

Political Theory Exam  
Fall 2024

For student #1

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.

The examination will be judged as a whole; avoid repetition.

Section 1

1. What role does religion play in political life? What role should it play? Discuss with reference to Plato, Hobbes, Locke, and Tocqueville.
2. Can revolutions be democratic? Discuss in relation to three of the following authors: Edmund Burke, Frederick Douglass, Marx, Gandhi, Schumpeter, Arendt.
3. Which is more important as a guiding principle for political life, freedom or virtue? Discuss with reference to Aristotle, Machiavelli and Rousseau.

Section 2

1. In recent decades, an influential group of political theorists has highlighted the history of imperialism. How should this body of work influence our understanding of basic themes of European political thought such as sovereignty, freedom and democracy?
2. Are representative governments of the kind found in European and American states properly understood as “democracies”? Consider Robert Dahl, Bernard Manin, Adam Przeworski and at least one other thinker.
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of understanding justice through the lens of social contract theories? Consider at least three of these thinkers: John Rawls, Charles Mills, Carol Pateman, Iris Young.

Section 3

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of social choice theory as a mode of political understanding?
2. Compare and evaluate the criticisms of Rousseau in the writings of Isaiah Berlin and Leo Strauss. What do these criticisms reveal about the fundamental themes of Berlins’s thought, and Strauss’s? What responses would you offer to each on his understanding of Rousseau?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of understanding freedom in the language of “rights”?