

Columbia University Department of Political Science

Written Qualifying Examination in Political Theory

August 2021

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.

I. Core

1. Discuss the attitude towards fundamental human rights we find in the work of 4 the following thinkers: Bentham, Burke, Hegel, T.H. Marshall, Marx, and Paine.
2. Machiavelli argued that certain actions and traits of character that are considered virtuous in private life (such as telling the truth) were unsuited to political life and leadership. Carefully reconstruct his views on this subject and compare them with those of 2 of the following thinkers: Plato, St Augustine, Hobbes, Kant.
3. In what sense(s) could Rousseau's political thought reasonably be called individualistic? Compare Rousseau's position on this question with those of at least one predecessor and one successor.

II. Justice, rights, and constitutionalism

4. Is the power to amend the constitution an instance of constituent or constituted power? In your answer, discuss the difference between constituent and constituted power and how it maps onto constitutional vs ordinary politics.
5. What rights, if any, should be recognized for all human beings, bearing in mind that all rights impose costs or obligations of some kind on others?

6. “The sovereign state is the proper political setting for applying standards of justice. We may have some obligations of justice towards people who are not part of our political community, but these are minimal.” Discuss with reference to the contemporary global distributive justice debate.

III. Democracy and its alternatives

7. Which is worse: an illiberal democracy or an undemocratic liberal state?
8. Many claim that populism does not entail a full-blown ideology but instead relies on a “thin ideology” that populists attach to “host ideologies” coming from the left, the right, or a mix thereof. Discuss.
9. “The most important distinction in modern political philosophy, the distinction between democracy and dictatorship, can be made best in terms of party politics. The parties are not therefore merely appendages of modern government; they are in the center of it and play a determinative and creative role in it” (Schattschneider). Discuss with reference to the ideas of modern authors (i.e. from the eighteenth century onward).

IV. Power, ideology, and identity

10. Does the nation-state perforce entail the production of a cultural, ethnic, or racial national majority and discriminate against national minorities? Are liberal or civic nationalism and or constitutional patriotism plausible antidotes? What version of the state could avoid such divisions?
11. Is the modern liberal tradition of political thought biased or exclusionary? Explain.
12. According to Karl Mannheim, the term *ideology* is most often invoked when “we are skeptical of the ideas and representations advanced by our opponent” (1929). Is it fair and/or helpful to treat ideology as simply a kind of cognitive or political error?