

Columbia University Department of Political Science
Written Qualifying Examination in Political Theory
August 2020

Instructions:

All students should answer one question from Part I of this examination. For the minor, students should also answer one question from any other part of this examination (Part II, III, or IV). For the major, students should answer two additional questions, one each from any two additional parts of this examination (e.g. one question from Part II and one from Part IV). You should incorporate into your answers discussion of the theories you deem most relevant to the question. Make sure, however, to answer the question directly as well as you are able; do not simply offer a literature review.

Part I Core

- 1) Montesquieu thought that a modern republic could secure liberty better than an ancient one. Explain and discuss.
- 2) With reference to Rousseau and Sièyes, evaluate each thinker's treatment of the relationship between the pursuit of self-interest and the general interest.
- 3) Many thinkers, from Mill, Tocqueville, Marx, to Nietzsche and Arendt, are concerned about the loss of individual freedom, action, and autonomy in the modern world. What do they envision as the greatest threat to individuality? Do you share their concerns, and what would you propose as possible solutions? Discuss by referring to the ideas of at least three authors.

Part II Justice, Rights, and Law

- 4) "If law is the command of the sovereign, then there is no such thing as international *law* properly speaking." Discuss.
- 5) Define and discuss a principle of ethical individualism.
- 6) Which injustices should be endured, which merit civil disobedience, and which justify revolution?

Part III Constitutionalism and Democracy

- 7) Is there a moral and/or civic duty to vote in elections for public office?
- 8) Discuss arguments for and against overrepresentation of small political units.
- 9) “[D]emocracy is too important to be left to politicians, or even to the people voting in referendums” (Pettit); what politics seems to need today is not more but less democracy. Discuss.

Part IV Ideology and Identity

- 10) “We can hardly claim to be concerned with the history of political theory unless we are prepared to write it as real history — that is, as the record of an actual activity, and in particular as the history of ideologies” (Skinner). Discuss.
- 11) Is economic inequality more of a stabilizing or destabilizing feature of liberal democracy?
- 12) Discuss Kelsen’s criticism of the ideology of popular sovereignty: “Therefore, it is a fiction when the unity, which the state legal order fashions out of the multiplicity of human actions, poses as a ‘popular body’ by calling itself the ‘People’.”