



POL.CPI5 Liberal Thinkers: John Stuart Mill and John Rawls

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Short answers may use bullet points. For levels-marked questions write a well-structured, developed response using accurate knowledge of Mill and Rawls and precise terminology. The final 30-mark essay must be answered in full sentences.

- 1** This question tests basic recall of John Stuart Mill's harm principle from On Liberty.

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** This question checks knowledge of Mill's view on free speech as set out in On Liberty.

(Total for Question 2 is 1 mark)

- 3** This question tests knowledge of Mill's concept of developmental individualism as a reason for liberty.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

- 4** This question checks recall of John Rawls's thought experiment in A Theory of Justice: the original position behind the veil of ignorance.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

- 5** This question tests knowledge of Rawls's two principles of justice in A Theory of Justice.

(Total for Question 5 is 3 marks)

- 6** This question is about Mill's qualified support for democracy from On Liberty and his concern about the tyranny of the majority.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

- 7** This question asks for application: explain two ways Rawls's difference principle permits limits on individual economic freedom in favour of redistribution, as set out in A Theory of Justice.

(Total for Question 7 is 5 marks)

- 8** This question tests comparative factual recall about the thinkers: state one difference between Mill and Rawls on the justification for limits to liberty, naming both thinkers and their works.

(Total for Question 8 is 6 marks)

9 Analyse two reasons why Mill supports individual liberty in *On Liberty*.

(Total for Question 9 is 10 marks)

10 This short item asks for a named example: give one historical policy or institution Mill supported to protect freedom of expression, with an explanation and date where possible relating to the 19th century context.

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

11 This question asks for a brief evaluation: give two criticisms of Rawls's original position as a method for limiting individual freedom, with concise explanation.

(Total for Question 11 is 4 marks)

12 Evaluate the extent to which John Stuart Mill and John Rawls agree on the limits of individual freedom. In your answer anchor arguments in Mill's *On Liberty* and Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, and reach a reasoned judgement.

(Total for Question 12 is 24 marks)

Mark scheme · POL.CPI5 Liberal Thinkers: John Stuart Mill and John Rawls

Question 1

- **B1** a concise definition of the harm principle, that individual liberty may only be limited to prevent harm to others
- **Answer: The harm principle states that the only justification for exerting power over an individual against their will is to prevent harm to others.**

Question 2

- **B1** states that Mill defended almost complete liberty of speech, including even offensive or false opinions, because debate helps reveal truth
- **Answer: Mill defended near-complete liberty of speech, arguing that allowing offending or false views to be expressed helps test and clarify the truth.**

Question 3

- **B1** identifies that developmental individualism values liberty because it allows individuals to pursue personal growth and moral development
- **B1** explains that Mill believed individuality leads to higher quality of human flourishing and social progress
- **Answer: Mill's developmental individualism holds that liberty permits individuals to develop their unique capacities and character, which leads to higher human flourishing and benefits society through diversity and innovation.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies the original position as a hypothetical contract situation for choosing principles of justice
- **B1** identifies the veil of ignorance as the device that prevents knowledge of personal characteristics so choice is impartial
- **Answer: The original position is a hypothetical situation where rational agents choose principles of justice behind a veil of ignorance that prevents them knowing their social status, talents or aims, ensuring impartial and fair principles.**

