

Political Theory Comprehensive Exam

August, 2017

Answer three questions, one from each part. Your exam will be evaluated as a whole so avoid repetition in your choice of topics and texts.

Part One:

1. In Plato's *Republic*, laws are denigrated as being an expression of conflict and contention but the legislator is said to stand above the laws. What does Plato mean by these two claims? Compare Plato's critique of law to Aristotle's case for the rule of law in the *Politics*. (Feel free to substitute either Maimonides or Aquinas for Aristotle).
2. Alexandre Kojève – the most important twentieth-century reader of Hegel – put the famous “struggle for recognition” at the center of Hegel's philosophy of history. What is the source of this conflict and how did Hegel hope to resolve it? After discussing Hegel's solution, what were Marx and Nietzsche's critiques?
3. Does one have obligations to one's fellow countrymen that are distinct from universal obligations that all humans owe to each other? Moreover, does one owe special obligations to those who one's country has wronged in the past? Answer using three authors from the list.

Part Two:

4. For Machiavelli and Hobbes, order is the first virtue of political institutions. For others, like Plato and Rawls, justice is. How and why do these authors differ? In your view, who is right?
5. Citizenship is a key concept in Western political thought, yet the question “who” the citizens is and why has been widely neglected. Discuss with respect to four thinkers on the reading list.
6. The rise of populism and demagoguery are indisputable features of contemporary politics throughout many parts of the world. Which three thinkers best help you explain and account for these twin facts?

Part Three:

7. The theologico-political problem – the relation between politics and religion – has been called “the genuine, single, and deepest theme” of world history. Discuss with relation to three thinkers on the list.

8. What are the main arguments for majority rule? Which one is the most compelling if any? Answer with reference to at least three different authors.

9. Legitimacy is a concept that is saddled between the normative and the empirical. Discuss with respect to three out of the following: Rousseau, Habermas, Weber or Judith Shklar.