

Political Theory Comprehensive Exam  
August 2019

Please answer three questions, one from each part. Your exam will be evaluated as a whole, so please avoid repeating yourself.

Part One

1. In book one of Plato's *Republic*, Thrasymachus cynically argues that justice is "the advantage of the stronger." Does Socrates successfully refute his claim in the rest of the dialogue?
2. Rousseau is one of the most polarizing figures in the history of political thought. His concept of "the general will," in particular, is an endless source of inspiration and confusion. What exactly did he mean by "the general will"? Should we try to apply the concept in our understanding of modern politics?
3. Hegel's theory of the state was much debated in the twentieth century. While some philosophers, such as Isaiah Berlin, condemned it as incompatible with liberal freedom, others praised it for grounding freedom in social institutions. Explain the relation between freedom and the state in Hegel's political thought, and explain what is at stake in the question for us today.

Part Two

4. Contemporary deliberative democrats place a lot of emphasis on what Habermas calls "the forceless force of the better argument." Other theorists, such as Ian Shapiro, argue that politics is ultimately about power and interests. Who is right?
5. Compare and contrast "minimalist" theories of democracy, such as Adam Przeworski's, with more robust theories, such as Sheldon Wolin's. How normatively ambitious should democratic theories and institutions aim to be?
6. "Liberalism is a victim of its own success." Discuss, with reference to at least two contemporary political thinkers (writing since 1945).

Part Three

7. Populism and authoritarianism are on the rise again all over the Western world. What can contemporary political theory and the history of political thought teach us about these two phenomena, about their relationship to one another, and about how to resist (or not) their allure?
8. What is the relationship between political and social equality? Discuss with reference to Aristotle or Tocqueville, and to one or two contemporary political theorists.
9. What form of government offers the most compelling alternative to democracy? Draw on at least one ancient and one modern or contemporary author in your answer.