

Columbia University Department of Political Science
Written Qualifying Examination in Political Theory
January 2022

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. One reads in Mill's *On Liberty* that the truly "formidable evil" is not "violent conflict between parts of the truth, but the quiet suppression of half of it." Discuss.
2. A number of modern writers are concerned about the loss of individual freedom, and autonomy in the modern world. What do they deem to be the greatest threat to individuality? What solutions did they propose to counteract this tendency? Discuss with reference to three of the following thinkers: Tocqueville, Nietzsche, Gandhi, and Weber
3. Discuss the role economic and social questions play in the political theories of three thinkers, one each from any three of the following pairs: Plato *or* Aristotle, Hobbes *or* Locke, Adam Smith *or* Marx, Hannah Arendt *or* Rawls.

PART II. JUSTICE, RIGHTS AND CONSTITUTIONALISM

4. What is constitutionalism and does it limit, establish and/or conflict with popular sovereignty?
5. Is justice primarily a rights-based (deontological) or a goal-based (consequentialist) notion? Discuss with reference to any three significant thinkers.
6. Is there a right to civil disobedience?

PART III. DEMOCRACY AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

7. Do populist movements, parties and governments present a challenge to or a deepening of democracy?
8. Is it possible to define the boundaries of a *demos* democratically? Discuss with reference to any three significant authors.
9. Elections are criticized today both as a poor means to achieve good results and as a procedure that takes deliberative power away from the citizens. Discuss

PART IV. POWER, IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY

10. Critics of modern political doctrines such as liberalism, cosmopolitanism, or human rights often contend that they cannot live up to their universalizing aspirations because they originated in the West. How damaging is this line of critique to the doctrines in question?
11. What makes gender oppression different from other forms of social and political domination?
12. Is there such a thing as a liberal ideology that obstructs the cause of justice? Explain.