3.2 Core Ideas and Principles of Liberalism

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 55 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short-answer items may be brief phrases or sentences where asked. For levels-marked questions write a developed response with accurate political knowledge, clear analysis and, for the 30-mark essay, an explicit judgement. Spend about 75 minutes in total, allocating roughly 35 minutes to the 30-mark essay and the remainder to the short questions.

1 State two constitutional mechanisms liberals typically support to constrain government power, naming the constitutional context.

(a) State one constitutional mechanism. **(1)**

(b) State a second constitutional mechanism distinct from the first. **(1)**

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Distinguish between 'negative liberty' and 'positive liberty' in the liberal context and explain why most classical liberals prioritise negative liberty, naming the conceptual context.

(Total for Question 2 is 4 marks)

3 Explain what liberal political theory means by 'negative liberty' in the context of freedoms liberals prioritise.

(a) Identify the basic meaning of negative liberty used by liberals. **(1)**

(b) Explain one implication of prioritising negative liberty for government policy in a liberal context. **(2)**

(Total for Question 3 is 3 marks)

---

4 Explain the liberal commitment to foundational equality as a prerequisite for individual liberty, in the context of core ideas.

(Total for Question 4 is 3 marks)

5 Evaluate the extent to which liberals agree on the role of the state, focusing on shared core ideas such as consent, constitutional limits, individualism and liberty.

(Total for Question 5 is 24 marks)

6 Analyse two liberal ideas about human nature for Edexcel 9PL0 Core Political Ideas: describe how liberals view human nature and explain political consequences of each idea.

(Total for Question 6 is 10 marks)

7 Explain how the liberal principle of individualism leads liberals to prioritise the rights and autonomy of individuals over collective goals, within the core ideas context.

(Total for Question 7 is 6 marks)

Mark scheme · 3.2 Core Ideas and Principles of Liberalism

Question 1

(a) one accurate mechanism, e.g. separation of powers, a written constitution, judicial review, or a bill of rights — **B1**

(a) Answer: Separation of powers between branches of government.

(b) one accurate, distinct mechanism, e.g. judicial review, a bill of rights, or regular free elections — **B1**

(b) Answer: Judicial review and independent courts.

Question 2

defines negative liberty as freedom from interference and positive liberty as capacity or opportunity to act — **B1**

identifies that classical liberals prioritise negative liberty to protect individuals from coercive state action — **B1**

explains a reason why, e.g. fear that state provision of 'capacity' could justify intrusive control or paternalism — **B1**

brief example or development, e.g. opposition to expansive welfare measures seen as limiting choice if coercive — **B1**

Answer: Negative liberty is freedom from interference, while positive liberty is the capacity or resources to act. Many classical liberals prioritise negative liberty because they fear that state attempts to supply capacities could become intrusive or paternalistic, limiting individual choice; for example, they warn that expansive compulsory programmes may restrict freedom even if intended to increase opportunity.

Question 3

(a) states that negative liberty is freedom from interference or constraint by others, especially the state — **B1**

(a) Answer: Freedom from interference or constraint by others, especially by the state.

(b) identifies an implication, e.g. limits on state power, protection of civil liberties, or restrictions on paternalistic legislation — **B1**

(b) development explaining how that implication follows, e.g. laws should focus on preventing harm rather than enforcing virtue — **B1**

(b) Answer: An implication is that government should have constrained powers, protecting civil liberties and avoiding paternalistic laws, so state action is justified mainly to prevent harm to others rather than to force individuals to be moral.

Question 4

identifies that foundational equality means all individuals have equal moral worth and equal entitlement to basic rights — **B1**

identifies that this equality is about equal legal and political rights rather than guaranteed equal outcomes — **B1**

explains the link, e.g. equal status underpins freedom of choice and access to institutions that protect liberty — **B1**

Answer: Foundational equality means all individuals have equal moral worth and equal entitlement to basic legal and political rights; it is equality of status and opportunity rather than ensuring identical outcomes, and it underpins the ability of individuals to exercise their liberty and access the protections of constitutional government.

