1770s. The French Revolution question divided candidates, with some struggling to adapt material on representation to the question. The best answers found inventive ways to think about the relationship between the changing political context and the political thought of revolutionary actors. On Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany, the standard of discussion of the set texts was generally high, but almost all candidates could have usefully done more to distinguish criticism of the ‘centralised state’ from that of the ‘mechanistic’ or ‘absolutist’ state. The
Gender and Political Thought topic attracted some very strong, conceptually-focused answers. Many candidates could marshal impressive amounts of exemplary material. Weaker candidates provided purely descriptive answers that lacked analytical depth. Nationality and the State was generally answered well with some strong discussion of Mazzini and Fichte. One candidate answered solely with reference to material from the Empire and Civilization topic; another answered predominantly with reference to 20th anti-colonial nationalism and the work of Benedict Anderson. In both cases the answers failed to adequately address the question. On the Empire topic, the standard was up on last year, with most candidates having something useful to say about the differences between settler colonies and the case of India, though some appeared to have only patchy knowledge of the Mill and Marx primary texts.

2020-21
Examiner: Dr Tom Hopkins

Seventy-six candidates sat this paper; one additional candidate was assessed following special arrangements. In line with university guidance, the exam was sat remotely, on an open-book basis, with candidates writing three essays in a six-hour window.

Overall, the general standard of answers was higher than in previous years. Whilst there were few truly outstanding scripts received, the proportion of candidates classed below a 2.1 was unusually low. This may perhaps be attributed to the longer span of time allotted for completing the exam and to candidates’ access to texts and notes. In total, of those who sat the main exam, twenty candidates were awarded a mark of 70 or above; fifty-four candidates received a mark in the 60-69 range, one in the 50-59 range, and one in the 40-49 range. The median mark was 67; the mean was 66.6. There were 134 answers on Section A topics and 94 answers on Section B topics. The most popular topic by some distance was Wollstonecraft (33 answers), followed by: Rousseau (26), Empire and Civilization (23), Gender and Political Thought (20), French Revolution (12), Burke (11), Luxury and Commercial Society (10), Constant (9), Marx (9), Smith (8), Hegel (8), Mill (8), Kant (7), American Revolution (7), Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany (7), Bentham (6), Socialism before 1848 (6), Nationality and the Theory of the State (5), Hume (4), Social Science (4), Montesquieu (3), Tocqueville (2). No candidate attempted the question on Natural Law and Sociability. There were notably strong answers on Kant, Hegel, the American Revolution, and Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany. Additionally, candidates tended to out-perform the average on Hume, Smith, Wollstonecraft, Constant, Tocqueville, the French Revolution, and Social Science. On average, candidates performed better on Section A than on Section B. The four topics with the lowest average mark were Nationality and the State, Gender and Political Thought, Socialism before 1848, and Empire and Civilization.

As in previous years, stronger answers were marked, firstly, by their focus on the question asked, as opposed to generic overviews of the topic; secondly, by detailed knowledge of the primary texts; and thirdly, by coherent, well-structured arguments. It was noticeable that a few candidates appeared to have attempted to repurpose answers to questions posed in previous years. Where this was the case, essays suffered from a want of close engagement with the terms of this year’s questions.