Question 5

- **B1** states the first principle guaranteeing equal basic liberties for all
- **B1** states the second principle allowing social and economic inequalities only if they benefit the least advantaged and are attached to positions open to all
- **B1** identifies the difference principle as part of the second principle
- **Answer: Rawls's two principles are: (1) each person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties, and (2) social and economic inequalities are acceptable only if they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged and attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies that Mill supported democracy as generally valuable but not absolute
- **B1** identifies Mill's concern about the tyranny of the majority suppressing individuality and minority opinion
- **B1** explains that Mill advocated checks such as strong civil liberties, representative institutions and protection for minorities
- **B1** links this to Mill's belief that democracy must be limited to protect individual development
- **Answer: Mill supported representative democracy as a valuable method of government but warned it could become a tyranny of the majority. He argued for safeguards including robust civil liberties, free speech and institutional checks to protect minorities and individuality, so democracy should be tempered to preserve space for individual development.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies one way, e.g. progressive taxation to benefit the least advantaged
- **B1** develops that progressive taxation reduces some individual economic freedoms to achieve improved prospects for the worst off
- **B1** identifies a second way, e.g. regulation of markets or wages to ensure fair equality of opportunity and benefit for the least advantaged
- **B1** develops that such regulation constrains pure economic freedom but aims to produce outcomes that justify the limits on liberty
- **B1** links both ways to the original position reasoning that behind the veil of ignorance rational agents would accept these limits
- **Answer: The difference principle allows limits on individual economic freedom through measures such as progressive taxation, which reduces some disposable income of the better off to improve the share available to the least advantaged, and market regulation or minimum wages that constrain unfettered contract freedom to secure fair equality of opportunity. Both are justified because, from the original position behind the veil of ignorance, rational agents would accept rules that improve the position of the worst off.**

Question 8

- **B1** states Mill and his work, On Liberty (1859)
- **B1** states Rawls and his work, A Theory of Justice (1971)
- **B1** identifies that Mill grounds limits in the harm principle and development of individuality
- **B1** identifies that Rawls grounds limits in a contractualist original position and the difference principle
- **B1** explains that Mill focuses on preventing harm and promoting individuality, while Rawls focuses on impartial fairness chosen behind the veil of ignorance
- **B1** offers brief evaluation e.g. this leads Mill to prioritise individual liberty unless others are harmed, while Rawls can justify more systematic redistribution for fairness
- **Answer: Mill (On Liberty, 1859) justifies limits through the harm principle and the value of individuality, arguing interference is only justified to prevent harm to others and to preserve conditions for personal development. Rawls (A Theory of Justice, 1971) justifies limits through a hypothetical contract chosen in the original position behind a veil of ignorance, notably the difference principle, which can legitimise redistribution to benefit the least advantaged. Mill therefore prioritises noninterference except to prevent harm, while Rawls allows broader, systematic constraints for impartial fairness.**

Question 9

- **Level 1** (1-3): Basic points about Mill's support for liberty with limited development and little link to evidence or analysis.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Clear explanation of two reasons with some analysis and reference to Mill's text or examples, but lacking depth or full comparison of the reasons' significance.
- **Level 3** (7-10): Detailed analysis of two distinct reasons, using accurate knowledge of Mill's harm principle, developmental individualism or free speech arguments, with evaluation of their strengths and implications.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Reason 1, the harm principle: Mill argues liberty should only be restricted to prevent harm to others; analysis might explain how this protects individuals from unwarranted state or social interference, while noting limits such as defining 'harm' in contested ways.
 - Reason 1 development: show how the harm principle protects a sphere for personal choice, and discuss objections, for example that some social actions cause indirect harm or that public moral standards might justify limits.
 - Reason 2, developmental individualism: Mill values liberty because it allows individuals to cultivate character, moral capacities and creativity; analysis could explain how individuality benefits both the person and society by encouraging progress.
 - Reason 2 development: consider tensions, for example when individual development conflicts with social welfare or when some choices might damage the individual without harming others, raising questions about paternalism.
 - Cross reason evaluation: compare the two reasons, for example the harm principle gives a rule for limiting liberty while developmental individualism offers a positive ideal justifying broad freedoms; weigh which is the stronger basis for Mill and consider how they operate together in his argument.
 - Conclude with an overall judgement about whether Mill's reasons form a coherent defence of liberty, acknowledging

Question 10

- **B1** names a relevant 19th century example linked to Mill's context, e.g. opposition to strict press censorship or support for reforming libel law
- **B1** explains how this relates to free expression, e.g. Mill's arguments against censorship to enable debate and truth-seeking
- **B1** provides a dated or contextual detail, e.g. references to the mid 19th century reform climate or Mill's 1859 publication date
- **B1** links the example to Mill's principle such as the harm principle or developmental individualism
- **Answer: Example: opposition to strict press censorship in the mid 19th century. Mill, writing in 1859, argued against censorship because open debate allows false beliefs to be challenged and truth to emerge, a position consistent with his harm principle and defence of individuality.**

