4.7 Anarchist Thinkers: William Godwin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

EDEXCEL 9PL0 · about 60 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. For levels-marked questions (questions 9 and 11) write a developed, well-structured response in full sentences and use precise political terminology and named ideas from Godwin and Proudhon. Spend approximately 60 minutes on this pack.

1 Define, in the context of William Godwin's political thought, what is meant by 'private judgement' as used in Enquiry Concerning Political Justice.

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

2 State one central claim Pierre-Joseph Proudhon makes in What is Property? (1840) about ownership.

(Total for Question 2 is 1 mark)

3 Explain, with one brief reason, why Godwin opposed the notion of a permanent, coercive state in Enquiry Concerning Political Justice.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

4 Give two short reasons, each with one sentence, why Godwin expected change to occur gradually rather than by sudden revolution, referring to Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793).

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

5 State two features of Proudhon's mutualism as an economic arrangement for a stateless society.

(Total for Question 5 is 2 marks)

6 Give one similarity between Godwin's and Proudhon's visions of a stateless society, stated with a brief explanation and a date of the primary work where the idea is expressed.

(Total for Question 6 is 3 marks)

7 Explain two ways in which Proudhon's idea 'property is theft' differs from a simple call for redistribution, referring to What is Property? (1840).

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

8 Explain one criticism that Godwin levels at political institutions that rely on punishment rather than moral persuasion, with reference to Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793).

(Total for Question 8 is 5 marks)

9 Evaluate the extent to which William Godwin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon agree on how a stateless society should be achieved. In your answer, focus on means rather than the end and cover similarities and differences using evidence from Godwin's Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793) and Proudhon's writings (notably What is Property? 1840).

(Total for Question 9 is 24 marks)

10 State two practical mechanisms Proudhon proposed to support mutual credit between workers' associations, briefly develop each, and identify one further supporting feature.

(Total for Question 10 is 5 marks)

11 Analyse two reasons why Proudhon rejected private property, using specific concepts from What is Property? (1840).

(Total for Question 11 is 10 marks)

Mark scheme · 4.7 Anarchist Thinkers: William Godwin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

Question 1

a concise definition identifying private judgement as individuals using their own reason and conscience to form moral and political views, independent of state or religious authority **B1**

Answer: Private judgement: the capacity and right of individuals to use their own reason and conscience to form moral and political views independently of state or religious authority, as advocated by Godwin in Enquiry Concerning Political Justice.

Question 2

identifies the claim 'property is theft' or an equivalent phrasing attributing unjust social relations to private property **B1**

Answer: Proudhon's central claim: 'Property is theft', meaning private ownership of the means of production creates unjust social relations and exploitation.

Question 3

identifies that Godwin believed a coercive state corrupts moral judgment and reliance on force undermines individual moral development **B1**

briefly develops the point, linking state coercion to the suppression of private judgement and moral progress **B1**

Answer: Godwin opposed a permanent coercive state because he argued that reliance on force and legal compulsion corrupts moral judgment and prevents people from developing their private judgement and moral capacities.

Question 4

one correct reason in one sentence, e.g. Godwin believed individuals need time to develop private judgement through education and moral persuasion **B1**

a second correct reason in one sentence, e.g. Godwin argued sudden revolution relied on passion and force that would produce further injustice rather than lasting moral improvement **B1**

Answer: Any two succinct reasons such as: Godwin believed moral improvement comes through gradual cultivation of private judgement via education and persuasion, not through sudden acts; he also argued revolution depends on coercion and passion which would not produce genuine moral progress and could lead to greater injustice.

Question 5

one accurate feature, e.g. a system of small producers' associations exchanging goods by mutual credit **B1**

a second accurate feature, e.g. contracts and federations of associations replacing state coercion in organising production and exchange **B1**

Answer: Any two of: small producers' associations exchanging goods by mutual credit; a network or federation of self-governing associations; contractual relations rather than state-imposed laws; cooperative workshops and possession-based property rather than absolute private property rights.

Question 6

identifies a valid similarity, e.g. both advocate the reduction or abolition of state power **B1**

briefly explains the similarity in one sentence **B1**

gives a correct date for the primary work, e.g. Godwin 1793, Proudhon 1840 **B1**

Answer: Similarity: both thinkers envisage reducing or abolishing the coercive state. Godwin argues for the dissolving of government through private judgement in Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793); Proudhon argues for contractual federations and self-governing associations in What is Property? (1840).

Question 7

identifies one way, e.g. Proudhon distinguishes possession based on use from property as absolute, hereditary right **B1**

develops this with an explanation, e.g. he defends possession for workers while attacking absentee ownership that yields rent **B1**

identifies a second way, e.g. Proudhon's critique is normative and structural, attacking the legal foundations and social relations produced by property rather than only advocating income redistribution **B1**

develops this with an explanation, e.g. he proposes institutional change like mutual credit and federations rather than only taxing the rich **B1**

Answer: Proudhon distinguishes useful possession, the right of a person to use what they work on, from absolute private property that allows owners to extract rent; he defends possession for producers while attacking absentee ownership. He therefore frames 'property is theft' as a structural and legal critique of ownership and its social relations, proposing mutualist institutions like mutual credit and federations instead of merely calling for redistribution of income.

Question 8

identifies the criticism, e.g. punishment undermines moral improvement and breeds hypocrisy or resentment **B1**

explains why, e.g. coercive punishments substitute external compliance for inner moral change **B1**

provides a consequence, e.g. reliance on punishment perpetuates dependence on institutions and prevents cultivation of private judgement **B1**

supports with a brief textual or contextual reference to Godwin 1793 **B1**

offers a short development linking to the broader Godwinian aim of gradual, rational moral improvement **B1**

Answer: Godwin criticises punishment-based institutions on the grounds that punishment produces external obedience rather than internal moral improvement; this breeds hypocrisy, resentment and dependency on authority, preventing the cultivation of private judgement that Godwin sees as necessary for a peaceful dissolution of government, as argued in Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793).

