

Political Theory Comprehensive Exam, August 2020

Answer three questions, one from each part

Your exam will be evaluated as a whole, so avoid repeating yourself

Part One

1. In Book VI of *The Republic* Plato states that philosophers “must be without falsehood—they must refuse to accept what is false, hate it, and have a love for the truth” (485c). Yet the Kallipolis is founded upon the “noble lie.” When, if ever, may the rulers lie to the ruled or the ruled lie to the rulers?
2. Hannah Arendt, J.G.A. Pocock, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Amartya Sen have all been characterized as Aristotelians. Whose claim to the designation is most authentic? Why?
3. Which are the two most important differences between Plato’s and Aristotle’s political theories, and which are the two most important similarities? Which matter more, the similarities or the differences? Why?

Part Two

4. In §42 of the *First Treatise* Locke argues that “a man can no more justly make use of another’s necessity to force him to become his vassal by withholding that relief God required him to afford to the wants of his brother, than he that has more strength can seize upon a weaker, master him to his obedience, and, with a dagger at his throat, offer him death or slavery.” How might any three of Isaiah Berlin, Philip Pettit, Michael Foucault, Judith Shklar, and Iris Marion Young evaluate this claim? What do your answers tell you about their respective understandings of the idea of domination?
5. Which is more important for justice: what I have or who I am? Discuss with reference to John Rawls and any three of Charles Taylor, Nancy Fraser, Will Kymlicka, Judith Butler, and Brian Barry.
6. Which is worse, anarchy or tyranny? What implications does your answer have for political thought? Answer with respect to at least three of the following: Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Madison, Constant, Tocqueville, Marx, and Arendt.

Part III

7. Both the majority and the minority may be the source of tyranny, despotism, or totalitarianism. Is it more concerning for a majority or a minority to wield political power? What institutional implications follow from the answer to that question? Discuss with reference to at least four theorists on the list.

8. Could partisanship be eliminated from politics, and if so would that be a good thing? If partisanship is inevitable, which kinds of partisanship are most healthy, and which kinds are most pernicious? Answer with reference to at least three of the following: Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, Burke, Madison, Tocqueville, Marx.
9. “Many political theorists are committed to the importance of impartial reasoning in arguments about justice, yet also profess to be democrats. There is no guarantee, however, that democratic majorities will support whatever impartiality might be argued to require.” Discuss the resulting tension by reference to any three of John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Jürgen Habermas, and Brian Barry. Who reconciles them most efficaciously? Why?

End of Exam