Study Guide #4 – Justice & Politics

1. Explain the difference between issues of distributive justice and issues of retributive justice.
2. Explain the 5 theories of legitimacy for a government covered in our text and include a discussion of some philosophic problems with each.
3. Explain Rawls’s “original position,” behind the “veil of ignorance.” Why is it important to not know who you are when constructing a theory of economic justice?
4. Explain Rawls’s two principles of economic justice. Does this mean that everyone will have exactly the same amount?
5. Explain the difference between historical and end-state principles of distribution. Which one does Nozick favor and why?
6. Why does Nozick argue that Rawls’s theory is inherently unjust?
7. Explain justice as utility as supported by J.S. Mill. Give some examples of an application of utilitarianism in our system of government today. Is there a problem with this theory? Explain.
8. What is the problem of the “tyranny of the majority?” Why did Mill argue that the institution of rights would correct this problem? Is the institution of rights ultimately consistent with the utilitarianism?
9. Thomas Hobbes and Jean Jacques Rousseau both agree that the Social Contract is the preferred form of a legitimate government yet their reasons are radically different for supporting it. Explain the difference between the two. Be sure to include the difference in their initial assumptions about humanity and the difference in the kind of government we need within the contract. Would Hobbes or Rousseau prefer a government that minimally interferes with its citizens’ lives, a government that focuses principally on maintaining law and order, or a government that works on issues of health, education and public welfare?
10. Assuming a government based on the social contract, if we don’t vote or protest against an unjust action what implications do our non-actions have on our responsibility for our government? In other words are we still to blame even if we didn’t vote for them?
11. Explain Locke’s argument for the government’s obligation to protect our rights. Why must these rights be inalienable?
12. Explain why Frederick Douglass thought it was appropriate for his friends to buy his freedom despite the fact that he was a strong advocate for abolishing slavery. Do you agree with him?
13. Thoreau argued that it is not only our right to protest but in fact our obligation to do so when faced with the idea that our government may not be doing what we believe was right. Why?
14. Martin Luther King argued that if our motives are not pure then the protest would fail. Why? Explain why he supported non-violent resistance. Did he think that this was the same as passivity?

15. Malcolm X argued that justice needed to be secured, “by any means necessary.” Why did he believe that violent resistance was justifiable and even necessary?

16. Can one be made by law a criminal because of their conscience? Do you believe we have an absolute duty as a citizen to protest an unjust law? Can you think of any laws that are unjust that you ought to be protesting?

17. How do Marx and Engels define freedom? What constitutes a person’s worth? Why must the proletariat revolt?

18. Explain communism as a governmental system. Explain the principle of economic justice that underwrites communism.

19. What is a “wage slave?” Why does Marx argue that after the revolt of the proletariat, politics will no longer be an issue?

20. Explain Fascism as a governmental system. What is the principle goal of a fascist government? Why does Mussolini argue that it is something that can be achieved, unlike a government based on individualism?

21. Why would Fascism be more efficient than a democracy?

22. Why did Mussolini claim that the fascist government was “a religious conception?”

23. According to Machiavelli, is it better for a Prince to be loved or feared? What obligations does the government have towards its citizens?

24. What is anarchy? Why does Tucker argue for anarchy?

25. According to Tucker, what would prevent anarchy from becoming chaos?