



The Political Philosophiser

A compendium of political philosophy questions to
get your learners thinking about thinking.



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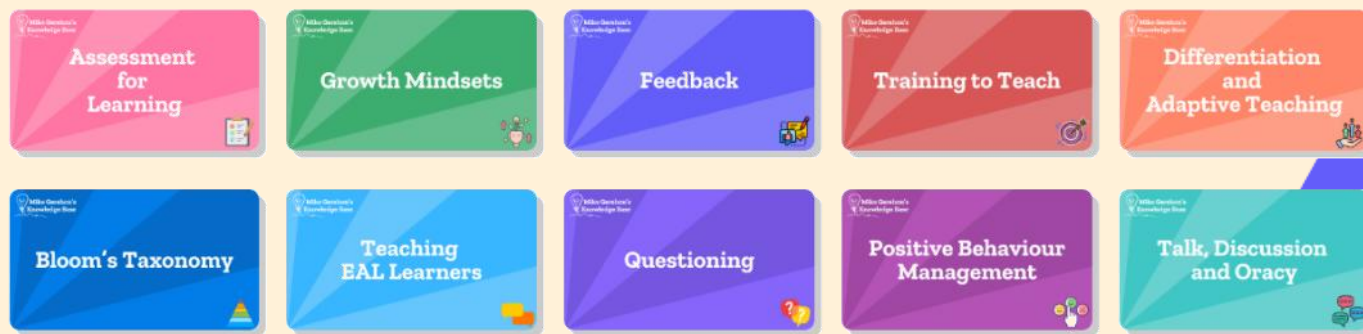


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How ought political institutions to be arranged?



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Is there an optimum arrangement of political institutions (and if so, what is it)?



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What form ought the state to take?



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How should power be distributed in a state?



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Do political institutions require legitimacy (and if so, what sort of legitimacy)?



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By what should a state's dealings with other states be guided?



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On what grounds can a ruler, or a state, claim authority over others?



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What purpose(s) ought the state to have?



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To what does 'the rule of law' refer?



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Do individuals have a moral obligation to obey the laws of their state?





What form of government is best?



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How can the authority of government be justified?



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**In a liberal democracy, how ought
government to respond to the
preferences of voters?**



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Should the power of government be constrained (and if so, how)?



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Is a constitution a necessary condition of governmental legitimacy?



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Which form of voting system is most just? (AV; FPTP; PR; CV)



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How ought the business of government to be conducted?



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To what extent should governmental decision-making be transparent?



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Is there a single system of government that is 'right'?



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What are the limits of government?



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To what do we refer when we say 'the state'?



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How much power should the state have?



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What is the optimum relationship between the state and individuals?



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Is there a type of state that we should prefer?



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Where are the boundaries of the state?



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Would it be possible to live without a state?



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Ought a state to be moulded along ideological grounds?



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How does the state interact with different aspects of society (for example civil society, the economy or interest groups)?





What is 'the nation state'?



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How do theoretical models of the state relate to empirical reality?



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How might social practices influence political behaviour?



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What effect might social practices have on individual perceptions of political legitimacy?



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To what extent ought politics to reflect prevailing social practices?



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To what extent do social practices influence politics?



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How might social practices reinforce, influence or undermine political institutions?



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Is there an ultimate 'human nature' which, if revealed, can lead to ultimate answers in political philosophy?





How ought we to arrange our social and family lives?



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Are human beings 'social animals?'



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What is the relationship between politics and society?



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Should politics take account of social practices?



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What are 'rights?'



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How is it that an individual can be said to be in possession of rights?



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Does the holding of rights confer certain duties?



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On what grounds is a government obligated to uphold rights (or to accept them as legitimate)?





To whom do rights belong and on what grounds?



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Does the concept of rights give rise to a dominant individualism?



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How can the conflict of competing rights be reconciled?



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Do rights diminish the legitimacy of the state (for example, is the Human Rights Act a point of authority to which the state must subordinate itself?)





**Are there any cases where
an individual's loss of
rights is justifiable?**





Can the concept of rights be reconciled with the notion of community?



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How ought the state to allocate resources?



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What should be the distribution of the public and private sectors of the economy?



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Are there certain principles or values the government should use to direct its spending?





Is taxation just?



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**'Taxes are what we pay for civilized society' (Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.) –
To what extent do you agree with this statement?**





**'The legitimacy of taxation rests
upon the state's monopoly of force'
– Do you agree?**





**How important a value is efficiency to
the government's management
of the economy?**



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Can any government 'manage' an economy?



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What is the point of growth?



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Ought a government to
pursue growth above and
beyond any other aim?





How ought society to be structured?



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Are utopias a useful tool or a dangerous idea?



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Should all political philosophy be conducted on strictly empirical grounds?



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How does one gain knowledge in political philosophy?



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In what manner ought political change to take place?



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What dangers might lie behind the use of utopian thinking?



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Is a pragmatic approach to politics desirable?



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Should political philosophy be simply a descriptive endeavour concerned with what was and what is?





Can any knowledge be arrived at *a priori*?

What are the implications of this for
political philosophy?



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How do ideals and reality interact?



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Does society exist?



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Can the pursuit of self-interest lead to the general good?



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Do individuals behave in a rational manner?



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What is the purpose of collective institutions?



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**Is one able to ascertain the behaviour
of a whole by aggregating the
behaviour of its parts?**



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To what extent should the community involve itself with the private actions of individuals?



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What duties towards the community does the individual have?



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**Ought an individual to cede
their moral positions to those
of the community?**



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**In what circumstances is it right that
an individual ignores the moral
imperatives of their community?**





Is individualism an accurate explanation of human behaviour?



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What methods should the political philosopher use?



