

Political Theory Comprehensive Exam, January 2013

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

Part One

1. Madison famously observed that power “is of an encroaching nature.” How, if at all, should that observation be factored into theorizing about justice? Discuss with reference to at least three authors on part I of the reading list.
2. “Aristotle’s concept of eudaimonia is sometimes interpreted to mean happiness, as is Bentham’s notion of utility. Yet the two ideas are worlds apart.” Discuss with reference to three authors on Part I of the reading list.
3. Rousseau spoke of designing political institutions “taking men as they are and laws as they might be.” How, if at all, does this set his enterprise apart? Discuss with reference to three authors on Part I of the reading list.

Part Two

4. “At least since Locke’s time political philosophers have had love-hate relationships with the proposition that people should be guaranteed ownership of the fruits of their labor.” Discuss with reference to at least three authors on part II of the reading list.
5. “Rawls’s ‘political, not metaphysical’ move shifted his focus from issues of justification to issues of legitimacy.” Is that an accurate characterization? If so, was it a good move? Why? If not, how would you characterize and evaluate his intellectual evolution?
6. “Predicating rights of groups rather than individuals is always a bad idea.” Discuss with reference to at least three authors on part II of the reading list.

Part III

7. What would Locke have made of the literature on majority rule since Condorcet? Would he be right? Why or why not?
8. “There is a curious tension at the heart of Enlightenment thinking: between the commitment to coming up with a deterministic science of politics, on the one hand, and to the view, on the other, that free choice and consent are the hallmarks of legitimate government. But if the determinist project could really be carried out, then there would be no room for choice and therefore no room for consent either.” Discuss with reference to Hobbes, Marx, Mill, and Rawls.
9. Quentin Skinner describes Hobbes’s view of freedom as depending on the absence of identifiable impediments which in effect render “some action within our powers impossible to perform.” Skinner contrasts this with the republican account of freedom as an independent status, commenting that although we must acknowledge that Hobbes “won the battle” it is “still worth asking if he won the argument.” Is Skinner’s assessment right? Discuss with reference to any three of Locke, Berlin, Arendt, and Nozick.

End of Exam