

Political Theory Exam
Fall 2023

Please 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 topics related to your personalized 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; avoid repetition.

Section 1

1. For Tocqueville, laws ultimately rest on *mores*, understood as “the habits of the heart.” Discuss the role of mores in processes of both social preservation and social transformation, with reference to three of the following authors: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Burke, Hegel, Tocqueville, Gandhi
2. In “The Ruling of Men” (*Darkwater*), Du Bois writes: “Education is not a prerequisite to political control – political control is the cause of popular education.” Discuss the relationship between education and democracy with reference to three of the following authors: Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Tocqueville, Du Bois
3. Is there a political justification for the institution of private property? Discuss, compare, and evaluate relevant arguments by Locke, Rousseau, and Marx.

Section 2

1. What is the best definition of “citizen”? How was the category of citizenship revised and rethought in the second half of the twentieth century? Is it in need of further revisions? Explain, in dialogue with at least three thinkers from the second part of our reading list.
2. Assess the “communitarian turn” in political theory, with reference to any three of the following thinkers: Sandel, Taylor, Kymlicka, Walzer.
3. “Combatting domination supplies a better basis for thinking about justice than pursuing a just distribution of goods and harms in society.” Discuss with reference to Rawls and any two of the following theorists: Pettit, Skinner, Walzer, and Young.
4. Carole Pateman and Charles Mills argue that, in social contract theories, contracts establish at once mutual freedom within a group and perpetual oppression of other groups, such as women and non-whites. Assess their arguments and the implications a) for understanding the theory of Hobbes or Locke, and b) for the possibility of a relevant and fair social contract theory today.

Section 3

1. Present the case both for and against the idea of group representation. After considering both perspectives as closely – and as fairly – as possible, offer your judgment, in dialogue with three authors from your list.
2. “Democracy is a method for handling conflict in a non-violent manner.” Explain how three writers on your list would reply to this statement and evaluate their positions.
3. Does democracy depend on active participation in government by all citizens? What activities count as “participation”? Discuss with reference to three authors on your list.
4. How have considerations of gender and the family refocused democratic theory? Answer drawing on three authors from your list.