In turning to individual topics, I again confine my comments to those questions where some level of generalisation about the quality of answers is possible. I will begin with Rousseau. The standard here was higher than in recent years; most candidates understood well enough that the question required
reconstruction of the argument of the Second Discourse. Some tried to draw out links to other texts, and in a small number of cases, this provided a useful supplement to the discussion. In others, however, generic accounts of the argument of the Social Contract added little to the question at hand, and took up space that could have been better employed more usefully on the origin of evil, rather than Rousseau’s proposed remedies. On Burke, most candidates offered a more or less sophisticated account of the distinction between the Glorious Revolution and the French Revolution. Better answers multiplied the instances of legitimate resistance, usually with reference to America or Ireland, and the best demonstrated a deeper understanding of Burke’s thinking about popular sovereignty, often drawing on the works of Prof. Bourke. Wollstonecraft attracted some very strong answers, and few weak responses. What distinguished the best answers was greater conceptual rigour, but it was noticeable also that some candidates made good use of the Short Residence in Norway, Sweden and Denmark to broaden their discussion. The question on Kant required a good understanding of the central arguments of the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, and this was uniformly on display, albeit with some variations in the quality of exposition. On Bentham, most candidates had something to say about his critique of natural rights, and most linked it to the theory of fictions. Some of the weaker essays tended to ignore the emphasis in the question on his ‘political’ thought; others gave a generic overview of his political thought, but without linking it consistently with the critique of natural rights. On Constant, there were one or two very strong answers, displaying great depth of understanding and, crucially, focusing on the ‘institutions’ element in the quotation, something neglected or under-emphasised by weaker answers. On Hegel, most candidates were able to give an overview of the ‘ethical life’ sections of the Philosophy of Right, but several evinced a rather sketchy understanding of his defence of constitutional monarchy. On Mill, there were a few good answers that made use of a range of Mill’s texts and gave thought to whether and how the idea of ‘civilizational progress’ might underpin his political thought at large; too many candidates treated this as if it solely concerned his thought about colonial empire. On Marx, one or two very knowledgeable answers aside, the standard was not the highest. Few candidates gave evidence of any great depth of understanding of Marx’s critique of capitalism, and whilst most were familiar with the concept of alienation, it was strikingly rare to see any candidate attempt to give any account of the development of Marx’s thought over time, or to register differences between the set texts.

On Section B, the responses to the Luxury topic were mixed. The best answers gave consideration to the different ways that ‘commerce’ featured in eighteenth-century political debate. Several recognised that Fénelon was not consistently hostile to commerce; some made good use of Ryan Patrick Hanley’s 2020 book on him. Weaker answers simply equated commerce with luxury and rehearsed standard characterizations of Fénelon as a critic of luxury, and Mandeville as its defender. The American Revolution was generally answered to a very high standard, with most candidates demonstrating an impressively detailed knowledge of the topic, and making good use of texts such as Pocock’s ‘1776: The Revolution against Parliament’ and Nelson’s The Royalist Revolution. The French Revolution was also generally well-answered, with some confident answers clear on the different conceptions of representation in play in revolutionary political debates. Equally, the German Aesthetics and Culture topic attracted some excellent responses, with candidates demonstrating good knowledge of the texts, and, particularly salient to this question, of the eighteenth-century intellectual background. The Gender topic caused some difficulties. The best answers recognised that to adjudicate the question of whether principles were sacrificed in the name of partial reform, they would need to attend to what principles individual thinkers were defending. Weaker answers approached the problem as a clash between ‘radicalism’ and ‘reform’, so that any ‘reformist’ attitudes on the part of individual thinkers could be treated as reneging on ‘radical’
principles. Too often, what was invoked as ‘radicalism’ was an ahistorical conception of what feminist principles should be, rather than what the theorists under discussion were concerned to defend. On Socialism, candidates were often better in thinking about the ways in which thinkers were and were not critics of property, than in linking this to the critique of existing forms of government. On nationality, there were a number of poor answers which missed the point of the question, and simply provided some commentary on historical events that might have shaped debates on the issue, rather than reflecting on the use made of arguments about history by theorists of nationality. On empire, two issues stood out. Firstly, very few candidates attempted to define what they understood by ‘imperialism’ or ‘anti-imperialism’, with many using ‘imperialism’ simply to denote the negative consequences of empire. Even where it was noted, usually with reference to Hobson, that the concept was sometimes distinguished from others, such as ‘colonialism’, this rarely led to any sustained reflection on what was being rejected by ‘anti-imperialists’. Most candidates converged on the conclusion that most (or all) critics of empire endorsed some forms of colonialism. Too often this led to overgeneralized characterization of debates about empire, in which distinctions between different positions got lost. A second source of problems concerned some candidates’ lack of attention to the stipulation that the answer should make reference to critics of empire ‘in nineteenth-century Britain’. One might make concessions for Marx (writing in Britain), and for Hobson (1902). It is rather a stretch to do so for Constant, Smith, Burke, or Fanon.

