

## Political Theory Comprehensive Exam, August 2015

Answer three questions, one from each part  
Your exam will be evaluated as a whole, so avoid repeating yourself

### Part One

1. Compare Plato's and Aristotle's accounts (in *The Republic* and *The Politics*) of how one sort of political regime changes into another. Which political dynamics does each thinker emphasize? What do their accounts of regime change tell us about their perspectives on politics more generally?
2. Augustine gives an argument in opposition to Greek philosophers like Aristotle who held that the cultivation of the virtues could lead to the ultimate good. What are Augustine's arguments against the virtues as the path to the good life, and what might a philosopher like Aristotle say in response?
3. In chapter 46 of *Leviathan* Hobbes writes: "Aristotle, and the other Heathen Philosophers define Good, and Evill, by the Appetite of men; and well enough, as long as we consider them governed every one by his own Law: For in the condition of men that have no other Law but their own Appetites, there can be no general Rule of Good, and Evill Actions. But in the Common-wealth this measure is false: Not the Appetite of Private men, but the Law, which is the Will and Appetite of the State is the measure." Did Hobbes get Aristotle right? What turns on their disagreement?

### Part Two

4. Can a purely political, non-comprehensive conception of justice defend intervention in the family while claiming to not trump comprehensive values or while not claiming truth for itself? How far can such intervention be justified? Discuss with reference to three authors on the reading list.
5. A number of modern writers are concerned about the loss of individual freedom, action, and autonomy in the modern world. What do they outline as the greatest threat to individuality? What solutions did they propose to counteract this tendency? Discuss with reference to four of the following thinkers: Rousseau, Tocqueville, Marx, Mill, Nietzsche, Arendt.
6. Alexis de Tocqueville argued that democracy and the love of equality could pose a threat to liberty. Explain and evaluate his argument, and explain how Robert Dahl's democratic theory aimed to deal with some of the concerns that Tocqueville had raised. Was Dahl convincing? Why or why not?

7. Modern political thought seems to both valorize and worry about what Nietzsche called 'plastic power of man,' i.e. the sense that humans have a recognized power to recreate their social, political, cultural worlds. What is appealing about such an idea for politics, and what might be dangerous about it as a political principle? Draw upon at least three of the following authors in your answer: Hobbes, Rousseau, Burke, Tocqueville, Marx, Arendt.

### Part III

8. Rawls on the priority of the basic liberties: "this priority rules out exchanges ('trade-offs') between the basic rights and liberties covered by the first principle and the social and economic advantages regulated by the difference principle." Is this a reasonable assumption? What drives it? Can justice, in fact, allow for such trade-offs? What must an argument that would allow for such trade-offs concede or give up?
9. What are the advantages, if any, of a distinctively feminist political theory? Are there disadvantages? Discuss with reference to at least three authors on the list.
10. "*Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* is a source of more useful insights into the relations between power and democracy than the political theory literatures on either of those subjects." Discuss.
11. "The 'Equality of what?' literature sidelined the discussion of the more important and in any case prior question 'Why equality?'" Discuss with reference to at least four authors on the list.

**End of Exam**