

Teaching guidance: Paper 3 – Political ideas

This teaching guidance provides advice for teachers, to help with the delivery of Political ideas content.

More information on our Politics specifications can be found on the [Politics pages](#) of our website.

Paper 3 – Political ideas

The main purpose of this section of the course is to provide students with a sound, ideological framework for their parallel studies of government and politics in the UK and USA, consistent with the synoptic aims of the specification. Each of the three 'core' political ideologies cited in the specification – liberalism, socialism and conservatism – should take into account the effect they have upon political developments in other countries (socialism and nationalism being key examples).

Students should examine four political ideologies; three 'core' ideologies and one 'other' ideology from the range of options outlined in the specification: anarchism, nationalism, feminism, ecologism and multiculturalism.

For each of the four, students should aim to incorporate the ideas and influence of the respective ideology's 'key thinkers' (as listed in bold type below). For each ideology, there will usually be five such 'thinkers', one of whom is likely to feature in the extract-based questions of Paper 3 Section B.

Teachers and students are urged to examine the three 'core' ideologies before they approach their chosen 'other' ideology. This is because, to a large extent, the 'other' ideologies are offshoots and critiques of the three 'core' ideologies, so students will have an incomplete understanding of these 'other' ideologies without a proper grounding in liberalism, socialism and conservatism.

It is advised that preparation for Paper 3 should begin with an assessment of liberalism. The reasons for this are that liberalism is the oldest of the ideologies featured in the specification; it is the ideology which other ideologies frequently use as a template for their own analyses; and it has had the most powerful ideological influence upon modern, advanced political systems. It is also advised that liberalism is followed by a study of socialism – another 'progressive' ideology which seeks similar yet distinctive goals to liberalism. It is thus advised that the study of 'core' ideologies should conclude with an assessment of conservatism – the ideology representing a critique of the 'normative' assumptions upon which both liberalism and socialism are based.

Liberalism

Reflecting the specification, the study of liberalism may be divided into six stages.

- (i) Origins: students should begin by examining the roots of liberalism and modern political doctrines. Students should learn about the 'Enlightenment' of the 17th and 18th centuries and its rejection of 'absolutist', arbitrary government. In particular, students should consider the influence of John Locke, his advocacy of constitutional rule and 'government by consent' and the effect of his work upon both the UK and US systems of government.
- (ii) View of human nature: students should understand why liberalism is thought to have an optimistic interpretation of human potential and how this relates to the liberal view that men and women are innately egotistical and freedom-seeking. However, it should also be stressed that liberals consider human beings to be rational creatures, normally able to understand and respect the wishes of other individuals and capable of resolving disputes and problems through the medium of logic, discussion and debate.
- (iii) View of society: students should learn how liberals believe in the individualistic society and how this relates to concepts such as self-realisation and self-reliance. There should also be discussion of how liberals believe in the concept of a 'natural' society, complete with 'natural rights' and 'natural' property ownership and how this connects to a liberal belief in tolerance, diversity and 'foundational equality'.
- (iv) View of the state: with renewed reference to Locke, students should focus on the 'contractual' nature of the liberal state and how it is designed to promote 'natural rights' and 'government by consent'. Teachers should also aim to ensure that students appreciate the structures and mechanisms of a typical liberal state. Students should be mindful of the UK and USA elements of the course and seek a more philosophical understanding of concepts such as 'limited government', 'checks and balances', 'separation of powers', 'bicameralism' and judicial review.
- (v) View of the economy: students should be aware of the connection between liberalism's belief in private property and its faith in a market-based capitalist economy. They should also recognise the links between capitalist economics, liberalism's individualistic view of society and liberalism's faith in mankind's inherent rationality. Finally, they should be aware (in broad terms) of the similarities and differences between early liberal economists like Adam Smith and later liberal economists like John Maynard Keynes and Milton Friedman.
- (vi) Internal differences: students must have a strong grasp of the similarities and differences between the two main strands of liberalism: classical liberalism and modern liberalism. With reference to classical liberalism, students should understand the notion of 'negative' liberty and classical liberals' subsequent belief in minimal government and laissez-faire capitalism. Teacher should ensure that students are also aware of the contribution made by two of liberalism's key thinkers – Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill – to the evolution of classical liberalism during the 18th and mid-19th centuries (particular attention should be paid to Mill's thoughts on how liberalism could be reconciled to industrialisation and democracy). With reference to modern liberalism,