Question 9

Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**
Level 1 Basic, limited knowledge of Godwin and Proudhon with little or no developed comparison of their methods for achieving a stateless society. Evaluation is minimal or absent.	**1-6**
Level 2 Some accurate knowledge of both thinkers and a basic comparative analysis of methods, but explanation and evaluation are underdeveloped or one-sided. Uses limited textual support.	**7-12**
Level 3 Clear and accurate knowledge of both thinkers, with a sustained comparison of their proposed methods. Evaluation addresses strengths and weaknesses and uses relevant evidence, reaching a plausible judgement.	**13-18**
Level 4 Sophisticated and balanced evaluation that integrates comprehensive factual knowledge, conceptual analysis and critical assessment. Demonstrates comparative insight into why each thinker recommends particular methods, evaluates their practical and theoretical viability, and reaches a nuanced, justified conclusion on the extent of agreement.	**19-24**

Indicative content:

- Godwin's method: gradual moral improvement via private judgement and rational persuasion; rejection of political violence and revolution; belief that once individuals adopt reason and benevolence, institutions will wither away through enlightened civil behaviour, as set out in Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793).
- Proudhon's method: institutional and contractual reorganisation via mutualist mechanisms, possession instead of absolute property, people's banks and federations of self-governing associations; deliberate reform of economic and legal structures to eliminate exploitation and replace state coercion with contractual federation, as in What is Property? (1840).
- Similarity: both reject the legitimacy of the existing coercive state and seek non-authoritarian patterns of social organisation; both value voluntary association and emphasise decentralised forms of social order rather than centralised coercion.
- Difference: Godwin places primacy on individual moral transformation and persuasion, downplaying formal institutional redesign; Proudhon places greater emphasis on concrete institutional arrangements and contractual guarantees to prevent exploitation and to coordinate economic life without state coercion.
- Practical evaluation: assess Godwin's optimism about universal moral improvement and problems of scale, timing and free riders; evaluate Proudhon's proposals for mutual credit and federations for their practicality, potential to institutionalise liberty, and risks of new forms of economic dominance or informal coercion.
- Theoretical coherence: consider whether Godwin's emphasis on reason can produce the social conditions Proudhon seeks, or whether Proudhon's mutualist institutions presuppose a degree of moral reciprocity similar to Godwin's private judgement, suggesting complementary rather than strictly opposed approaches.
- Historical and empirical critique: note the differing 1793 and 1840 contexts, how industrial capitalism shaped Proudhon's focus on economic structures, while Godwin wrote in the aftermath of the French Revolution and Enlightenment thought; use this to explain why their methods differ.
- Conclusion: a reasoned judgement about the extent of agreement, for example that they agree in principle about antistatism and decentralisation but diverge significantly on means, with Proudhon favouring concrete institutional redesign and Godwin favouring moral persuasion, though both approaches may be mutually reinforcing.

Question 10

identifies one mechanism, e.g. a people's bank issuing credit to producers at minimal or no interest	**B1**
brief development of that mechanism	**B1**
identifies a second mechanism, e.g. a system of bilateral or multilateral clearing between associations to settle exchanges	**B1**
brief development of that mechanism	**B1**
identifies a third supporting feature, e.g. contractual federations guaranteeing reciprocity and credit networks	**B1**

Answer: Any two mechanisms (each briefly developed) and one further supporting feature, from: a people's bank or national bank of exchange to provide producers with credit at minimal cost; a system of clearing or mutual settlement between producers' associations to balance exchanges; contractual federations of associations providing guarantees and reciprocity for credit. These mechanisms are outlined in Proudhon's mutualist proposals to reduce dependence on capitalist moneylenders.

Question 11

Level 0 No relevant content.	**0**
Level 1 Limited identification of reasons with minimal development. May name assertions such as 'property is theft' without explaining why.	**1-3**
Level 2 Clear identification of two reasons with some explanation and an attempt at analysis, using relevant Proudhon concepts such as possession, rent or exploitation.	**4-6**
Level 3 Detailed analysis of two distinct reasons, each supported by conceptually precise explanation and evidence from Proudhon, showing how the reasons connect to his broader critique of legal and economic structures and reaching a developed conclusion.	**7-10**

Indicative content:

- Reason 1, exploitation and rent: Proudhon argued private property enables owners to extract rent and profit from the labour of others, creating exploitation; property is not the result of labour alone but of legal power that permits owners to appropriate surplus value.
- Development of Reason 1: explain how absentee ownership and rent allow non-producers to live off producers, and link to Proudhon's condemnation of proprietors who draw income without productive contribution.
- Reason 2, legal and moral critique: Proudhon saw private property as upheld by law and custom that institutionalises inequality, making property theft because legal rights protect illegitimate claims; property creates unjust social relations by turning social power into individual privilege.
- Development of Reason 2: connect to Proudhon's distinction between possession (use-rights) and property (absolute rights), and his claim that reform requires changing legal-institutional frameworks rather than simple redistribution.
- Analytical comparison: evaluate which reason Proudhon emphasises more strongly or how they interrelate, for example that legal foundations enable economic exploitation, making the moral and structural critiques mutually reinforcing.
- Conclusion: a judgement that combines the two reasons, noting Proudhon's proposed remedies such as possession, mutual credit and federations as responses to both exploitation and the legal basis of property.