3.3 Classical and Modern Liberalism: Tensions Within the Tradition

Total Marks

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

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short answer questions may be brief, but present full sentences for any question worth 4 marks or more. The final 30-mark essay must be a developed, structured response. This pack focuses on the internal tensions within liberalism between classical and modern strands.

1 State two features of the minimal or 'nightwatchman' state associated with classical liberalism, for the topic of liberal ideas on the state.

(a) Give the first feature of a minimal state. **(1)**

(b) Give the second feature of a minimal state. **(1)**

(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)

2 Explain, in the context of liberal responses to economic failure, how market failure can be used to justify state intervention as taught under modern liberalism.

(Total for Question 2 is 5 marks)

3 Analyse the extent to which liberals agree on the principle of individualism, focusing on the classical versus modern liberal debate within the topic of liberalism.

(Total for Question 3 is 12 marks)

4 Evaluate the extent to which liberals disagree over the role of the state.

(Total for Question 4 is 24 marks)

5 Distinguish between classical and modern liberal views of the state, focusing on their core disagreements and any important overlap. This is a 10-mark short answer for the topic of liberalism internal tensions.

(Total for Question 5 is 10 marks)

Mark scheme · 3.3 Classical and Modern Liberalism: Tensions Within the Tradition

Question 1

(a) one accurate feature, e.g. provision of core functions like law, order and defence only **B1**

(a) Answer: Provision of core functions only, such as law and order, defence and protection of property.

(b) one accurate feature, e.g. minimal economic intervention with laissez-faire policies **B1**

(b) Answer: Minimal economic intervention, favouring laissez-faire markets and low taxation.

Question 2

identifies market failure types, eg public goods, externalities, information asymmetry or monopoly **B1**

explains how public goods or externalities lead to underprovision or harmful outcomes absent state action **B1**

links to state remedies, eg regulation, taxation, provision or subsidy **B1**

explains how remedies increase individuals' real choices, connecting to positive liberty **B1**

gives a brief example, eg state regulation to control pollution or public funding of education **B1**

Answer: Market failures such as public goods, externalities, information asymmetry and monopoly can produce poor social outcomes; modern liberals argue the state can correct these failures through regulation, taxation, subsidies or direct provision, for example pollution controls or publicly funded education. Such remedies increase real choices and capacities, thereby enhancing positive liberty.

Question 3

Level 0 No relevant content. **0**

Level 1 Basic, partial statements about individualism with limited development. May conflate classical and modern positions. **1-4**

Level 2 Clear explanation of classical and modern liberal conceptions of individualism, with some analysis of similarities and differences. **5-8**

Level 3 Detailed, balanced analysis explaining where the strands share a common commitment to individual rights and where they diverge over the role of society and the state in enabling individual development, reaching a supported judgement. **9-12**

Indicative content:

- Agreement: both classical and modern liberals place the individual at the centre of political theory, defending individual rights, rule of law and tolerance of plural lifestyles.
- Classical emphasis: individualism framed as self-reliance, personal responsibility, and freedom from state interference, stressing property rights and market choice.
- Modern emphasis: individualism includes concern for individuals' real capacities to choose, so enabling public services and redistribution are necessary to secure substantive freedoms.
- Analysis should consider whether the difference is substantive or only semantic: both oppose collectivist subordination of the individual but disagree over whether formal liberties are sufficient without social and economic provisions.
- A good conclusion might judge that liberals broadly agree on prioritising the individual but disagree significantly on what the state must do to make that ideal meaningful, so agreement is strong in principle but contested in policy.