students should understand the notion of 'positive' liberty and how it led many liberals to support extensive government intervention and an expansive 'welfare state'. When assessing modern liberalism, it is also important that students appreciate the contributions of the other two key thinkers, John Rawls and Betty Friedan. Finally, students would benefit from a basic knowledge of neo-liberalism and the attempt (made by philosophers like Friedrich von Hayek) to adapt classical liberalism to a modern setting. However, neo-liberalism will require less examination than either classical or modern liberalism.

Socialism

Reflecting the specification, the study of socialism may be divided into six stages:

- (i) **Origins:** students should examine the roots of socialism in the early-mid 19th century, how its original ideas overlapped with liberalism in many respects and how it emerged in order to counter the perceived limitations of liberalism. It will examine the 'preliminary' socialism of 'utopian' progressives like Robert Owen and Charles Fourier and how they sought to make the ideals of the Enlightenment applicable to newly industrialised societies, where wealth and power were increasingly polarised.
- (ii) **View of human nature:** students should understand why socialism takes an optimistic view of human nature and how it does so in a way that distinguished it from liberalism. Consequently, students should develop a keen awareness that, for socialism, humanity is naturally fraternal, co-operative and communal; seeking solidarity rather than competition. However, students should also understand that socialists see human nature as malleable, 'plastic not permanent' and thus susceptible to either regression or improvement, depending on social environment. This connects with the next stage of studying socialism.
- (iii) **View of society:** students should appreciate that, for socialists, the nature of society is fundamental: it shapes human nature. There should be an awareness that socialists, like liberals, believe in the concept of 'natural' society, but differ from liberals in terms of what they believe 'natural' society was like. It is important for students to understand at this point the importance of equality within socialist thinking: for socialists, the natural and normative society is egalitarian – one where there is not just equality of opportunity but also significant equality of outcome (without which equality of opportunity is said to be impossible).
- (iv) **View of the state:** teachers must alert students to the wide variety of states favoured by socialists. It is important, however, for students to grasp one central point: all socialists believe that a certain type of state is necessary so as to distribute wealth and power; thus engineering the sort of society socialists prescribe – one where there is greater fraternity, social justice and equality of outcome (it is worth pointing out to students that this is what distinguished socialists from certain types of 'collectivist anarchist').
- (v) **View of the economy:** it is essential to point out that socialism arose in response to capitalism and the challenge that market economics posed to key socialist values like equality and fraternity. Students should therefore understand that, unlike liberals, many socialists are hostile to economies based on private ownership, while all socialists believe that capitalism has the potential to retard society and human nature. Indeed, students should

- be aware that 'dealing with' capitalism has been one of the most pressing issues for socialists to negotiate.
- (vi) Internal differences: socialism is a highly ambiguous ideology. So, with reference to six of its key thinkers, students need a robust understanding of socialism's various strands and interpretations. Specifically, students need to learn the difference between fundamentalist socialism, with its hostility to capitalism and private property, and revisionist socialism, with its more lenient view of market economics and its subsequent stress upon public spending rather than public ownership. But students will also need to understand socialism's sub-strands – particularly the 'revolutionary' and 'evolutionary' elements of fundamentalist socialism. With this in mind, students will need to evaluate both the various forms of revolutionary socialism, as propagated by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Rosa Luxemburg, as well as the 'gradualist' approach of democratic socialists like Beatrice Webb. Revisionist socialism also has its sub-strands, so students will need to examine both the social democracy associated with Anthony Crosland and the 'third way' ideas of Anthony Giddens.

