

Columbia University
Department of Political Science
Written Qualifying Examination in Political Theory
January 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 to answer the question directly as well as you are able; do not simply offer a literature review.

PART I: CORE

- 1) Discuss Hobbes's claim that only rule by an absolute sovereign can guarantee long-lasting peace within a state.
- 2) Kant's moral and political philosophy draws subtly and not-so-subtly on Rousseau's writings. What are some important ways in which Kant uses, misuses, or builds on Rousseau?
- 3) "Modern politics is so different in kind from ancient politics that it requires new political concepts and new forms of political analysis." Discuss with reference to at least two of the following: Montesquieu, *The Federalist Papers*, Constant, Tocqueville, Marx.

PART II: JUSTICE, RIGHTS, AND LAW

- 4) Assess the republican (or neo-Roman) conception of liberty.
- 5) It has recently been argued that contemporary liberal theories of distributive justice have concerned themselves exclusively with the socioeconomic floor below which people should not be allowed to fall, while paying insufficient attention to the wealth ceiling above which nobody should be allowed to rise. Do you think such an omission (if it indeed exists) is problematic? Why or why not?

- 6) Fundamental and/or human rights presuppose an atomic, egoistic, individual as their referent. Discuss the pros and cons of this claim by referring to three political thinkers (historical or contemporary).

PART III: CONSTITUTIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY

- 7) What forms of political representation are most consistent with democracy?
- 8) Can transparency and publicity (in the day-to-day business of legislative and executive branches of a democratic government, for instance) have undesirable consequences?
- 9) Critics of constitutional entrenchment argue that constitutional provisions inevitably reflect elite interests prevailing at the time of their adoption. How far does this objection diminish the value of constitutionalism?

PART IV: IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY

- 10) Contemporary societies contain a multitude of different groups and social identities. Given the conditions of pluralism and deep disagreement over politically salient issues, is universalism a myth and is relativism unavoidable?
- 11) Can liberalism provide an adequate normative and social theory of collective identity? Or do claims of national, cultural, and other forms of group solidarity necessarily threaten liberal models of selfhood and autonomy?
- 12) Is populism an ideology? If not, why not?