Question 4

Level 0 No relevant content. **0**

Level 1 Basic, partial knowledge of liberal strands with little or no developed analysis or evaluation. Argument is descriptive rather than analytical. **1-6**

Level 2 Clear, mostly accurate knowledge of classical and modern liberal positions with some developed analysis. Evaluation is present but may be unbalanced or underdeveloped. **7-12**

Level 3 Detailed, accurate knowledge and sustained analysis of both strands, addressing theoretical justifications and policy consequences; evaluation weighs the strengths and limits of each position and advances a considered judgement. **13-18**

Level 4 Sophisticated, wide-ranging and well-evidenced knowledge used to construct a balanced, critical evaluation that directly compares theoretical bases, empirical examples and practical implications of classical and modern liberal approaches to the state, reaching a clear, well-substantiated judgement on the extent of disagreement. **19-24**

Indicative content:

- Clarify the claim: disagreement over the role of the state can be about size, scope, purpose and methods of intervention. Distinguish negative versus positive liberty as the core philosophical fault line.
- Case for substantial disagreement: classical liberals defend a nightwatchman state limited to protecting rights and enforcing contracts, motivated by the harm principle, consent and individual responsibility; modern liberals argue for an enabling state to secure positive liberty through education, health, welfare and regulation to counter structural inequalities and market failure.
- Policy contrasts: laissez-faire economics, low taxation and property rights protection versus progressive taxation, welfare provision and regulation to secure opportunity and correct market failures.
- Philosophical justifications: classical liberal trust in spontaneous order and market solutions; modern liberal emphasis on capability, social justice and the conditions for meaningful choice.
- Case for significant convergence: both strands affirm the centrality of the individual, private property rights and opposition to authoritarian collectivism; both prefer evolutionary reform over revolutionary transformation and often accept limited state roles in areas like national defence and policing.
- Contextual and pragmatic overlap: in practice many liberal parties and governments have combined elements of both strands, for example supporting markets alongside social safety nets, suggesting disagreement is often about degree and emphasis rather than absolute rejection of the other strand.
- Critical evaluation: assess strengths and weaknesses of each position, for instance classical concerns about dependency and loss of autonomy versus modern claims about structural barriers and unequal starting points; consider empirical evidence on outcomes of different policies such as education investment or deregulation.
- Reach a judgement: a strong conclusion may argue that liberals disagree fundamentally at the level of the conception of freedom, so the disagreement is real and consequential for policy, but there is also considerable overlap in commitment to individual rights and pragmatic acceptance of mixed approaches, so the extent of disagreement varies by issue and historical context.
- Responses that take a plausible alternative judgement are creditworthy if supported by coherent argument and evidence.

Question 5

Level 1 Limited, generalised statements about classical and modern liberal views with little accurate detail or development.	**1-3**
Level 2 Clear identification of key differences, such as negative versus positive liberty and minimal versus enabling state, with some developed explanation and at least one example or consequence.	**4-6**
Level 3 Detailed, accurate distinctions across several dimensions (state size, purpose, economic policy, conception of freedom), showing how each view justifies its position and noting one area of overlap.	**7-8**
Level 4 Sophisticated, well-structured distinctions that compare and contrast classical and modern positions across theory and practice, explain underlying philosophical reasons, and identify shared liberal ground such as commitment to individual rights and consent.	**9-10**

Indicative content:

- Classical liberals prioritise negative liberty, arguing for a minimal state limited to protecting life, property and contract, and favour laissez-faire economics. Modern liberals prioritise positive liberty and support an enabling welfare state to remove barriers to freedom and correct market failure.
- Classical liberals justify the minimal state through social contract ideas and the harm principle, emphasising consent and non-interference. Modern liberals justify state intervention as enabling individuals to exercise choice and develop capacities, citing structural disadvantages and unequal starting points.
- On economics, classical liberals favour low taxation and minimal redistribution, while modern liberals accept progressive taxation and public spending to fund education, health and social security for equal opportunity.
- Overlap: both strands value individualism, the rule of law and rights, and oppose authoritarian collectivism; both typically reject revolutionary collectivist redistribution that abolishes property rights.
- A full answer organises these contrasts clearly and may give a brief example, such as classical support for laissez-faire markets versus modern support for state-funded schooling to enable positive liberty.