

Ph.D. General Exam in Political Philosophy

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12:00 – 4:00 PM

Answer four questions, one from each part of the exam. Refer to relevant work on each topic you discuss, presenting a critical evaluation of others' views, and arguments for your own.

Part I: Political theory

1. What is the Lockean theory of self-ownership? What are some objections to it? Discuss critically, stating your own position on the matter. (In explaining the theory, you may want to give examples of laws and everyday practices that implicitly or explicitly assume that we own ourselves.)
2. Today democracy is typically accepted as the preferred form of government, yet it has had harsh critics from Plato and Aristotle forward. What are the strongest arguments *against* democracy? What are some responses defenders of democracy have offered in reply? Be sure to consider the institutional form of democracy (e.g. the unlimited Athenian version or the constitutional American version) that the theorists you discuss have in mind.
3. What is the relevance of imaginary situations to political argument? Discuss in the context of the social contract tradition of running from Hobbes through Rawls. Does the hypothetical nature of the contract they appeal to in order to justify their political theories undermine the plausibility of these theories?
4. Critically discuss the debate between "liberals" and "communitarians" about whether a state should be neutral about the good (or the good life). Be sure to consider what theorists on both sides have to say about the self in this exchange.

Part II: Sovereignty

1. What is Westphalian sovereignty—i.e. the modern conception of state sovereignty that emerged out of the Thirty Years War? How does the modern state, on this conception, differ from ancient and medieval political entities? Which political theorists give the clearest articulation of this conception? Be sure to discuss the relationship between the "internal" notion of a sovereign's authority over its citizens and territory, and the "external" notion of the a sovereign's standing *vis a vis* other states.

2. Why did both Hobbes and Bodin believe that the sovereign should be indivisible? How did later theorists of the separation of powers criticize this argument? How would Bodin and Hobbes respond to these critics?
3. Most theorists of human rights tend to see state sovereignty as an obstacle to the protection of human rights. However, as state sovereignty has strengthened throughout the 20th century (i.e. as more states have become recognized as sovereign, and international law has strengthened norms of non-intervention), recognition and protection of human rights has increased as well. What are those philosophers who see sovereignty and human rights as potentially in conflict with each other missing?
4. Some have claimed that globalization has resulted in an erosion of sovereignty, perhaps to the point it is no longer a relevant concept. Critically discuss contemporary debates about sovereignty, by presenting what you take to be the strongest challenges to, and the most promising developments of the concept.

Part III: Justice

1. Describe the central disagreement between Rawls and Nozick over the distribution of property in a just society. Whose view do you find most compelling, and why?
2. In *A Theory of Justice* Rawls discusses the need for the members of society to possess a "sense of justice". What is the sense of justice, and why is it necessary? Compare Rawls on this issue with one or two other philosophers. Be sure to explain and support your own views about the issues you discuss.
3. How useful is Rawls' conception of justice for our understanding of justice in the international context? Critically explicate how he himself deals with the difference between justice in the domestic and international domains. And critically engage Thomas Pogge's efforts to apply Rawls' views to international affairs.
4. In *Spheres of Justice*, Walzer argues that goods ought to be distributed according to their meanings. Critically explicate his view. Present examples of distributions he would consider to be just, and explain how he analyzes unjust ("tyrannical") distributions. Finally discuss how he takes the meanings of goods to be established. Are you persuaded by his account?
5. In *Frontiers of Justice*, Nussbaum criticizes theories of justice inspired by the notion of a social contract. What is the substance of the criticism? Is it

successful? What does Nussbaum propose to supplement or replace the legacy of the social contract?

Part IV: Human rights

1. Provide an overview of the notion of human rights. Discuss two or three of the central issues in the current debate about such rights, e.g. do they reflect fundamental interests, or freedom of choice; are they valid globally, or variable across cultures; are they absolute, or may they be violated in certain circumstances? State which view you find most persuasive and explain why.
2. In his "Farewell Address," George Washington warned against permanent alliances with other countries or even meddling in their affairs or playing favorites in commerce. Nonetheless, the U.S. now has military commitments across the globe, and has justified interventions in other nations on humanitarian grounds. On your view, does the U.S. government have a duty to intervene in other countries for humanitarian reasons, and if so, what sort of duty is it? Consider arguments both for and against humanitarian intervention, considering, in particular, the role the idea of human rights plays in these arguments.
3. Describe Nussbaum's "capabilities approach" to human development and its implications for an adequate account of human rights. Does Nussbaum's approach successfully bring to the table aspects of human rights that had been neglected by previous accounts? Explain, using examples of accounts that you take to be lacking in this respect.
4. Is there a human right to environmental quality? Critically assess a contemporary claim that environmental rights have the status of genuine human rights. As part of your critical assessment, consider two of the following: a) the idea that claims to environmental quality should be subsumed under more general rights; b) conflicts between rights to which the affirmation of environmental rights might lead; c) how a regime of environmental rights might be implemented, and likely challenges to its implementation.