2019-20
Examiner: Dr Tom Hopkins

A total of thirty-seven candidates sat the paper this year, a marked drop occasioned by the novel exam arrangements introduced in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. This exam was classed as a formative assessment and was conducted remotely on an ‘open-book’ basis. In light of restricted digital access to some of the set texts, it was agreed with the chair of examiners that candidates would not be unduly penalised for failure to make use of material thus affected. It was further agreed, with the support of relevant exam boards in the History Faculty, that certain exam questions would be revised where lack of access to specific texts would materially compromise candidates’ ability to answer. Two questions were amended on this basis in advance of the date of the exam.

The standard of answers was broadly in line with previous years. Nine candidates received marks of 70 or above; twenty-four candidates received marks in the range 60-69; one candidate in the range 50-59; two in the range 40-49; and one below 40. The median mark was 66; the mean was 65.2. There were 63 answers on Section A topics; 48 answers on Section B topics. No instances of plagiarism were identified. As ever, some clustering was in evidence, but despite the fact that fewer candidates sat the paper, there was still a pleasing spread of topics covered. The most popular topics were Rousseau (14 answers) and Gender (13), followed by Nationalism (11) and Wollstonecraft (10). Other popular topics included Empire (8), Burke (7), Mill (6), and Luxury and Commercial Society (6). Montesquieu, Smith, Kant, Marx, and the French Revolution each attracted 5 answers. The question on Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany was answered by 3 candidates, and 2 candidates answered on Hegel. The questions on Hume, Bentham, Constant, Socialism before 1848, and Social Science each received 1 answer. No candidate chose to tackle the questions on Tocqueville, Natural Law, and, most unusually, the American Revolution. Leaving aside those topics answered by only one or two candidates, the question on Smith attracted some very strong answers, and the standard for the Marx and the Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany topics was also high. Candidates tended to outperform the average when answering on Nationalism, Gender, Empire, the French Revolution and Burke. It is notable that many candidates performed better when answering on
Section B topics than on Section A. At the other end of the spectrum, Rousseau once again proved challenging to a number of candidates, with marks clustered at the lower end of the 2.1 spectrum; the same was true of Mill. The question on Luxury and Commercial Society was not, as a rule, well-answered, with many candidates unsure what to do with the ‘ancients/moderns’ distinction. There was, however, one answer of outstanding quality on this topic, and there were also notably strong individual answers on Smith, Wollstonecraft, Gender, and Empire.

It was not evident that the shift to an ‘open-book’ assessment had any great impact on the standard of answers. To perform well, candidates needed: firstly, to answer the question in front of them, rather than offer a generic overview of the topic; secondly, to demonstrate first-hand knowledge of the specified texts; thirdly, to produce a coherent, logically-structured argument. Weaker answers were deficient in respect of one or more of these requirements.

In turning to individual topics, I again confine my comments to those questions where some level of generalisation about the quality of answers is possible. For Section A, I will begin with Montesquieu. This question invited reflection on a number of Montesquieu’s primary intellectual concerns. Most candidates rightly made much of the phrase ‘modern liberty’, but weaker answers confined their attention to threats to liberty arising from constitutional arrangements, to the neglect of other factors, such as the growth of commerce. On Rousseau, most candidates linked the question to the problem of perfectibility, and some saw the pertinence of recent scholarly literature, with Neuhouser proving a popular interlocutor. However, weaker candidates struggled to make sense of the reference to ‘reason’, and not every candidate appeared to be entirely at home with the argument of the Second Discourse. Answers on Smith, as noted, were of generally high standard, with candidates displaying high levels of conceptual precision, and close familiarity with both the Theory of Moral Sentiments, and the secondary literature. The question on Burke received a mixed response. Better answers focused closely on the problem of ‘moral equality’, but rather too many defaulted into generic accounts of Burke’s attitude towards revolution and reform. There were few very weak answers on Wollstonecraft, but there were quite a number that offered merely descriptive responses that did little to interrogate the notion of the ‘good life’ with any great analytical rigour. On Kant, answers veered between those that were informed by close textual analysis, and a series of generic answers that failed to engage with the question adequately, for instance, by offering an overview of Kant’s views on revolution, rather than focusing on the problem of progress per se. One strong answer aside, responses to the question on Mill also suffered from a want of attention to the specific premise of the question, with few candidates showing more than passing interest in the contrast between ‘social’ tyranny and ‘political’ oppression, or in-depth knowledge of the relevant sections of On Liberty. On Marx, the best answers were able to relate the discussion of commodity fetishism to a range of texts other than Capital, but even at the upper end of the range there was only a limited sense of the interpretive questions that can be asked about the relationship between the early and later writings.

