

Political Theory Comprehensive Exam

August, 2010

Answer three questions, one from each section. Your examination will be evaluated as a whole, so avoid repeating yourself.

Section I

1. The alleged connection between the ownership of property and political freedom is a central theme in ancient and modern political thought. Why? Answer with respect to at least one ancient and two modern authors from part I of the list.
2. Discuss the different conceptions of republican government found in Aristotle's *Politics*, Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*, and *The Federalist Papers*. In particular, what are the areas of continuity between them and how do modern republicans (beginning with Machiavelli) set out to revise or transform the ancient conception of the *politeia*?
3. Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant are often considered as opposed thinkers. But some have argued that there is more affinity in their thought than first meets the eye. Discuss with reference to their concepts of the social contract, human nature, and history.

Section II

4. "The question is not whether we should be egalitarians, but rather it is what kind of egalitarians we should be." Criticize or defend this view by reference to at least five authors on part II of the reading list.
5. Can democratic theory offer coherent accounts of citizenship and the legitimate boundaries of political communities? If so, how? If not, how should democratic polities deal with these issues? Discuss with reference to at least four authors on part II the reading list.
6. Is sovereignty still a valid concept? Discuss by reference to Machiavelli, Kant, Schmidt, and Habermas. After discussing their views as fully as time permits, give your own considered judgment on the viability of national sovereign state.

Section III

7. Rawls wrote: "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions." Plato (at least in *The Republic*) and Aristotle (in *The Nicomachean Ethics*) would not necessarily disagree. Compare and contrast Rawls to either Plato or Aristotle on the priority of justice and show where their conceptions of justice differ. How do you evaluate these differences?
8. Every theory of politics rests on a philosophical psychology: a set of assumptions about human motivation, malleability, and aspirations. Yet every philosophical psychology is controversial. How, then, can political theory advance? Discuss with reference to at least four authors on the list, at least one of whom should be drawn from each part of the reading list.
9. Until the twentieth century, democracy was made famous mostly by its critics. What changed, and why? Discuss with reference to at least four authors on the list, at least one of whom should be drawn from each part of the reading list.

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