

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2012

Government and Politics 6GP04 4B
Ideological Traditions

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General Comments:

In view of the small entry for this unit in January, it would be misleading to develop general judgements on the basis of the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate responses in this series, as these trends may apply only to a small number of centres. The report is therefore short and does not contain exemplar material. The most common weakness in performance in response to short questions (questions 1/5, marked out of 15) was limited conceptual knowledge. Candidates in too many cases failed to define terms clearly and robustly, and it was rare for them to demonstrate developed conceptual awareness. In relation to the essay questions (questions 6-8, marked out of 45), two key weaknesses were in evidence. First, synopticity was often poorly addressed. Very few responses, for instance, began with a strong first paragraph outlining the nature of the debate that was at the heart of the question. Second, the material presented was often descriptive rather than analytical.

Comments on individual questions:

Question 1

Strong responses to this question tended to focus squarely on the issue of how and why radical feminists emphasise the politics is located primarily in the private sphere, also pointing out that to do so they have effectively equated politics with power-structured relations. Weaker responses used the question as an opportunity to write generally about radical feminism.

Question 2

Some responses to this question struggled to explain the key distinction between culturally-defined nations and biologically-defined states, with race sometimes being seen as one of the features of nationhood. The strongest responses noted that the confusion between the two terms tends to stem from the tendency within right-wing forms of nationalism to advance an exclusive model of nationhood, with some candidates also, helpfully, highlighting the difference between civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism.

Question 3

A proportion of candidates constructed strong responses that emphasised green credentials of capitalism, usually based on the consumer responsiveness of the market mechanism. In too many cases, however, candidates wrote more about the anti-ecological tendencies of capitalism rather than its pro-ecological tendencies, with eco-socialism, unhelpfully, featuring strongly.

Question 4

Performance on this question was based very clearly on the degree to which candidates understood the term communitarianism. When they fully understood the term, insightful points were often made about issues such as cultural embeddedness and its implications, when they had only a limited grasp of the term, or ignored it altogether, they struggled to make relevant points.

Question 5

Very few responses were unable to highlight at least some links between feminism and liberalism. Only in the strongest responses, however, was the importance of liberal individualism stress and its implications discussed, notably the quest for formal equality and genderless 'personhood'.

Question 6

Many candidates approached this question by providing an account of the various traditions within nationalism, relying more on description rather than analysis. Only in the strongest responses was there a clear and consistent focus on the issues of expansion and aggression, usually based on the contrasting ideas of liberal nationalism and chauvinist nationalism.

Question 7

Most candidates, appropriately, approached this question by considering the debate between multiculturalists, who believe that cultural diversity serves to strengthen the civic unity of the nation, and anti-multiculturalists, usually influenced by conservative nationalist thinking, who argue national cohesion must be based on a common culture and shared values. Good responses also sometimes noted different approaches to the issue of national unity within multiculturalism itself.

Question 8

In response to this question, a large proportion of candidates constructed answers that focused on the key differences between deep ecology and so-called shallow ecology, and in some cases this was done skilfully and on the basis of extensive knowledge and understanding. Some candidates, however, had only the most superficial grasp of deep ecology, in which case their answers tended to degenerate into an unfocused account of ecologism generally.

Paper Summary:

Examination performance could be improved by:

- Ensuring that candidates are able to provide clear and robust definitions of key terms in the specification, which can then be developed as appropriate.

- Strengthening candidates' awareness of the requirements associated with AO2, including synopticity, and particularly of the need to analyse and evaluate contending arguments rather than just describe them.

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