3.4 Liberal Thinkers: John Locke and Mary Wollstonecraft

Total Marks

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

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. Short-answer items may be brief but must be precise. For levels-marked questions, write developed paragraphs with accurate political knowledge and clear evaluation. Use the named thinkers John Locke and Mary Wollstonecraft where required.

1 State two central claims Mary Wollstonecraft makes in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) about women and equality.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 Explain Wollstonecraft's idea of rational individualism and how it extends a liberal principle to gender relations.

(Total for Question 2 is 3 marks)

3 Analyse two ways in which Locke's ideas reflect classical liberalism, using his writings in Two Treatises of Government (1689) as the context.

(Total for Question 3 is 10 marks)

4 Explain two ways Mary Wollstonecraft's liberalism departs from Locke's formulation on property and citizenship, referring to A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792).

(Total for Question 4 is 6 marks)

5 Evaluate the extent to which John Locke and Mary Wollstonecraft agree on the foundations of liberalism, using their key works Two Treatises of Government (1689) and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) as the main sources. Anchor your answer in both thinkers and reach a judgement.

(Total for Question 5 is 24 marks)

6 Explain Wollstonecraft's critique of women's exclusion from education and how she links this exclusion to wider political inequality.

(Total for Question 6 is 5 marks)

Mark scheme · 3.4 Liberal Thinkers: John Locke and Mary Wollstonecraft

Question 1

one accurate claim, e.g. women are rational beings entitled to the same natural rights as men	**B1**
second accurate claim, e.g. women should have equal access to education or property and citizenship rights	**B1**
third accurate claim, e.g. the social treatment of women produces perceived female inferiority	**B1**
fourth accurate claim, e.g. marriage and legal dependency restrict women's freedom	**B1**

Answer: Any two of: women are rational individuals entitled to the same natural rights as men; women should have equal access to education; women's legal and social exclusion from property and citizenship is unjust; marriage laws and social norms that produce female dependency should be reformed.

Question 2

identifies rational individualism as the claim that individuals are rational agents who should exercise reason	**B1**
explains extension to gender, e.g. women possess reason and so should have the same civic rights	**B1**
links to political consequences, e.g. equal education and property rights follow	**B1**

Answer: Rational individualism is the claim that individuals are rational agents who should exercise reason in moral and political life; Wollstonecraft extends this to gender by insisting women are equally rational and so should enjoy the same civic rights, education and legal standing as men.

Question 3

Level 1 Limited description of Locke with general points, such as mentioning rights or consent without clear development or links to classical liberal principles.	**1-3**
Level 2 Clear explanation of at least one way Locke reflects classical liberalism, with accurate use of Locke's concepts and some analysis of their significance.	**4-6**
Level 3 Detailed analysis of two distinct ways Locke reflects classical liberalism, showing how his ideas about natural rights, property, consent or limited government embody classical liberal values, and evaluating their implications.	**7-10**

Indicative content:

- Locke's emphasis on natural rights to life liberty and property echoes the classical liberal prioritisation of individual liberty and private property as foundations of a just political order.
- Locke's argument that legitimate government rests on the consent of the governed aligns with classical liberal distrust of hereditary or absolute authority and supports government limited by the will of citizens.
- Locke's defence of limited constitutional government, the rule of law and constraints on rulers embodies the classical liberal aim to protect individuals from arbitrary power and to secure a framework for free economic and social activity.
- Analysis could note tensions or limits, for example Locke's justification of property via labour could be examined for how it privileges propertied interests or how his toleration exclusions temper a fully egalitarian liberalism.
- A strong response will link Locke's arguments to classical liberal themes and explain why these features make his thought seminal for later liberal theorists.

