

Specimen of Written Test at Interview

Issued May 2000

THE COLLEGES OF OXFORD UNIVERSITY

PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

Time allowed: Fifteen minutes preliminary reading time and one hour writing

For candidates applying to the joint school of Philosophy, Politics and Economics

There are three questions in this paper. Answer ALL questions. You should spend about the same time on each question.

1. Read the following two passages carefully and then answer the questions that follow.

Passage I: The real antithesis of science seems to be not theology but politics. Whereas science is a sphere of knowledge, politics is a sphere of opinion. Politics is constructed out of preferences, which it strives to elevate, by the mere multiplication of words, to the status of truths. Politics depends on personalities and rhetoric; social class, race and nationality are elemental to it. Further, politics relies, for its very existence, upon conflict. It presupposes an enemy. It is essentially oppositional, built on warring prejudices. If this oppositional structure were to collapse, politics could not survive. There could be no politics in a world of total consensus. Science, by contrast, is a co-operative not an oppositional venture. Of course, the history of science resounds with ferocious argument and the elaboration and destruction of rival theories. But when consensus is reached science does not collapse, it advances. Another crucial difference is that politics aims to coerce people. It is concerned with the exercise of power. Science has no such designs. It seeks knowledge. The consequence of this difference is that politics can and frequently does use violence (war, genocide, terrorism) to secure its ends. Science cannot. It would be ludicrous to go to war to decide upon the truth or otherwise of the second law of thermodynamics.

Needless to say, the ideal state I have described, in which science is free from and antithetical to politics, is not one that survives in the real world, where politics invades and contaminates science as it does everything else. But the warlike and destructive uses to which science has been put have nothing essentially to do with science: they are the responsibility of politics. Science's apolitical nature is worth stressing, because it helps us to defuse the charge that it is amoral. It allows us to see science's amorality not as a defect but as a condition of its strength and purity. Politics of course, is inseparable from

morality. It battens on morality, or on moralizing, like a tapeworm on the gut. Consequently science could not free itself from politics except by being amoral.

From John Carey, introduction to *The Faber Book of Science* (1995)

Passage II: Science is one of man's weapons in his fight for freedom. For the purpose of attaining freedom in society, man must use social science to understand and change society and carry out social revolution. For the purpose of attaining freedom in the world of nature, man must use natural science to understand, conquer and change nature and thus attain freedom from nature.

From Mao Tse-Tung, *Little Red Book*

- a. Describe, in your own words, John Carey's view of politics.
 - b. Do you think that the views of Carey and Mao could be reconciled?
2. For all of the following word triples, define each word, showing its difference from the others in the group; or use the words in such a way as to reveal the differences in sense between them.
- a. Faith, Belief, Opinion.
 - b. Radical, Revolutionary, Reformist.
 - c. Programme, Plan, Policy.
 - d. Reactionary, Conservative, Repressive.
 - e. Power, Influence, Authority.
3. Each day 10,000 people must travel from A to B. They can either take the train, which always takes 40 minutes irrespective of the number of people who use it, or drive. Driving takes 20 minutes when there is no other traffic on the road, but each additional 200 cars adds 1 minute to everyone's driving time. We assume that people make their choice of how they would like to travel solely on the basis of the expected journey time.
- a. The local council decides to limit car usage and issues 2,000 free licences for the right to use the road. How long will those who obtain licences take to travel? How many will apply for the licences?
 - b. Suppose the local council decides instead that car usage should be unrestricted. Will everybody choose to try travelling by car? Eventually, the number of cars on the road adjusts to make the travelling time by car equal to the travelling time by train. In this case, how many people are choosing to drive? What is the percentage of the population who chooses to travel by train?

END OF PAPER