

LIBERAL ARTS SEMINAR COURSE – EXAMPLE QUESTIONS AND TEXTS

(1) Do statesmen have a duty to make citizens good?

“From whom, we may ask, comes our sense of moral obligation and our reverence toward the gods? From whom do we derive that law which is common to all peoples, or that to which we apply the term ‘civil’? From whom comes our feeling for justice, for honour, for fair dealing? Assuredly, from those statesmen who have developed these qualities by education and have embedded some of them in custom and have enforced others by the provisions of their laws”. (Cicero).

(2) Is there any way of securing moral agreement in our culture?

“Justice demands that every citizen should enjoy, so far as is possible, an equal opportunity to develop his or her talents and his or her other potentialities. But prerequisites for the provision of such equal opportunity include the provision of equal access to health care and education. Therefore justice requires the governmental provision of health and educational services, financed out of taxation”.

“Everybody has a right to incur such and only such obligations as he or she wishes, to be free to make such and only such contracts as he or she desires and to determine his or her own free choices. Freedom thus requires the abolition of those restraints on private practice such are imposed by licensing and regulation by bodies such as universities, medical schools, the BMA and the State”. (MacIntyre)

(3) How jealously should we love our *patrie*?

“It does pain me much that my fatherland must remain the prey of a few and be subjected to their pride and avarice.” (Machiavelli).

(4) How can governments be made to serve the common good?

“That every county may have liberty to chose some certain number [of county commissioners] amongst themselves [who shall be] be bound to receive all impeachments, by any person of the respective counties, against any of their own respective knights or burgesses in Parliament, for falsifying and betraying their country’s trust, or anywise endeavouring the introduction of an arbitrary power in this land”. (Leveller petition).

“Most [of the Maltese police] had lost the will to stand their ground in their duties. One group of officers could hardly be called heroes [...] and indeed a number of them had given in to the bad influence of their superiors. There were others who were simply criminals in uniform.” (Guido de Marco, former President of Malta).

(5) *"How shall we live now, now that God is gone?"* (The Gourds, Alternative Country Band). Does Philippians 4:8 provide a sound basis for secular morality?

(6) What are the ethical implications of treating economics as a value-neutral science?

"Either democracy must tame capitalism or capitalism will tame democracy" (Laski).

"If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him, do not take advantage of each other." (Lev. 25:14).

(7) What, if any, is the legitimate role of aristocracy in a well-ordered republic?

"The wisdom of the few may be the light of mankind; but the interest of the few is not the profit of mankind nor of a commonwealth." (Harrington)

"An egalitarian democracy actually requires a hierarchy both of values and of persons of excellence. Otherwise, money and sophistry co-conspire to destroy it. Democracy can only be sustained when there is a parallel, non-democratic concern with paideia—the formation of good character—which links talent to virtue and both to positions of appropriate social influence." (John Milbank)

(8) What is a wise approach to death?

"I want death to find me planting my cabbages, neither worrying about it nor the unfinished gardening". (Montaigne, *Essays* I.20)

"I can scarcely tell my cabbages from my lettuces". (Montaigne, *Essays* I.17)

(9) Under what circumstances should one laugh?

"Humour is the affectionate communication of insight. Satire is focused bitterness, and burlesque the skewing of proportions". (Leo Rostein).

(10) Does Erasmus' 'Education of a Christian Prince' or Machiavelli's 'The Prince' provide better guidance for democratic statesmen in the contemporary world? Why?