

**Comprehensive Exam: Political Theory Minor
September 2011**

Answer one question from each of the three sections below. No theorist should be discussed in detail more than once in answering the questions.

Section I – Overview

I.1. What is a state? And why do states go to war? These questions have occupied International Relations scholars in the 20th Century, but before that time political thinkers gave very different answers to these questions. Discussing at least one ancient, one early-modern, and one 17th or 18th-Century thinker, explain the changes in the concept of the state, and the explanations for war, over time. You might want to consider, among a number of other things, when the contemporary concept of the sovereign state emerged, and whether the explanation of war-making changed at the same time.

I.2. Works of political theory typically have origins in crisis, conflict, or war. Discuss three works with clear roots in the conflicts of their day, explaining the solutions proposed by their authors and the premises that inform their proposals. Taken as a whole, what might your three works tell us about the nature of political theory? (WW)

I.3. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? “Thinkers who emphasize *glory* and those who focus upon *pride* are discussing the same phenomenon, but the first are praising it and the second condemning it.” Discuss with reference to three or more thinkers from different periods.

Section II – Comparison

II.1. Rawls is sometimes described as reviving the famous early-modern tradition of “social contract” theory. On balance does such a description do more to illuminate or to obscure the relation of Rawls’ work to that of prior thinkers? Answer by comparing Rawls’ method, purpose, and/or conclusions with those of the major early-modern social contract theorist of your choice.

II.2. Hobbes is often thought to represent a new beginning in political philosophy, which contrasts with the theories of the ancient Greeks and medieval Christians by placing politics on specifically modern foundations. Defend the claim that Hobbes inaugurates a specifically modern form of political philosophy by thoroughly contrasting his claims with those of an ancient or medieval political philosopher. (WW)

II.3. Locke and Mill are often contrasted as offering distinct (and sometimes at-odds) interpretations of liberalism. What are the essential differences in their formulations of liberal political theory? Would their conceptions of liberal politics end up looking different in practice?

Section III – Single Author

III.1. Assess this claim about Machiavelli: “One can safely say that there is no moral or political phenomenon that Machiavelli knew or for whose discovery he is famous that was not perfectly known to Xenophon, to say nothing of Plato or Aristotle. It is true that in Machiavelli everything appears in a new light, but this is due, not to an enlargement of the horizon, but to a narrowing of it.” (Leo Strauss)

III.2. In *The Republic*, Plato argues that a perfectly just city might come into being on the condition that philosophers rather than poets rule and educate the *polis*. Plato's "expulsion of the poets" is sometimes viewed as a charming eccentricity, but the move is crucial to the institution of political theory as an enduring practice. Explain the importance of Plato's contest with the poets for political philosophy in the Platonic sense (that is, the sense at play in Plato's *The Republic*). To what extent is Plato able to extricate himself from the pull of the poets in *The Republic*?

III.3. Foucault's analysis of modern society developed a critique of the ideal of individual autonomy and of sovereign power. In the history of political thought, how should we assess Foucault's position as a theoretical innovator?