

# MASTER'S THESIS REPORT

International Economic and Political Studies (IEPS)

Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

<b>Thesis title:</b>	The Ethical Foundations of Limited Government in James Buchanan's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination
<b>Student's name:</b>	Benedict Sendke
<b>Supervisor's name:</b>	Janusz Salamon

Criteria	Maximum	Points
Contribution and argument (originality, justifiable research question and hypotheses, argumentation)	25	23
Theoretical framework (situating research into the existing knowledge)	25	23
Methodology (methods and data relevant to the research question and appropriately used)	20	18
Referencing to sources	15	14
Formal aspects (structure, logical coherence, layout, tables, figures)	10	10
Presentation (language, style, cohesion)	5	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>93</b>

**Plagiarism-check (URKUND) match score** (if the plagiarism-check (URKUND) match score is above 15%, the reviewer has to include his/her assessment of the originality of the reviewed thesis in his/her review):

### **Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria:**

Benedict Sendke Master's thesis is an ambitious work, balancing an attempt at originality (consisting primarily of immanent critique of the coherence of Buchanan's political theory) with due attention to the political concepts that remain central to the broader liberal discourse (such as individual freedom, contractarianism or distribution of resources) that constitute the background for Sendke's assessment of Buchanan's proposals. The Author is consistently concise (sometimes perhaps too much so, when considering the context in which Buchanan expresses his views and considering potential counterarguments against his own criticism might deepen the discussion). Occasionally, the reader is left in doubt whether critical remarks are original contributions of the Author or they can be found in the secondary literature listed in the bibliography. Be as it may, the number of footnotes is quite impressive for a Master's thesis of this length, even though some of the secondary sources are referred to only once. The resulting criticism is pretty devastating, since it is the more original among Buchanan's ideas (individual sovereignty, unanimity, ordered anarchy, subjectivism, non-reductionism, natural distribution) that, as Benedict Sendke shows rather convincingly, face the most serious theoretical challenges, often undermining each other. The value of the Author's inquiry is magnified by extrapolation of his conclusions to contractarianism as such which, as he skillfully argues, struggles with establishing a firm foundation for individual freedom and accommodating in the political order other moral constraints than individual freedom (the line of argument that has been developed by other authors, e.g., Michael Sandel, but Benedict Sendke manages to find a different angle from which to formulate such criticism). Overall, I judge the work as manifesting considerable philosophical skills and methodological self-awareness worthy of a mature scholar, and for this reason recommend grade the top grade, while acknowledging that the thesis might benefit from a more detailed discussion of the key issues, grounded in the secondary literature, especially in the works of the authors more sympathetic to Buchanan.

**Proposed grade:** A

**Suggested questions for the defence:**

James Buchanan is more often than not characterised (including by some libertarians) as a libertarian. Do you presuppose in your thesis that Buchanan is not a libertarian? Do you think such characterisations matter when it comes to the assessment of the plausibility of his position? To put it differently: can your criticism of Buchanan be extrapolated to imply criticism of the core libertarian principles?

**I recommend the thesis for the final defence.**

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Signature

**Overall grading scheme at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University:**

<b>Total Points</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Quality standard</b>
91–100	A	= outstanding (high honour)
81–90	B	= superior (honour)
71–80	C	= good
61–70	D	= satisfactory
51–60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0–50	F	= failing, the thesis is not recommended for defence