For Section B, as noted, the Luxury and Commercial Society topic was, in the main, poorly answered. This topic often attracts generic answers that rehearse the arguments of Fénelon and Mandeville with little reference to the question, frequently relying more on the secondary literature than on the primary texts themselves. This year was no exception, but this was compounded by confused treatment of the ‘ancients/moderns’ distinction. There was one exception – an answer that demonstrated an outstandingly sure grasp of the secondary debates and close reading of the primary texts. Beyond this, Section B topics were generally well answered. On the French Revolution, candidates took the reference to
‘the British model’ in their stride, and there was some good comparative discussion of the primary texts. ‘Culture and Aesthetics’ was answered with some degree of conceptual precision, and candidates made use of a wide range of primary texts. On Gender, most candidates focused squarely on rights, though the question of change was handled with less confidence. There were signs that the Nationalism topic is starting to generate more conceptually ambitious answers – some candidates appeared to have found Kelly’s article on Bluntschli particularly illuminating – though at the weaker end of the spectrum it remained the case that some answers made little attempt to draw out connections or comparisons between the set texts. On Empire, it was pleasing to see some candidates drawing on theoretical perspectives from sociology and anthropology, though this sometimes came at the expense of any close engagement with the primary texts.

Overall, candidates are to be commended on their performance under exceptionally challenging circumstances.

2018-19
Examiner: Dr Tom Hopkins

Eighty candidates sat the paper by examination this year; one candidate was assessed following special assessment procedures. The examination was, very regrettably, significantly disrupted when a misprint was discovered five minutes into the exam. Question 21, which should properly cover the Nationalism topic, had been replaced by last year’s question on Empire and Civilization. The exam was stopped after approximately five minutes; the correct question was identified by the examiner from History, who was the paper setter. Candidates were informed of the correction and those who had begun to answer the misprinted question 21 were requested to strike out their answers. The exam resumed with ten minutes added to the clock to make up for lost time. These changes were communicated by the examination supervisors to other examination centres, although it appears that, in at least one instance, this message was not received. Clearly, this raises questions about paper-setting procedures. As with POL7 and POL10, the exam paper for POL8 is set by the Faculty of History and subject to their scrutiny. The examiner for POL8 did not have sight of the exam paper before the morning it was sat. I strongly recommend that this change in future, and that exam papers for POL7, POL8 and POL10 be made available in advance to their respective examiners in POLIS as a safeguard against any repeat of this kind of error.

In light of this disruption, special care was taken to ensure that no candidate was unduly disadvantaged. Examiners identified all cases where there were particular grounds for thinking that a candidate might have been disadvantaged by the error and its correction. These were given additional scrutiny by the external examiners, as were cases where there seemed to be a significant discrepancy between a candidate’s marks for POL8 and those for other papers.

In the event, overall the standard of answers was high. Eighteen candidates received an overall First-class mark; fifty-eight received an Upper Second; three received Lower Seconds; and one candidate received a Third. The median mark was 66; the mean was 65.8. There were 138 answers on Section A topics; 102 answers on Section B topics. Answers were heavily clustered around five topics. The most popular topic was Rousseau (36 answers), followed by Wollstonecraft (31 answers), Gender (24), Burke and Empire and Civilization (both 21). Trailing some way behind was Luxury and Commercial Society (13), Hume and the French Revolution (both on 12), the American Revolution (11), Nationalism (9), and Kant and Mill (both on
Bringing up the rear were Montesquieu, Marx, and Socialism before 1848 (all on 5), Constant and Social Science (both on 4), Tocqueville and Natural Law (both on 3), Bentham and Hegel (both on 2) and Smith (most unusually, receiving only a single answer). Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany was the only topic not to receive an answer. There were notably strong answers on Hegel and on the Gender topic, although the latter topic also attracted many rather generic answers to the question; there were a number of good answers on Hume, Wollstonecraft and Nationalism, and those candidates who attempted the questions on Smith, Bentham, Constant, Natural Law, and Social Science tended to perform well. Strikingly, many candidates struggled with the questions on Rousseau and Empire and Civilization, with a number of candidates receiving one or more marks in the 40-49 or 50-59 range for these questions.

