Political Theory: Comprehensive Exam
Fall 2008

Select three questions from at least three different sections; avoid repetition. Make sure to structure well your essay. Your essay should be doubled space. 15 pages are sufficient. Please do not exceed 20 pages.

Section I. Ancient

1. Consider the strengths and flaws of democracy according to at least two Greek theorists and historians, such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides, and Xenophon.

2. Explain Plato's notion of decline of regimes in *The Republic*? Is this pattern cyclical? How does it relate to Aristotle's account of change (or "revolution") in *The Politics*? How is it related to Plato’s account of change in his attempt to advise the tyrant Dionysius in the Seventh Letter?

3. Why does Socrates, as seen in Plato’s *Apology* and *Crito*, decide to go to his death? How does this decision prefigure modern civil disobedience? Discuss.

4. Plato's *Republic* is a great indictment against tyranny. According to Plato, Aristotle and Xenophon, what are the leading problems with tyranny? Do these authors see any accompanying benefits to tyrannical rule? What else can tyranny become?

5. "Ancient political theory is concerned primarily with virtue rather than justice. Even when justice is ostensibly the theme -- most notably in Plato's *Republic* -- the real focus is on virtue." Discuss.

6. "Friendship is central to politics in ancient Greece. This more than anything else illustrates the profound gulf between ancient and modern understandings of politics." Discuss. (You may substitute honor for friendship.)

Section II. Modern-Enlightenment

1. Write an essay exploring the concepts of equality and scarcity in Hobbes’s theory of the state. What is the nature of equality as he conceives it, and what factors result in the condition of scarcity? How are Hobbes’s ideas about scarcity and equality connected to his concept of will?
2. Compare Locke on the accumulation of property and the "public good" with Rousseau’s conception of property and the "general will."

3. Compare Rousseau on inequality (oligarchy) and the general will and Rawls on the difference principle and the first principle of justice?

4. Human nature, society and the state are central concepts in the history of Western political thought. Select two or three major political theorists of the Enlightenment and describe the role these concepts play in their theories, and the way in which the theorists justify those views.

Section III. Modern-Contemporary

1. In his *Philosophy of Rights*, Hegel argues: “Personality begins not with the subject’s mere general consciousness of himself as an ego concretely determined in some way or other, but rather with his consciousness of himself as a completely abstract ego in which every concrete restriction and value is negated and without validity.” Explain and discuss the significance of this idea for understanding modernity.

2. “… every man has property in his own person … the labor of his body and the work of his hands are properly his. Whatevsoever, then, he removes out of the state that nature has provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labor with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property.” (Locke, *The Second Treatise*)

“A person must translate his freedom into an external sphere in order to exist as Idea.” (Hegel’s *Philosophy of Rights*)

“The worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and extent. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he produces. The *devaluation* of the human world grows in direct proportion to the *increase in value* of the world of things.” (Karl Marx’s *The Philosophical Manuscript*)

Three very different theories of property right are summarized in these two quotations. Write an essay exploring two theories and their different implications. Make sure you avoid repetition with section II.

3. How and why did the Frankfurt school integrate the contributions of Kant, Hegel, Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche as tools for critical thinking? Select at on or two Frankfurt School theorists of your choice to discuss that question.

5. What is Franz Fanon’s argument for violent revolution? What internal problems does Barbara Deming detect in Fanon? By taking his argument seriously, does she provide a more effective defense of mass nonviolent resistance than others? To what extent do arguments of Locke or Marx or Martin Luther King (or others) cast additional light on this debate?

6. What sense does it make, if any, to consider inequality a matter of injustice? Consider as an example of an argument that attempts to do so Rawls’s theory of justice. In that theory, how is justice conceived and under what conditions is inequality unjust? Explore the strengths and weaknesses of this argument for treating inequality as a matter of injustice.

7. “Human rights are typically associated with the rise to modernity and the Enlightenment. Did nineteenth century political theorists either ignore or actively oppose the idea of equal and inalienable ‘natural’ ‘rights of man’?” Discuss.

8. One of the main divisions in the human rights community is between universal rights proponents and group or national rights advocates. Identify proponents of the “universalist” and “relativist” positions (at least two for each side), and apply their contending arguments to three issues (e.g. women rights, gay rights, political and economic rights, history, etc.). Assess their views and draw your own well-reasoned conclusions.