Question 11

- **B1** first criticism identified, e.g. that the original position is too abstract and detached from real social conditions
- **B1** brief explanation of that criticism, e.g. abstraction may ignore existing inequalities or cultural differences that affect justice
- **B1** second criticism identified, e.g. that the veil of ignorance ignores personal attachments and responsibilities, making its impartial choices unrealistic
- **B1** brief explanation of that criticism, e.g. critics argue people behind the veil would not accept severe limits on liberty if they cared about family or community obligations
- **Answer: Two criticisms: (1) the original position is overly abstract and may ignore real world social and historical factors, so the principles chosen might be ill-suited to actual societies; (2) the veil of ignorance removes personal attachments and responsibilities, producing an unrealistic deliberator who may accept limits on freedom that real people with family ties or cultural duties would reject.**

Question 12

- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **Level 1** (1-6): Basic, limited knowledge of Mill and Rawls with little or no developed analysis or evaluation. Statements may be general and unsupported by textual reference.
- **Level 2** (7-12): Clear knowledge of Mill and Rawls and some developed analysis of their views on limits to freedom. Evaluation is present but may be one-sided or lacking in depth and precise textual anchors.
- **Level 3** (13-18): Detailed and accurate knowledge of both thinkers used to construct a sustained analysis comparing their justifications for limits on freedom, with balanced evaluation and some judgement.
- **Level 4** (19-24): Authoritative, precise and comprehensive analysis and evaluation of Mill and Rawls that directly compares their accounts of permissible limits on freedom, uses detailed textual and conceptual evidence, engages with counterarguments and reaches a clearly argued, balanced and original judgement.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Agreement point: both thinkers accept that individual freedom is not absolute and that some limits can be justified. Mill allows interference to prevent harm to others. Rawls allows limits to secure a just basic structure and to permit inequalities only if they benefit the least advantaged.
 - Agreement development: both seek impartial justification. Mill builds an ethical utilitarian defence that protects individuality to promote general welfare, while Rawls uses the original position as a form of contractualist impartiality yielding principles that can limit liberty for fairness.
 - Disagreement point: Mill prioritises protection of individuality and free expression, resisting state interference except to prevent harm, and is sceptical of broad redistributive demands that excessively limit personal liberty. Rawls, by contrast, can justify far-reaching restrictions on economic freedom through the difference principle and institutional design chosen behind the veil of ignorance.
 - Disagreement development: show examples, e.g. Mill would oppose paternalistic laws that limit adult self-regarding behaviour even if such choices are harmful to the person, whereas Rawls might endorse redistribution via taxation that limits some economic freedoms because it improves the position of the worst off, chosen by agents who do not know their future place.
 - Methodological contrast: Mill grounds limits in utilitarian reasoning and the intrinsic value of individuality, while Rawls grounds limits in a deontic contractualist framework that privileges justice as fairness, so their normative bases lead to different practical conclusions when liberty conflicts with distributive justice.
 - Tension over democracy and majorities: Mill fears the tyranny of the majority and defends civil liberties to protect minorities; Rawls also protects basic liberties as inviolable in his first principle, so there is common ground in protecting certain liberties from majority infringement, though Rawls places basic liberties at the top of a lexical ordering which constrains possible redistributive measures only to those that respect basic liberties.
 - Evaluation of limits: assess whether Mill's harm principle gives clearer guidance in everyday cases than Rawls's more structural principles. Consider critiques such as vagueness in defining harm for Mill, and Rawlsian abstraction and potential practical difficulties in applying the difference principle.
 - Judgement: a balanced conclusion might argue Mill and Rawls agree at a general level that liberty needs principled limits and both protect core liberties, but they differ significantly in scope and justification. Rawls permits institutional constraints for distributive justice that Mill would resist, while Mill gives stronger protection to individual autonomy in self-regarding matters. The extent of agreement is therefore limited: they converge on protecting basic civil liberties but diverge on economic limits and the role of redistribution.