

# **General Exam in Political Theory (minor field)**

**Fall 2009**

Please respond to one of the questions in part one, and to both of the questions in part two. The questions in part one are intended to test depth and breadth of knowledge in a particular field of political theory; those in part two are intended to test more detailed knowledge of particular texts. There is not a specific expectation for length (as long as you answer the questions adequately), but we expect that the response to part one will be roughly twice as long as each of the responses to part two. Be sure to take time to think through your answers, plan what you will write, and read over what you have written. Quality is more important than quantity. Good luck!

## **PART ONE: History of Political Thought**

- (1) All political theorizing takes place against the horizon of the past, which has been understood variously as a repository of wisdom to be drawn upon, as a burden to be set aside or overcome, and as a set of empirical resources for projecting the future. Discuss each of these ways of appealing to the past – to history – illustrating each with specific reference to at least two canonical texts. What implications do these understandings of the past have for the practice of political theory in the present? Is one of them more compelling than the others?
- (2) One of the perennial aspirations of political thought has been to ensure that the practice of politics obeys the dictates of reason. Discuss at least three different ways in which the appeal to reason has been used to evaluate political practices and institutions, giving particular attention to the way(s) in which reason (and politics) are defined in each. Illustrate each approach with specific reference to at least two canonical texts. Is one of these conceptions of reason more compelling than the others? Can politics itself be made “reasonable”?

## **PART TWO**

### **Democratic Theory**

What does Rorty mean when he says that democracy is “prior” to philosophy? Is he right? Discuss a 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century thinker who would disagree, and his/her reasons why.

### **Liberalism and Its Critics**

Does Philip Pettit’s theory of republican government offer a critique of liberalism, as Pettit himself claims, or is it best thought of instead as an elaboration of liberal ideals?