Conservatism

Reflecting the specification, the study of orthodox (or 'traditional') conservatism may be divided into six stages:

- (i) Origins: students should be aware that conservatism emerged in the late 18th century, as a critical response to many of the values associated with liberalism and the Enlightenment. Students should be especially aware that the 'source' of conservatism is widely thought to be Edmund Burke's historic work, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), which offered a philosophical rebuff to the ideas of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' then associated with the new French regime. Students should be aware that the French revolution was initially considered the apogee of Enlightenment thinking, destined to show that a 'perfect' society, based on 'reason', could indeed be realised.
- (ii) View of human nature: with reference to both Burke and Thomas Hobbes, students should recognise that conservatism's 'sceptical' view of humanity is quite distinct to that of the other core ideologies. Teachers should therefore emphasise that conservatism is a 'philosophy of imperfection': one which highlights human fallibility rather than human potential; one which highlights the gap between aspiration and achievement; and one which cautions against the utopian visions associated with the French Revolution and later radical movements.
- (iii) View of society: at this point, teachers should impress upon students that the conservative society is not one that is resistant to change. Indeed, it is vital for students to realise that conservatism is a form of change, based upon Burke's principle that society must 'change to conserve'. However, mindful that conservatism is a 'philosophy of imperfection' and with reference to both Burke and Michael Oakeshott, it should be understood that conservative reforms are cautious, piecemeal and 'organic', while respecting of the idea that, within society, inequality is both inevitable and desirable. Teachers should explain that, for conservatives, change should be rooted in a pragmatic or 'empirical' assessment of what needs to be done, taking into account the merits of tradition and continuity. There should also be an appreciation that, for conservatives, the best sort of society is one comprising a variety of small communities (what Burke

termed 'little platoons'), bound by a loyalty to 'one nation' and overseen by authority figures with a 'paternalistic' concern for their community's less fortunate members.

- (iv) View of the state: students should understand that a conservative view of the state's purpose is informed by the philosophy of Hobbes. As such, it should be explained that the conservative state prioritises authority, order, security and stability; operating on the principle that, without a strong state, 'society' is impossible. With further reference to Burke, students should also appreciate that the structure of the 'conservative state' traditionally emphasised hierarchy and aristocracy rather than democracy and equality. However, it should also be acknowledged that, for conservatives, the state should evolve 'organically', with its 'ruling class' again exercising 'paternalistic' responsibility towards the governed.
- (v) View of the economy: students will be made aware that conservatives defend private property and are therefore tolerant of capitalism. But there needs to be recognition that, consistent with its sceptical view of human nature, conservatism (unlike liberalism) traditionally takes a less idealistic view of capitalism and is therefore prepared to modify market economies in the interests of continuity and stability. Conservatism's historic support for protectionism and the 'mixed economy' should be examined within this context.
- (vi) Internal differences: it is important for teachers to explain that the 'views' so far outlined represent traditional conservatism and that – since the 1970s – these views have been challenged by another strain of conservatism known as the New Right. With reference to key thinkers Ayn Rand and Robert Nozick, students should appreciate that the New Right contains both conservative and liberal elements and consequently takes a rather different view of human nature, society, the state and the economy. The best students, however, will understand that the New Right's conservative and liberal elements are complementary rather than contradictory and that the New Right has important continuities with traditional conservatism.

Other ideologies

As required by the specification, teachers should choose one of the following 'other' ideologies. It is advised that, whichever 'other' ideology is chosen, teachers follow the same sequence used for the core ideologies, again incorporating the relevant key thinkers. As a result, one of the following five routes may be followed.

- (i) Anarchism:
 - Origins; view of human nature; view of society; view of the state; view of the economy; internal differences.
 - Key thinkers: Max Stirner; Mikhail Bakunin, Emma Goldman; Peter Kropotkin, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.
- (ii) Ecologism:
 - Origins; view of human nature; view of society; view of the state; view of the economy; internal differences.
 - Key thinkers: Aldo Leopold; Rachel Carson, Fritz Schumacher; Carolyn Merchant; Murray Bookchin.
- (iii) Feminism:
 - Origins; view of human nature; view of society; view of the state; view of the economy; internal differences.

- Key thinkers: Charlotte Perkins Gilman; Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Sheila Rowbotham, Bell Hooks.
- (iv) Multiculturalism:
- Origins; view of human nature; view of society; view of the state; view of the economy; internal differences.
 - Isaiah Berlin; Will Kymlicka; Charles Taylor; Tariq Modood; Bikhu Parekh.
- (v) Nationalism:
- Origins; view of human nature; view of society; view of the state; view of the economy; internal differences.
 - Key thinkers: Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Johann Gottfried Herder; Giuseppe Mazzini; Marcus Garvey; Charles Maurras.