Much as in previous years, the best answers had a number of virtues in common. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, they offered direct answers to the questions posed rather than generic discussions of the topics concerned. Secondly, they were based on close reading of the relevant set texts and did not rely upon summary accounts such as might be gleaned from lectures, supervisions or basic textbooks. Thirdly, they offered cohesive arguments that used each successive paragraph to build an overarching case, rather than laying out arguments in a disjointed or haphazard fashion. Additionally, the best answers were able to make judicious use of secondary literature to advance their case, whether by invoking it in support of the argument, or by challenging its conclusions with reference to the primary texts.

For section A, as noted, Rousseau proved most problematic. Weaker candidates showed a lack of familiarity with the discussion of the lawgiver in Book II Chapter 7 of the Social Contract. Several confused this figure with either the sovereign or the government; others neglected the emphasis of the question on the source of the lawgiver’s authority or misidentified it. Others still offered an overview of the argument of the Social Contract, but neglected to focus on the problem at hand. Stronger answers took the quotation as the starting point for a discussion of the lawgiver’s role and their appeal to divine authority. Problems with other topics were less widespread. Hume was generally answered well, though most candidates were significantly more familiar with the Treatise than with the Essays. Montesquieu was answered best by those candidates able to discuss the distinction between nobility and aristocracy with confidence, and to relate them to different forms of government. Answers on Burke were somewhat unadventurous, with many candidates falling back on generic discussion of his ‘consistency’. Better answers aimed to address the relationship between theory and practice more directly. Wollstonecraft attracted a number of strong answers that made interesting use of the Short Residence. Weaker answers neglected one or other of the two Vindications. Kant was generally well answered, and candidates proved adept at relating his moral, legal and political philosophies. The emphasis on free trade in the Mill question presented a challenge to those candidates who had neglected the relevant passages in On Liberty or who had passed over the Principles of Political Economy. Answers on Marx were mixed. Though all candidates showed some understanding of a range of his texts, weaker candidates struggled to make a coherent argument. Few showed any very deep appreciation of Marx’s historical or philosophical thought. Other questions attracted fewer answers, though these tended to be of high quality. The answers on Smith and Hegel demonstrated a good grasp of the primary texts and in some cases notable intellectual ambition in their arguments. Bentham and Constant attracted some convincing arguments based on a solid understanding of the primary texts. The answers on Tocqueville were a little weaker, and it was noticeable that some candidates were less than confident in discussing the Ancien Régime and the Revolution.

For Section B, Gender was the most popular topic. The best candidates excelled, with answers that demonstrated both wide reading in the primary and secondary literature, but also a clear focus on the ways
in which the historicization of the ‘woman question’ shaped debate on the subject. Weaker candidates fell into two camps: those who did not focus sufficiently on the ‘history’ aspect of the question; and those who struggled to pull the threads of their answer together into a coherent argument. For Empire and Civilization, a focus on political economy again proved challenging. Some candidates struggled to address this dimension of the topic on anything more than a superficial level; others neglected one or another of the terms specified in the question: ‘British liberal critiques of empire’. Optimistic attempts to recruit Marx to the ranks of British liberals did not impress. The best arguments drew on secondary and primary sources to examine the role of debates on free trade, attacks on the ‘old colonial system’ and slavery, on international competition, and on the role of empire in fostering or perpetuating domestic inequality. Some answers also made plausible cases for distinguishing between favourable and critical arguments about empire in thinkers such as J.S. Mill. Of the other topics, the Luxury topic was popular this year, and received a number of very well-informed answers, though some candidates struggled to retain the focus on ‘corruption’. The French Revolution question was not answered especially well, with a number of candidates demonstrating a very superficial knowledge of Sieyès’ thought, in particular. The American Revolution fared a little better, especially where candidates demonstrated first-hand knowledge of the Constitution itself, as well as of the arguments made for and against its adoption. The Nationalism topic attracted some very strong answers, which both drew on a wide range of primary texts, but also, crucially, gave thoughtful consideration to the concept of ‘civilization’. The candidate who answered the question solely with reference to texts drawn from the Empire topic fared less well. Answers on Socialism and Social Science were generally solid, though some candidates slipped into giving flat overviews of key thinkers. The better answers focused more attentively on the terms of the questions. The answers on Natural Law all provided convincing answers to the question, but in some cases could have tried to make more use of the set texts.

