

Political Theory Exam
Fall 2022

Answer one question from each of the following three sections. The first section is meant to focus on the history of political thought, the second on more recent theorizing, and the third on a topic drawn from your individual lists. Each answer should have a clear thesis argument and should be based on analysis of the relevant texts.

You have seven hours to complete the exam, closed book, open note. The examination will be judged as a whole so avoid repeating yourself.

Section 1

1. Discuss the meaning of the term “republic” in three of the following: Plato, Cicero, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and the Federalist. What are the grounds of continuity between the ancient and modern uses of this term? What kind of transformation does the concept undergo in time?
2. How has modern political theory dealt with the problem of diversity and inclusion? Compare and contrast three of the following (one from each set): Spinoza or Marx on the Jews; Wollstonecraft or De Beauvoir on women; Douglass or DuBois on African-Americans. How do you evaluate their views?
3. Politics is the art of managing conflict. Discuss the role of class/faction in Aristotle, Machiavelli, Publius, and Marx. What lessons can or should be adopted from their teachings that are most useful today?

Section 2

1. “Democracy and representation: They can’t live with each other, but they can’t live without each other.” Discuss.
2. Is identity politics compatible with liberalism? If yes, explain why. If not, does liberalism have the internal resources to respond to this critique?
3. Politics and partisanship seem inseparable. Can politics do away with partisanship? Discuss with reference to three authors on part two of the list.

Section 3

1. “It would be more helpful for political theorists to focus on injustice and domination than on justice and freedom.” Discuss.
2. What is political philosophy? Discuss using three authors from part three of your list.
3. Amartya Sen has said that we are all egalitarians; we just disagree about “equality of what?” Is he right and, if so, how important is his insight? If he is wrong, explain why and what turns on his error.
4. Rawls claimed that justice is “the first virtue of social institutions.” Do you agree? Use three figures from your list to offer an alternative to or a correction of Rawls’s claim.
5. Does the exercise of political power inevitably lead to oppression?