

MASTER'S THESIS REPORT

International Economic and Political Studies (IEPS)

Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	The Ethical Foundations of Limited Government in James Buchanan's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination
Student's name:	Benedict Sendke
Reviewer's name:	Tomáš Halamka

Criteria	Maximum	Points
Contribution and argument (originality, justifiable research question and hypotheses, argumentation)	25	23
Theoretical framework (situating research into the existing knowledge)	25	24
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
Total	100	94

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): Thesis 7%, Turnitin 13%

Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria (min. 1,800 characters including spaces when recommending a passing grade, min. 2,500 characters including spaces when recommending a failing grade):

This MA Thesis dives deep into the thought of James Buchanan and consists of two principal parts. First, the thesis introduces, or rather reconstructs, Buchanan's theory of social contract. The second part then introduces several points of criticism of that theory. The thesis is generally well-researched. It works with relevant primary and secondary sources and demonstrates good knowledge of the academic debates and contemporary literature on the topic. The main argument of the thesis is nicely crafted, and the thesis always guides the reader through the individual argumentative steps. There are smooth transitions between individual (sub)chapters, so the main line of argument is always visible and easy to follow. Contentwise, the thesis encompasses topics from the disciplines of philosophy, politics and economy, and the author demonstrates good erudition in all of them. While my lack of economic expertise restricts me from properly evaluating the economics parts, I am happy to say that the prevalent politico-philosophical analyses and criticisms are on a very decent level. First, we get a detailed, careful and diligent reconstruction of Buchanan's argument. Next, the thesis offers interesting and elaborate points of criticism and identification of several inconsistencies in Buchanan's thought. Regarding the form of the text, the thesis is in very good shape too. There are some occasional formal issues, but they are rare and negligible.

Let me now introduce some points that might have further improved the thesis. First of all, the title seems to be a bit vague and misleading because the range the thesis covers is actually broader than the ethical foundations. Similarly, the main research questions (What are the key

characteristics of Buchanan’s contractarianism, and what does it demonstrate or justify?) are interpretative, while at least half of the text is normative and goes beyond these questions. Furthermore, I think the number of main chapters could have been reduced to just two: 1) the reconstruction of the theory and 2) the criticisms. In this respect, I also think that the occasional critical comments in chapter 4 could have been reserved for later, i.e. for chapter 6 in this version. That would draw an even clearer line between the reconstructive/interpretative part of the thesis, and the critical part. Finally, I was not altogether persuaded by the explanation of the relevance of the topic. If Buchanan’s theory is underexplored and this thesis is quite critical of it, isn’t the general omission justifiable, and shouldn’t we rather spend time reading different theorists? To be fair, the thesis is not silent on this issue, and it offers some interesting arguments against contractarianism at large, going beyond Buchanan’s work. Nevertheless, I do not want to exaggerate the importance of these issues, which are mostly minor and do not interfere with the clarity of the main argument. And most importantly, they are far overshadowed by the qualities of the thesis. In general, this thesis displays many attributes of an advanced academic text, putting forward a sophisticated and relevant philosophical argument. Therefore, I recommend the thesis to be evaluated with the highest grade A.

Proposed grade: A

Suggested questions for the defence:

I recommend the thesis for the final defence.

Signature

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

Total Points	Grade	Quality standard
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