2017-18
Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

Eighty-two candidates sat the paper this year. There were thirteen overall First-class marks, fifty-eight Upper Seconds, and eleven Lower Seconds. The median mark was 64, the mean a little higher (64.6). There were 151 answers on Section A questions, and 95 on Section B questions. Every question on the exam paper was attempted at least twice except for the question on natural law, which attracted no answers. The popular answers were on Rousseau (as ever, 34), Wollstonecraft (25), gender (23), the French Revolution (19), Smith and Burke (both 14), nationalism (13), and Montesquieu (12). Mill’s popularity on this paper continues to decline, with only nine takers this year (fewer than Constant, for example, who had ten). German authors were also not very popular this year, with eight on Kant, three on Hegel, five on Marx (though these were strong answers), and two on the German Romantics (ditto). Although authors and topics that concentrated on France were popular (counting Rousseau and Constant as French for the time being), making up just over a third of all answers, they were, at the margin, slightly weaker in quality than answers on other questions, and somewhat flat answers were disproportionately to be found amongst attempts to the questions on Rousseau, Constant, Tocqueville, and the French Revolution.

The fundamental things apply / As time goes by, and this remains as true as ever when it comes to POL8. Higher marks were awarded to candidates who focused on the question on the exam paper and reflected on what, exactly, was being asked about, rather than moving as swiftly as possible to generic discussion of the set authors’ best-known views; who showed first-hand knowledge of the set texts, rather than relying on
textbook summary or arm’s-length engagement; who were able to bring in accurate reference to and sensible discussion of relevant secondary literature, where this was appropriate; who built an argument across the answer as a whole, rather than offering disjointed paragraphs with little connection between them; and who clearly allocated their time evenly across their three answers, rather than starting off with a longer and ending with a somewhat truncated piece. One satisfying aspect of this year’s scripts is that vanishingly few answers read like summaries of lecture material. A very small number of essays, however, did read like answers to questions that had appeared on previous exam papers—about Rousseau on transparency, or Bentham on Blackstone, for example—that had been very lightly repurposed.

Turning to some of the individual questions, the stronger answers on Rousseau tended to have more concrete institutional detail (sometimes with explicit reference to Geneva, Poland, or Corsica), and worked out strong lines of argument to connect the two main set texts, rather than juxtaposing them and/or dealing mainly in abstractions. Wollstonecraft answers were sometimes let down by an insufficiently analytical attention to the distinction between rights and virtues. Responses to the question on Kant sometimes failed to hold their attention on the essay ‘What is Enlightenment?’, and spent too long distracted by chestnuts like the right to revolution or the relationship between his moral and his political thought. Bentham essays flourished to the extent that they thought about what ‘official aptitude’ might be. Answers on Hegel might have focused more on the idea of history as slaughterbench than they did. Those on Constant and Tocqueville too often read like essays from candidates who had not really moved on from Part I. Stronger essays on the latter incorporated discussion of the Ancien Régime and the Revolution, or contributions from secondary authors such as Cheryl Welch. Mill essays might have had more than they did on the notions of a duty to oneself and of accountability. Marx answers were generally good, and the stronger answers weren’t just fixated on the “young Marx”, but covered later texts including, in particular, the Critique of the Gotha Programme.

