

Political Theory Minor Comprehensive Exam for Guo Li

Please answer one of the three questions in each section in essay form.

1. Approaches

- a. Explain the relationship between the concept of “the political” as an object of study and judgment, and the methodologies of political theory, referencing at least three political theorists.
- b. In “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” Quentin Skinner reflects on, among other things, the use and abuse of the great political thinkers by students of political thought. After Skinner, what can and should be said about the indispensability of political theory and the great political theorists?
- d. Explicitly or implicitly, many contemporary political theorists and political scientists – but particularly those with strong (small “d”) democratic political commitments have explored the relationship that Archon Fung highlights between democratic theory and political science. Discuss this relationship with reference to the work of at least three of the following theorists: Fung, Wolin, Tully, Brown, MacIntyre, Shapiro, Grant, and Connolly. Consider, in particular, whether there is *some sense* in which political science *requires* democratic theory (and/or democratic practice) or whether, alternatively, there is only a contingent or conditional relationship between them (e.g., something evident mainly in so-called democratic societies).

2. Thinker: Foucault

- a. According to Foucault, the central issue for political thought has to do with the question of the possibilities and dangers inherent in the use of reason: “How can we exist as rational beings, fortunately committed to practicing a rationality that is unfortunately criss-crossed by intrinsic dangers?” Explain and assess Foucault’s understanding of the ambiguous relationship between reason and power.
- b. “The King is dead. Long live the King.” Yet, in “Truth and Power,” Foucault writes: “We need to cut off the king’s head: in political theory that has still to be done.” What important and indispensable things does Foucault have to tell political theorists about lingering forms of political monism?
- c. In what way is Foucault’s method essential to his politics? Discuss this question with reference to at least two of Foucault’s interpreters.

3. **Topic: Deliberative Democracy**

- a. Explain the key features of Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy. Are there significant differences between Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy and others who identify with this theoretical perspective, such as Dryzek or Gutmann and Thompson? Does anything important depend upon these differences?
- b. It is relatively easy to imagine a deliberative democracy under ideal conditions, when participants are relatively equal in power and seek, in good faith, to influence one another through argument. Such ideal conditions, however, rarely accompany real political problems. Must ideal conditions exist for the theory of deliberative democracy to have relevance to politics? Discuss, with reference to at least two theorists of deliberative democracy.
- c. Deliberative democratic theory has developed mostly within the context of the relatively wealthy electoral democracies, and has been largely devoted to deepening democracy within these systems. But surprising, we find deliberative politics on the increase in some non-democratic contexts—China in particular. What kinds of claims distinguish deliberative democracy theory, and can these claims in any way frame or the democratic potentials (if any) of deliberative politics in non-democratic contexts?