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School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science

May/June 2018

PHIL232101

Political Philosophy

Time allowed: TWO hours

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Answer TWO questions
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1. ‘Contract theory, as an account of the just state, depends either a) on people’s actual consent which has not been given or b) people’s hypothetical consent which is not genuine consent. Given this, contract theory cannot hope to give an adequate account of the nature of the just state.’ Discuss.

2. What is Rawls’ Difference Principle, how would the principle apply to society and must a state apply this principle in order to be just?

3. Hobbes holds that in the state of nature individuals act in their individual self-interest but fail to act in ways that are collectively rational. Hence rationality dictates that we should contract into a state where the sovereign has absolute power. What, if anything, is compelling about Hobbes’ argument and why?

4. “The state of nature is governed by a law that creates obligations for everyone. And reason, which is that law, teaches anyone who takes the trouble to consult it, that because we are all equal and independent, no-one ought to harm anyone else in his life, health, liberty or possessions” (Locke, Second Treatise, 2.6). Should we agree that this is true of the state of nature and, why, if at all, should people in the state of nature contract into the political state?

5. ‘There is no reason to believe that a state ever came into being or is freely consented to as Locke requires for a state to be just. Given this is so, Locke’s account of what it is for governments to have legitimate political authority is fatally flawed.’ Discuss.

6. What, if anything, does Rousseau’s conjectural human history tell us about human nature and why we need a social contract?

7. Rousseau holds that for there to be a truly free and just society in the social contract “each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the direction of the general will” (SC I.6, p. 7). What does this mean, why does he think this is so and should we agree with him?

8. Critically assess Godwin’s critique of social contract theory, and, in light of your critical assessment, draw out some key implications for a just society