**Comprehensive Exam: Political Theory Minor**

**January 2015**

**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 “democracy”? What institutional, social, economic, or other factors distinguish democracy from other forms of political order? Discuss at least two major conceptualizations of democracy, and comment on the comparative value of these approaches as starting points for social scientific inquiry.

I.2. Weber’s definition of the state as “the monopolization of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” cannot be considered a purely functional definition because of the critical role of the idea of legitimacy embedded in the conception. Discuss at least two approaches to the foundation of a state’s legitimacy.

I.3. Individual rights are among the most prominent themes in the liberal tradition of political thought. But liberal theorists have not agreed about the source or foundation of rights. Compare at least two historically significant arguments about the philosophical, metaphysical, religious or other basis of individual rights. To what extent and in what ways can these arguments withstand the skeptical and/or naturalistic challenges characteristic of contemporary political thought?

**Section II – Comparison**

II.1. Marx, Nietzsche and Foucault developed critiques of the emancipatory potential of western liberalism. Choosing two of these writers, compare their indictments of prevailing versions of freedom.

II.2. Compare John Locke’s argument for religious toleration with John Rawls’ defense of “reasonable pluralism”. On what premises does each theorist build his argument? How do these premises affect his conclusion? In developing your comparison, be sure to consider the limits of toleration. In what ways do Locke and Rawls, respectively, limit toleration to certain ideas or practices?

II.3. The 20th century philosopher A.N. Whitehead famously claimed that: "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato." But Plato and Aristotle are also commonly viewed as the fountainheads of two alternative philosophical traditions. For the purposes of teaching the history of Western political thought, should we see these two ways of framing the relations between Plato and Aristotle as in tension, and if so which on balance sets up a more compelling comparison between their political theories?

**Section III – Single Author**

III.1. How divergent are Machiavelli’s basic perspectives on political action as laid out in *The Prince* and *The Discourses*? What are his most lasting contributions to modern conceptions of politics?

III.2. Saint Augustine's extensive and elaborate theology well warrants his prominent place in the Western canon. But are the specifically political elements of his work sufficiently well developed in their content and implications, and their coherence into an overall theory, to warrant Augustine's common treatment as canonical in the more specific area of the history of political thought?

III.3. Carl Schmitt wrote: “The concept of humanity is an especially useful ideological instrument of imperialist expansion, and in its ethical-humanitarian form it is a specific vehicle of economic imperialism.” Explain his statement.