Question 4

identifies a departure, e.g. Wollstonecraft's explicit challenge to legal and educational exclusions of women from property and citizenship	**B1**
develops how this departs from Locke, e.g. Locke's natural rights rhetoric did not explicitly extend to women in practice	**B1**
identifies a second departure, e.g. Wollstonecraft criticises the social conditioning that transforms women into dependents rather than equal rights-bearing agents	**B1**
develops the second point, linking it to implications for citizenship and education	**B1**
links both departures to liberal theory, e.g. extending liberal individualism to demand institutional change	**B1**
offers brief evidence or example, e.g. Wollstonecraft's call for equal education and legal reforms	**B1**

Answer: Wollstonecraft departs from Locke by explicitly insisting that natural rights and rational individualism must include women, challenging legal and educational exclusions that left women without property rights or full citizenship; she also emphasises that social conditioning, not natural inferiority, explains women's subordinate position and so calls for institutional reforms such as equal education to realise liberal equality.

Question 5

Level 1 Basic knowledge of Locke and/or Wollstonecraft with limited analysis or evaluation. Claims are general and lack supporting evidence or linkage to liberal foundations.	**1-6**
Level 2 Clear knowledge of both thinkers and some analysis of areas of agreement and disagreement, but evaluation is undeveloped or one-sided. Some accurate textual references may be present.	**7-12**
Level 3 Detailed knowledge and analysis of how Locke and Wollstonecraft articulate liberal foundations, showing clear comparisons and some critical evaluation, with relevant evidence from their works.	**13-18**
Level 4 Sophisticated, balanced evaluation that integrates detailed textual knowledge of both thinkers, weighs strengths and limits of their agreement on liberal foundations, addresses counter-arguments and reaches a clearly argued, justified judgement about the extent of their agreement.	**19-24**

Indicative content:

- Areas of agreement: both emphasise individual rights and the importance of reason, making rational individualism a common foundation; both view legitimate government as having limits and being justified by consent or the need to protect rights.
- Locke's emphases: natural rights to life liberty and property, consent as the basis of political legitimacy, and constitutional limits to prevent arbitrary rule. Locke's account largely addresses male property holders and focuses on property as central to political order.
- Wollstonecraft's emphases: extension of rational individualism to women, critique of social and legal barriers that prevent women enjoying rights in practice, insistence on equal education and legal standing as necessary to realise liberal principles.
- Points of departure: Wollstonecraft explicitly applies liberal foundations to gender, arguing Locke's general principles must be extended to women; Locke's writings do not systematically challenge gendered exclusions and can be read as implicitly limited in their practical application.
- Tensions within liberalism: consider how Locke's defence of property and conditional toleration may produce limits in the inclusiveness of liberalism, and how Wollstonecraft's critique exposes a gap between abstract principles and social institutions.
- Evaluation could assess whether the differences are a matter of emphasis and extension, so that Wollstonecraft completes Locke's project by universalising it, or whether they are deeper, with Wollstonecraft rejecting assumptions about who counts as a full bearer of rights.
- Evidence to use: Locke on natural rights consent and limited government in Two Treatises; Wollstonecraft on education property and civic inclusion in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, with dates 1689 and 1792 cited where relevant.
- A strong conclusion should judge the extent of agreement, for example arguing that they share core liberal foundations in principle but differ significantly in the scope and application of those principles, with Wollstonecraft offering a corrective that expands the liberal project to include gender equality.

Question 6

identifies that Wollstonecraft argued women were denied proper education	**B1**
explains consequence, e.g. lack of education produces dependency and cultivated 'weakness' or vanity	**B1**
links to political inequality, e.g. uneducated women cannot exercise reasoned citizenship or defend rights	**B1**
gives an example or development, e.g. reforming education would enable women to be moral and civic equals	**B1**
connects to liberal principle, e.g. education as a means to realise individuals' natural rights and autonomy	**B1**

Answer: Wollstonecraft argued women were systematically denied proper education, which produced dependency, cultivated weakness and prevented women from exercising reasoned judgement; this educational exclusion is linked to political inequality because uneducated women cannot function as autonomous citizens or defend their rights, so reforming education is essential to realise liberal claims about individual rights and autonomy.