When it came too Section B, weaker answers on luxury rehearsed the standard Hontian discussion of the debate as it came down from Fénelon and mentioned cities a few times; stronger answers showed that they had really got inside the spirit and detail of Mandeville’s argument. Essays on the American Revolution were better to the extent candidates were aware of recent scholarly debate on the question of monarchy, e.g. Eric Nelson’s recent contribution. Essays on the French Revolution sometimes appear to have been written by candidates who either hadn’t really thought about privilege at all or were too focused on specifically monarchical privilege. On both of these topics, some essays were let down by insufficient grip on the general train of events during the Revolutions concerned. Better essays on women organised their answers around a central line of argument, rather than spending a paragraph on each set author and vaguely relating what they had to say to the question that had been asked. When it came to the questions on nationalism and empire, the more interesting answers grappled directly with the set texts, rather than offering detached summary. Weaker answers to the question on empire either offered a fairly general account of British liberal imperialism, into which the phrase “standard of civilisation” was slipped a few times, or offered uncritical summary of some commentator or other’s views.
Ten candidates sat this exam, which was conducted remotely, on an open-book basis, and in a three-hour window. The standard of answers was high. Four candidates received marks of 70 or above; five received marks in the 60-60 range; one received a mark in the 50-59 range. The mean mark was 66.4; the median mark was 66. In total, there were sixteen answers on Section A topics and fourteen on Section B. In two instances there was evidence to suggest more or less extensive use of previously-prepared materials with a corresponding drift in focus from the specific question at hand.

As was the case last year, answers were spread across a range of topics: four answers on Rousseau; three each on Wollstonecraft, the French Revolution, Gender and Political Thought, and Empire and Civilization; two on Kant and on Socialism before 1848; and one each for Hume, Montesquieu, Smith, Bentham, Constant, Hegel, Mill, Natural Law and Sociability, Luxury and Commercial Society, and Nationality and the State. Natural Law, Luxury and Commercial Society, Bentham and Constant attracted particularly strong answers; the weakest answers were on Wollstonecraft and the Gender topic. In the former case, weaker answers failed to give adequate attention to the concept of natural benevolence; in the second, weaker answers were very limited in conceptual depth. A similar remark might be made about the spread of marks in answers to the Rousseau, French Revolution and Empire and Civilization questions; what distinguished the better answers was a clear focus on the question, good knowledge of the primary texts and the issues they raise, and an analytical approach to the material. The same qualities characterise the best answers on this paper year in, year out.

Seven candidates sat this exam, which was conducted remotely, and on an open-book basis. One candidate was awarded a first-class mark; the rest received marks in the 2.1 range. All told, there were ten answers on Section A topics, and eleven on Section B. There was a pleasing spread of topics covered: three answers on Kant; two each for Smith, Burke, the French Revolution, and Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany; and one each for Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel, Luxury and Commercial Society, the American Revolution, Gender and Political Thought, Socialism before 1848, Nationality and the State, Empire and Civilization, and Social Science. Given this spread, generalizations about individual topics are out of the question, but as in previous years, stronger answers combined excellent textual knowledge, a focused approach to the question at hand, and clear argumentation.

Eight candidates sat the exam in this sitting. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic the exam was conducted remotely on an ‘open-book’ basis. In light of restricted digital access to some of the set texts, it was agreed
with the chair of examiners that candidates would not be unduly penalised for failure to make use of material thus affected. It was further agreed, with the support of relevant exam boards in the History Faculty, that certain exam questions would be revised where lack of access to specific texts would materially compromise candidates’ ability to answer. Two questions were amended on this basis in advance of the date of the exam.

Two candidates received first-class overall marks, one of which would have qualified for a distinction. A further five candidates received a mark in the 2.1 range. One candidate received an overall 2.2. The median mark was 65.5; the mean marginally higher at 65.75. Whilst not an outstanding year, the mark profile was broadly in line with previous years, and under the circumstances this is to be welcomed. A wide range of questions were attempted. Kant and the Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany questions each received three answers. Hume, the American Revolution, Nationalism, and Empire each received two answers. Rousseau, Burke, Wollstonecraft, Bentham, Constant, Hegel, Tocqueville, Marx, the French Revolution, and Gender received one answer each. No candidate attempted the questions on Montesquieu, Mill, Natural Law, Luxury and Commercial Society, Socialism before 1848, or Social Science.