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Can the ultimate validity of judgements made in political philosophy be known?



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What can be known in political philosophy?



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How might one test a hypothesis in political philosophy?



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What is the relationship between the thought of political philosophers and the reality of the political world?





Should political philosophers seek to account for their own bias?



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Is there a preferred means of approach in political philosophy?



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Does politics work?



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How might political philosophy be influenced by contemporary events, trends, ideas or myths?





Who (or what) is political philosophy for?



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How far should the state be allowed to intrude into people's private lives?



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Should Britain have a written constitution?



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What is the fairest system of voting?



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How and to whom should elected members be accountable?



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Is it right to restrict civil liberties to counter terrorism?



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Are liberal democracies the best form of government?



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How important is 'the rule of law'?



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Should the power of the state be subordinated to that of human rights?



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To what extent ought a government to cede its powers if part of a federation?



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Is local government a necessary condition of a democracy?



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What should be the relationship between individuals and society?



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What are the limits of freedom?



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Is freedom of speech a good idea?



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When may government act against the will of a citizen?



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When should a citizen act against their government?



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What is the purpose of government?



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What characterises a good government?



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Is society more important than the individuals who make it up?



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What responsibilities do citizens have (to themselves; others; the polity)?



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What ought to be the goals of society?



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Is there an ultimate good?



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Do values conflict?



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**Can all values be reconciled in
some ultimate, revealed good?**



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How ought values to be prioritised?



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What values ought a polity to be governed by?



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How important are the values of elected members?



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To what extent do political parties reflect the values of individuals and society?



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Can a society be accurately described as having values?



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To what do values refer?



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Do values matter?



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What is ideology?



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Are humans free and equal by nature?



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Should property rights be forcibly protected?



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Is a nation a distinctive cultural and linguistic entity?



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Are humans rational and self-interested?



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Should politics be viewed through abstract principles?



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How important is tradition?



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Is society naturally hierarchical?



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Do economic factors order social relations?



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Is authority implicitly oppressive?



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What is justice?



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Is there such a thing as 'natural justice'?



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Ought a government to pursue policies that give rise to social and economic justice?



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**Does justice mean the same thing when
prefixed by different concepts (for example,
social justice and economic justice)?**





How is justice best served in a society?



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What ought to be the relationship between government and the judiciary?



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Is there a necessary connection between law and morality?



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Does the law reflect the goals of certain dominant groups in society?



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Should anyone be above the law?



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"What experience and history teaches us is that people and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it." Hegel

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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From what authority do laws derive?



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"The end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom. For in all states of created beings capable of law, where there is no law, there is no freedom." Locke.

To what extent do you agree?

What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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"All mankind ... being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions." Locke.

To what extent do you agree?

What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?





**"It is not wisdom but Authority that makes a law."
Hobbes.**

**To what extent do you agree? What are the implications
of your answer for political philosophy?**





"... this is the first precept of the law, that good is to be done and promoted, and evil is to be avoided. All other precepts of the natural law are based on this ..." Aquinas.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?





"[Evil is] nothing but the corruption of natural measure, form or order. What is called an evil nature is a corrupt nature ... It is bad only so far as it has been corrupted." Augustine.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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"Man is free. Man is Freedom." Sartre.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." Marx.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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“'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.” Hume.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?





"The moral worth of an action does not depend upon the results expected from it." Kant.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?





"... the pursuit of self-interest places human beings in a condition of universal war." Hobbes.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?





"It is evident that the statesman ought to have some acquaintance with psychology, just as a doctor who intends to treat an eye must have knowledge of the body as a whole." Aristotle.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?





"What is the highest of all goods? Well as far as the name goes there is pretty general agreement. 'It is happiness' say both ordinary and cultured people." Aristotle.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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[Socrates] "We must proceed to the further question ... whether the just live better and happier lives than the unjust ... We must look at the question more closely. For it is not a trivial one; it is our whole way of life that is at issue." Plato.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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"Don't all men desire happiness? And yet perhaps this is one of those ridiculous questions which I'm afraid to ask, and which ought not to be asked by a sensible man: for what human is there who does not desire happiness?" Plato.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?





"A person may cause evil to others not only by his actions but by his inaction, and in either case he is justly accountable to them for the injury." Mill.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?





"A party of order or stability, and a party of progress or reform, are both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life." Mill.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?





"Men decide far more problems by hate, love, lust, rage, sorrow, joy, hope, fear, illusion, or some other inward emotion, than by reality, authority, any legal standard, judicial precedent, or statute." Cicero.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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"Liberty is rendered even more precious by the recollection of servitude." Cicero.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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"Now, in a well-ordered republic, it should never be necessary to resort to extra-constitutional measures ..."
Machiavelli.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?





"For government consists mainly in so keeping your subjects that they shall be neither able, nor disposed to injure you ... " Machiavelli.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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"The passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces a very remarkable change in man, by substituting justice for instinct in his conduct, and giving his actions the morality they had formerly lacked. Then only, when the voice of duty takes the place of physical impulses and right of appetite, does man, who so far had considered only himself, find that he is forced to act on different principles, and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations." Rousseau.

To what extent do you agree?
What are the implications of your
answer for political philosophy?



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"It is the greatest good to the greatest number of people which is the measure of right and wrong." Bentham.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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"As to the evil which results from a censorship, it is impossible to measure it, for it is impossible to tell where it ends." Bentham.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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"The power of the lawyer is in the uncertainty of the law." Bentham.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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"In constant pursuit of money to finance campaigns, the political system is simply unable to function. Its deliberative powers are paralyzed." John Rawls.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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"Freedom granted only when it is known beforehand that its effects will be beneficial is not freedom." Hayek.

To what extent do you agree? What are the implications of your answer for political philosophy?



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