

# Comprehensive Exam: Political Theory Minor

## January 2021

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** Over the history of political thought, different theorists have understood the meaning of “equality” differently. Drawing on one ancient, one modern, and one contemporary thinker discuss how the idea of “equality” has evolved over time.

**I.2** When, if ever, is military humanitarian intervention morally justified? Be sure to specify what you mean by “military humanitarian intervention,” and draw on at least three thinkers to support your answer.

**I.3** Sovereignty is an essential concept for political theorists; it underlies theories of the state and of officials’ rights to govern within set borders. Discuss the idea of sovereignty in Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Schmitt. What are the main contours of their arguments about the nature and role of sovereignty? In concluding, explain whether the idea of sovereignty continues to have relevance in the twenty-first century.

### Section II: Comparison

**II.1** Discuss how Locke’s and Rousseau’s treatments of property and property rights differ from each other and how these differences translate into their views on the forms government should take and how governments should use their power.

**II.2** Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals* and Freud’s *Civilization and its Discontents* both argue that 'modernity' is repressive. In contrast to Nietzsche, however, Freud is far more willing to accept such 'discontent' as necessary and unavoidable, even if he wishes to avoid its pathological forms. In evaluating Freud and Nietzsche’s respective positions with regard to modernity, do they offer any way out of our modern predicament?

**II.3** One could argue that, for both Marx and Weber, history is the study of the concrete material reality, since they both—in various degrees—offer a materialist form of analysis. Another could argue, however, that, because Weber considers ideas to have an autonomous existence, separate

from the influence of economic forces, he fundamentally opposes Marx. Using Marx's and Weber's thought, in your view, should we understand the development of capitalism as inevitable in the course of human history?

### **Section III: Single Author**

**III.1** In *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls deliberately chooses to make “peoples”—not “states,” nor individual persons—the central focus of his theory of international justice. Why does he make this choice and how does it influence the content of the views he develops in the book?

**III.2** Explain three ways in which Habermas would find fault with the 2020 Presidential Election in the United States. In developing your answer, do not concentrate on the candidates per se but rather on society, political institutions, the media, and other more general concepts.

**III.3** Throughout his *Ethics* and *Politics*, Aristotle maintains—as if paradoxically—that good laws come from good men only and that good men can come about only from good laws. Drawing intellectual inspiration from Aristotle's apparent paradox, in what sense/s, in your view, should ethics require politics and politics require ethics?