The very best answers were resolutely focused on the question posed, rigorously argued, and displayed outstanding critical understanding of the primary texts and of relevant secondary debates. There were few instances of an outright failure to answer the questions posed, though a number of candidates produced somewhat generic answers that were insufficiently focused. Weaker candidates tended to display a more superficial level of analysis, a weaker grasp on the primary texts, and looser argumentation. Some candidates, perhaps encouraged by the ‘open-book’ format, reproduced long strings of quotations, without sufficient analysis or attempt to weave them into a compelling argument. Given the range of topics covered by a small number of candidates, it is difficult to generalise about responses to individual questions, so I will merely highlight a few particular issues arising, where these do not fall under the generic categories listed above. For Burke, the legal origin of the term ‘prescription’ should have been attended to. On Wollstonecraft, candidates would have been advised to give more consideration to the philosophical and theological concerns underpinning her account of progress. On Kant, the question required a clearer account of the argument of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, and the relationship between this text and Kant’s doctrine of right, than some candidates were able to give. The question on the American Revolution was poorly answered; candidates demonstrated very little conceptual and historical precision in handling ‘democracy’, and there was some evident confusion about the political affiliations of some of the authors of the specified texts. Answers on the Nationalism topic suffered from limited knowledge of the primary texts, though it was notable that candidates made a concerted effort to draw out comparisons between individual authors. On Empire, candidates showed much greater confidence in discussion of the secondary debates than in treating the primary texts.

This was an examination taken under unique circumstances, and all candidates are to be congratulated on their performance in the face of unprecedented challenges.

2018-19
Examiner: Dr Tom Hopkins

Fourteen candidates sat this paper this year, of whom four received Firsts and the remainder Upper Seconds. The median mark was 67 and the mean 66.5. As these figures suggest, the overall standard was high, with a
number of candidates receiving marks for individual questions in the high 70s. Candidates tackled a pleasingly wide range of questions. Every topic in Section B received at least one answer: Nationalism attracted four answers, the French Revolution three, and the American Revolution and Culture and Aesthetic Politics in Germany two each. The pattern for Section A was a little more clustered. Burke led the field (6 answers), followed by Hume and Montesquieu (4 each), Constant (3), Rousseau and Tocqueville (2 each), and Smith, Kant, Hegel and Mill (1 each). Most unusually, Wollstonecraft, Marx, as well as Bentham, received no answers.

As always, the best answers displayed a firm grip on the question posed; good (and in some cases outstanding) knowledge of the primary texts; the ability to construct a coherent and well-structured argument; and good judgement in using secondary literature either to support an argument or to provide a target for criticism. Weaker answers demonstrated either a failure to answer the question directly; a deficiency of understanding of the set texts; or a poorly-constructed argument.

Of those topics where it is possible to draw out some general trends, Montesquieu was the most consistently well-answered. Candidates were generally well versed in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century French political debate and were able to draw out some plausible connections in discussing Montesquieu’s political theory. The question on Hume was most compellingly answered by candidates who could confidently connect his theory of property with the theory of government. Answers on Burke were rather too often somewhat generic, discussing his writings on Ireland, America and France in turn and making a more or less plausible case for or against consistency. The better answers tended be those that were more confident in tying the material together into a coherent argument. On Constant, it was clear that Garsten and Rosenblatt’s discussion of Constant’s religious thought have made an impact, but this sometimes led to the political dimension being downplayed. It was noticeable on this topic, as on some others, that some candidates were tempted to rehearse arguments from practice essays that did not always speak to the matter at hand. On Nationalism, the best answers were those that were more ambitious in their attempts to draw out what a ‘coherent doctrine’ might have been. On the French Revolution, all the answers started sensibly enough from a comparison between Sieyès and Robespierre, but without advancing especially far in their analysis of the concepts of ‘nature’ and ‘artifice’.

2017-18
Examiner: Dr Christopher Brooke

Seven candidates sat the paper, writing thirteen answers on Section A authors and eight on Section B topics. One candidate received a (low) First-class mark, one a (high) Lower-second class mark, the rest were all Upper Seconds. There were few significant disagreements amongst the markers, which were never greater than five points. Only two questions attracted more than two answers. There were five essays on Rousseau, which flourished to the extent that they focused sharply on the analytical separation between sovereignty and government, rather than restating more general aspects of his political thinking. There were three essays on the luxury debate, where candidates usually didn’t quite say enough about corruption per se, but seemed more comfortable talking about other negative consequences of luxurious consumption.