

POLITICAL THEORY COMPREHENSIVE EXAM
January 2011

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

Section I

1. The role of the people – the *demos* for Aristotle, *il popolo* for Machiavelli, the “general will” for Rousseau or the “majority” for the Federalist authors and Tocqueville - plays a central part in the work of great political philosophers. What should the proper role of the people be? Should the people govern or be governed, if so, how? Discuss using four thinkers or texts from the list.
2. Quentin Skinner has remarked that Hobbes’s understanding of liberty as being left alone has triumphed in the mainstream of the Western tradition since his time. Skinner thinks this involves the rejection of an older (and better) ideal of liberty that defined liberty by reference to the lack of dependence on others. How does your reading of Aristotle, Hobbes and any *two* of Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Mill lead you to assess Skinner’s claim?
3. It has been claimed that Hegel, as well as Marx, remained in some deep sense “Aristotelians.” Discuss with reference to their concepts of human nature and political society.

Section II

1. Which democratic procedures and principles, if any, can be usefully extended to ‘global institutions’? Can democratic theory offer a coherent account of the boundaries/ limits of political communities? Discuss with reference to 3 or more authors on part II of the reading list.
2. What is the role of ‘thought-experiments’ in theories of justice and equality? What do they reveal and what do they conceal? Discuss with reference to 3 or more authors on part II of the reading list.

3. Can liberalism provide an adequate normative and social theory of collective identity? Or do claims of national, cultural, and other forms of group solidarity necessarily threaten liberal models of selfhood and autonomy? Discuss with reference to 3 or more authors on part II of the reading list.

Section III

1. Many political thinkers – ancient, modern and contemporary – both valorize and worry about what Nietzsche called the ‘plastic power of man,’ i.e. the sense that humans have a recognized power to recreate their social, political and cultural worlds. What is appealing about such an idea for politics and what might be dangerous about it as a political principle? Choose *three* authors – from Parts I and II of the reading list – answering this question.

2. Is patriotism a virtue? Discuss with the help of Plato, Machiavelli, Rousseau, Arendt, and Habermas.

3. Whereas most liberal thinkers celebrate the growth of individual freedoms and liberties in the modern era, many others lament the “decline of the political” in the modern world. Is politics in the modern world in decline? Isn’t the question of what modernity is, itself a political question? Answer with respect to any 3 authors on the reading list, chosen from parts I and II.