

# AHS Humanities 12

## Constitutional Values Writing Packet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Constitutional Values

## Equity

Equity is about distributing costs and benefits **fairly**. Equality is sameness; equity is fairness. In politics, people argue over what's fair, a lot.

There are three ways to argue about equity:

1. Recipients - who should get something (e.g. citizenship)
2. Item - what is being distributed (e.g. money, food, penalties, chocolate cake, etc.)
3. Process - how do you decide and how do you implement distribution (e.g. competition, lottery, elections)

## Efficiency

Efficiency is about getting the most out of a given input or achieving an objective for the lowest cost. Efficiency is about comparing different ways to accomplish something. The underlying goal is the greatest good for the greatest number.

There are three ways to argue about efficiency:

1. Who - Who gets the benefits and bears the burden of a policy?
2. What - What do we define as values and costs of a policy?
3. How - How do we organize human activity to yield an efficient result?

People with a technical bent (engineers and economists) often jump over these questions and create an equation to solve that will yield the most "efficient" and "best" outcome.

One answer is that since what people consider valuable differs the best way to achieve efficiency is through a market based on voluntary exchange. This will generate the greatest happiness and social welfare, for the least cost.

People who believe in the polis see several problems with this formula. People might not have the information they need to make a good exchange. One person's exchange can have an impact on other people. Some things belong to everyone and can't be exchanged. If someone has dire needs, are their exchanges "voluntary."

## Security

Security is about providing for needs.

There are three questions to argue about security:

1. What constitute a need?
2. What kinds of needs should government attempt to provide people?
3. How should government distribute the burden of meeting these needs?

The simplest definition of a "need" has to do with biological survival. But is this truly all people "need" or are their broader needs that a good society should provide? Marxists would say that capitalism keeps workers so focused on "short-term" survival needs that they remain blind to their "true" needs. Here are some complicating questions to consider:

- Should we measure need against a fixed standard or relative to other people in a community?
- Should society only provide current needs or think about the needs of future generations?
- Should we focus on needs of individuals or the needs stemming from relationships (e.g. dignity, trust, and a sense of community)?

How we define needs within a society and which are worthy of government attention reflects what we consider to be the fundamental nature of humanity.

## Liberty

Freedom seems fundamental to the American system of government. "Give me liberty or give me death!" shouted Patrick Henry, one of our Founding Fathers. The question is politics is when should a government limit individual freedom to benefit the community as a whole.

John Stuart Mill in his classic essay *On Liberty* said only to "prevent harm to others." But what constitutes harm? Is it just physical? What about economic harm? Psychological, spiritual, or moral harms? Arguments about liberty very quickly become debates about "harms to others." What about harms to future generations?

There are two different ways to look at liberty. One view says liberty is about the lack on interference in individual actions. In this view, maximum liberty comes when government does nothing or does as little as possible.

The other view says that maximum liberty and free choice can only occur when people have their basic needs met. This means freedom requires the government to do more, not less.

## Community

The value of community is inherent in the definition of the polis. The question here is what duties or responsibilities does an individual have to people beyond one's immediate family. Should there be a requirement to serve in the armed forces to defend the community? Should everyone have to pay taxes to pay for roads, schools, and other cooperative ventures necessary to maintain social order.

Underneath a concern about "community" are two related and sometimes contrasting emotions: compassion for others and fear of instability. One thing to argue over with this value is who belongs in the community. This is a decision about who is worthy of concern and who is expected to contribute. What about prisoners? What about corporations? Does the government account for past injustices through affirmative action? Does the "community" reach back in time or reach forward?

# 1. Developing an Argument - Five Elements of Equity (5 points)

For each pair of choices, check the statement you agree with more:

To decide if distribution is fair

- You look at the history of how individuals acquired what they own OR
- You set up fair rules for distribution and apply them without regard to identity or history

It is okay to re-distribute money across society through taxes and government programs

- As long it doesn't limit people's freedom, defined as the freedom to do what one wants OR
- As long as it promotes freedom of choice by providing basic necessities to people

Property and wealth is primarily

- the result of individual effort and redistribution of property and wealth is inherently unfair OR
- the result of cooperative effort and so everyone is entitled to a fair share

People are motivated to work, produce, and create primarily

- by material needs and the will to survive; satisfying these needs reduces productivity
- to give their lives meaning; satisfying material needs enhances productivity

To justify

- re-distribution you have to show someone doesn't deserve what they have
- inequality you have to show it is to everyone's advantage

If you checked more of the first statements you are on the socially conservative side of the equity debate. If you chose the second statement more often you are more of a social liberal.

Which of the ten statements above do you agree with the most?

Statement: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Now give two reasons that you agree with this statement. If you want, there is space on the back for freewriting in order to work out your ideas:

Reason 1: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Reason 2: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Give one piece of support for each reason. Support can include: examples, stats, quote from an expert or authority, powerful anecdotes, or textual evidence. In this case, your support is likely an example or anecdote

Support for Reason 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Support for Reason 2: \_\_\_\_\_

If you need to freewrite to get your thoughts down on paper, use the space below:

## 2. Counterargument - Equality vs. Efficiency (5 points)

Which one of these statements do you agree with most?

Maintaining equity requires government interference with individual choice and free choice is necessary for exchanges to produce efficiency and innovation

Maintaining equity by providing for people's basic needs makes them more efficient and encourages risk taking and innovation

Write a statement below that **acknowledges** the argument you didn't pick and then gives the reason for picking the opposing argument

Write a statement that **concedes** part of the argument you didn't pick is true and then gives the reason that the truth of the statement you did pick is more important.

Write a statement that **refutes** the argument you didn't pick

### 3. Classification & Forecasting - Defining Needs (5 points)

Freewrite about all the different kinds of needs within a society and which you think the government should assist with from the general treasury. Alternatively, you can brainstorm a list of different kinds of needs below. You can refer to the definition of security at the start of the packet to give you some ideas.

Re-read your freewrite or your list. Take all the different needs you thought of and cluster them into groups. Give those groups names. On the next page, write a **forecasting statement** that you might discuss in an essay about the different kinds of needs politicians should pay attention to.

Example of a forecasting statement using ice cream flavors instead of needs is at the top of the next page.

Example of a forecasting statement:

There are three types of frozen deserts that one might classify as "ice cream." The first is sherbet, the second is traditional ice cream, and the third is frozen yogurt. Gelato is a special case, which was, of course, invented by the Italians because they had to be different.

Write your forecasting statement about needs below:



#### 4. Practicing Description - Freedom (5 points)

Describe freedom. Freewrite a description about what freedom means to you. Use descriptive writing strategies: listing of qualities, using specific examples, comparing to concepts to what freedom is not, incorporating the sights, sounds, smells, tastes of freedom. Get creative. Don't limit yourself. Once you're done answer the question on the back of the page.

Re-read your freewrite. Is there one sentence or phrase that encapsulates the main point? Circle or underline it? Read the statements below and check which most agrees with the view of freedom expressed in your free write:

Liberty is decreased whenever some people are coerced by public policies aimed at creating more equality for others

Society can expand human freedom by solving problems that affect large numbers of people, even if that means compelling cooperation to achieve a solution.

## 5. A More Perfect Union (5 points)

Re-read your answers to the questions above. Which of the five values (equity, efficiency, security, liberty, or community) do you feel is most important? Why do you feel this value is so important? How do you think this will influence your contribution to making America a more perfect union? (Note: if you want to write about a value not listed above, go for it!)