Comprehensive Exam: Political Theory Minor
May 2016

Answer one question from each of the three sections below. No theorist should be
discussed in detail more than once in answering the questions. Make sure to
demonstrate your mastery of the authors, the texts you choose to discuss, and the
conceptual/analytical issues as you answer the questions posed.

Section I – Overview

Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals* and Arendt’s *The Human Condition* both offer
critiques of attempts to provide purely objective accounts of political life. The same may
be said of works by Weber, Schmitt, and Foucault. How successful is this modern (or
post-modern) critique of the enterprise of political science? Draw on thinkers of your
choosing.

Political theorists including Aristotle, Locke, Publius (Madison and Hamilton), Constant,
and Nozick argue that private property is an essential element of freedom. Why do they
think so? How convincing are their arguments? You may draw on thinkers of your choice
in responding, but be sure to discuss at least one skeptic (e.g. Marx) about the connection
between private property and freedom.

One commentator has called Plato’s *Republic*, Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and Marx’s
*Communist Manifesto* “masterpieces of anger transmuted into hope.” That is, they all
adopt a mode of expression of this sort: “If only this were to come about, how much
better a place the world would be!” These works take humans as they are but contend
that their shared existence could be organized in a radically different way. How accurate
is this characterization of these classic works?

Section II – Comparison

Machiavelli and Rousseau developed ideals of republicanism in quite distinct historical
periods. This may account for some of the divergences in their conceptions of the
elements necessary for a republic to thrive. Which thinker’s conception of republicanism
seems most plausible as a model for republican politics?

John Locke is often read as a covert Hobbesian who moderates the teaching of the
*Leviathan* without radically departing from its major premises. In what sense may we
consider Locke a follower of Hobbes? In what sense does he depart from Hobbes?

John Rawls is often described as a Kantian. What elements of his account of justice
resemble Kant’s? What aspects of Kant does Rawls modify or reject?

Section III – Single Author
Plato’s *Republic* accomplishes the remarkable task of overcoming Homer and expelling the poets from its ideal city, all the while making abundant use of poetry throughout its lengthy dialogue, itself a form of poetry according to Socrates. Explain the logic behind Plato’s complex use of poetry to advance his political project.

J.S. Mill argues that his theory of liberty rests upon utilitarian foundations. To what extent does Mill go beyond a grounding in utility in his defense of liberty?

What does Carl Schmitt mean by “the political”? Why does he think it is so important to distinguish the political from other forms of human activity?