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Political ideas

Essay on nationalism and human nature

This guidance for writing a 24-mark essay answer on this subject should be read alongside 'Nationalism: Positive or pessimistic about human nature?' (pp. 10–11)

Question: To what extent do nationalists disagree on human nature?

The 24-mark essay question on Paper 2 is no different to the 24-mark essay questions you will be familiar with on Paper 1 (UK politics and Core political ideas). You should spend approximately 30 minutes on it, and it should be done last. Unlike Paper 1, where you could be examined on any one of conservatism, liberalism or socialism, you will get a choice of two questions on nationalism (or one of the other options).

Planning

What is your line of argument?

Either: Liberal nationalists believe that humans possess a shared collective identity and consciousness based on an inclusive 'national spirit' (Mazzini). Expansionist nationalists stand in stark contrast, disagreeing fundamentally that nationhood is determined by a shared sense of ethnicity. There are irreconcilable differences between expansionist nationalists, such as Maurras, who seek to conquer 'inferior' races, and liberal and postcolonial nationalists, such as Rousseau, who favour inclusiveness and peaceful coexistence. While both liberal and expansionist nationalists may appear to share a romanticised view of human nature, liberal nationalists like Rousseau believed in the innate goodness of the 'natural man', whereas expansionists like Maurras romanticised the superiority of the French people.

Or: All nationalists place importance on humans possessing a shared collective identity and consciousness. Even liberal and expansionist nationalists would agree on this. It is merely a minority view held by expansionist nationalists, such as Maurras, that nationhood is determined by biological factors. There is much greater agreement that nationalism is inclusive, not exclusive. This is best demonstrated by liberal nationalists such as Mazzini, whose positive view of human nature makes them believe that nations can cooperate. Similarly, postcolonial nationalists, such as Garvey, favour peaceful coexistence – he hoped that Africans could put aside ethnic differences and form a united Africa (Pan-Africanism). While there may appear to be disagreement between expansionist and liberal nationalists, both Maurras and Mazzini had a romanticised view of human nature, so there are significant areas of agreement.

Supporting arguments and evidence that you could use from the article:

Evidence that suggests that nationalists disagree on human nature:

- positive
- exclusive
- superiority

Evidence that suggests that nationalists agree on human nature:

- pessimistic
- inclusive
- cooperation

Writing the essay

It is essential to have a clear line of argument (AO3) running through your essay, which should be evident in every paragraph. There also needs to be a debate (point/counterpoint) within each paragraph. Aim for three paragraphs plus the introduction and conclusion. As this question on Section B is worth 24 marks, rather than the 30 marks for the UK government questions on Section A, two paragraphs will suffice. It is not necessary to provide contemporary examples. Instead, your thinkers and what they advocated for will act as your supporting evidence. You must lead your arguments with the strands, rather than thinkers, and you must refer to at least two of the specified five thinkers in your essay.

Sample introduction

Nationalists view individuals as sharing a collective human identity. Arguably, this demonstrates that there is agreement among nationalists who broadly share a romanticised view of human nature. This agreement, however, is superficial. The view of human nature could not be more different between expansionist nationalists like Maurras, who believe in racial superiority, and liberal nationalists like Rousseau, who believe national sentiment is built on fellowship. While it is true that liberal and postcolonial nationalists share a more inclusive view of the nation, the extent to which expansionist nationalists have an exclusive view means that nationalists are in irreconcilable disagreement over human nature.

Plan for paragraph 1

Argument: All nationalists place importance on humans possessing a shared collective identity and consciousness.

Supporting evidence: Even liberal nationalists and expansionist nationalists would agree on this. Liberal nationalists like Mazzini argued that a 'national spirit' and a sense of fellowship could bind a country together. Similarly, Maurras believed in a shared collective identity even if that was rooted in race.

Counter-argument: The stronger argument is that liberal nationalists believe that humans possess a shared collective identity and consciousness, whereas expansionist nationalists stand in stark contrast, disagreeing fundamentally that nationhood is determined by a shared sense of ethnicity.

Supporting evidence: Liberal nationalists' shared collective identity and consciousness is based on an inclusive 'national spirit' (Mazzini) and sense of fellowship. It is these shared liberal democratic

values that create a national identity. Contrastingly, expansionists' collective identity is based on racial superiority (Maurras) and is therefore exclusive, demonstrating a fundamental disagreement within nationalism.

AO3 judgement: Any agreement on a shared collective human identity is at best superficial. Liberal nationalists' inclusive view of shared human identity is irreconcilable with expansionists' exclusive view.

Plan for paragraph 2

Argument: Liberal and postcolonial nationalists share a positive view of human nature, which means they favour peaceful coexistence with others, resulting in a belief that nations can cooperate.

Counter-argument: There are irreconcilable differences between expansionist nationalists who seek to conquer inferior races, and liberal and postcolonial nationalists who favour inclusiveness and peaceful coexistence.

Plan for paragraph 3

Argument: While there may appear to be significant disagreement between expansionist and liberal nationalists, both share a romanticised view of human nature.

Counter-argument: The substance of this romanticised view of human nature is very different. Liberal nationalists believe in the innate goodness of the 'natural man', whereas expansionists romanticise the superiority of one nation over another.

Student task

Complete this essay.

- 1 Add supporting evidence to paragraphs 2 and 3.
- 2 Add an AO3 judgement to paragraphs 2 and 3.
- 3 Write a conclusion, bringing the three judgements together.

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