Question 5

Level 0 No relevant content. — **0**

Level 1 Basic, limited knowledge of liberal ideas about the state, with little or no analysis or evaluation. Points may be general and unsupported. — **1-6**

Level 2 Clear, accurate knowledge of liberal principles relevant to the role of the state, with some developed analysis of agreement and disagreement. Evaluation is present but may be one-sided or partial. — **7-12**

Level 3 Detailed, accurate knowledge of a range of liberal arguments and relevant institutional implications, with balanced analysis comparing points of agreement and divergence. Evaluation is developed and reaches a provisional judgement. — **13-18**

Level 4 Sophisticated, comprehensive and precise use of relevant liberal ideas and examples to produce a tightly argued, balanced evaluation that directly addresses the question and reaches a fully substantiated, discriminating judgement on the extent of agreement among liberals about the role of the state. — **19-24**

Indicative content:

- Areas of clear agreement among liberals: the state must be legitimate, grounded in consent via representative institutions and free elections, and must be constrained by constitutional mechanisms to protect individual liberty and prevent arbitrary power.
- Agreement on protecting basic rights and civil liberties, since individual autonomy and freedom from coercion are central to liberalism, leading to support for legal protections, independent courts and a bill of rights or similar safeguards.
- Shared commitment to foundational equality of status, meaning the state should guarantee equal legal and political rights, though not necessarily equal socioeconomic outcomes, so the state has a role in ensuring equal opportunity rather than enforced material equality.
- Key areas of disagreement: the scope and scale of state intervention to secure liberty and equal opportunity - some liberals favour minimal state intervention (emphasising negative liberty and free markets), while others accept a larger role for the state to provide education, basic welfare or regulations that enable real freedom, sometimes justified in terms of positive liberty.
- Tension between individual autonomy and collective action: disagreements over whether the state should prioritise protecting individual choice even at the cost of social inequality, or should use redistributive measures to secure conditions for meaningful liberty for all.
- Different liberal strands give different weight to rationalism and fallibility: some stress individual rational capacity and therefore trust private arrangements and markets; others stress human limitations and support state institutions to correct market failures and protect the vulnerable.
- Institutional implications: agreement on constitutional checks and consent contrasts with divergent views on economic policy, the welfare state and regulation. A strong answer should cite illustrative modern examples or hypothetical policy contrasts to show how disagreement plays out in practice.
- Evaluation and judgement: a balanced conclusion could argue that liberals broadly agree on the state's fundamental legitimacy and the need for constitutional limits to protect individual liberty, but disagree substantially and meaningfully about the state's proper size and redistributive role, so the extent of agreement is strong at the level of principles but weak at the level of policy and institutional detail.

Question 6

Level 0 No relevant content. **0**

Level 1 Basic identification of one or two ideas about human nature with limited explanation of political consequences. **1-3**

Level 2 Clear knowledge of two liberal ideas about human nature with some developed explanation of how each idea leads to particular political arrangements or policies. **4-7**

Level 3 Detailed, accurate explanation of two distinct liberal ideas about human nature, each linked to well-developed political consequences and specific institutional implications, reaching a reasoned conclusion about their significance. **8-10**

Indicative content:

- Idea 1, rational and autonomous individuals: liberals see humans as capable of reasoned choice and moral judgement, which justifies individual freedom, representative government and the protection of private conscience. Political consequence: emphasis on free speech, toleration, education to cultivate reason, and institutions that enable informed choice such as free elections and pluralist civil society.
- Idea 2, self-interested but mutually cooperative: liberals often depict individuals as motivated by self-interest yet able to cooperate for mutual benefit. Political consequence: support for markets and voluntary association tempered by rules to prevent harm and protect rights, and a limited state role to secure the conditions for exchange and contract rather than to plan outcomes.
- Alternative idea, fallibility and need for checks: some liberal thought recognises human error and bias, which justifies constitutional safeguards, separation of powers and decentralisation so no single actor can impose mistaken decisions. Political consequence: legal protections, independent judiciary and checks on majoritarian impulses.
- Evaluation point: the two ideas may complement each other in liberal theory, since faith in reason supports freedom while recognition of fallibility supports institutional constraints; a strong answer considers tensions and how different liberal strands emphasise one idea over another.

Question 7

identifies that individualism treats the individual as the primary unit of moral and political concern **B1**

identifies that this leads to protecting individual rights and choices against group or state interference **B1**

explains how this supports policies favouring individual rights, pluralism and tolerance **B1**

explains a political consequence, e.g. opposition to collectivist planning or to majoritarian laws that override minority rights **B1**

provides a brief example or illustration, e.g. legal protections for freedom of religion or conscience **B1**

explains a limitation or qualification, e.g. individual rights are constrained where they harm others **B1**

Answer: Individualism treats the individual as the primary moral and political unit, so liberals protect personal autonomy and rights against coercive group or state demands. This leads to pluralism, tolerance and legal safeguards for freedoms such as religion and expression, a general scepticism about collectivist planning, and a readiness to limit majoritarian measures that infringe minority rights, subject to the qualification that individual liberty may be restricted to prevent harm to others.