

# TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM

## Politics and Values (VA 466) – Fall 2004



**Due on Monday, November 15 no later than 5:00pm.**

There are two parts to this exam. Part I includes essays related to the writings of major political philosophers. You must answer ONE of these questions. Part II requires you to write a critical review of either the Mueller or D'Souza book (see below). ***I would like each part turned in as a separate paper.*** Each paper should be typed, double-spaced, have normal margins and fonts, include a cover page, and be stapled.

**PART I: Essays on Political Philosophers (Answer ONE)** -- Read the questions carefully and make sure you answer all parts of the question. Quality essays will:

1. Show that you understand and can articulate the arguments of the respective thinkers -- keeping in mind that since this is a take home exam, simple reiteration is only a small part of your grade.
2. Effectively compare, contrast, and critique these works.
3. Offer your own analysis and points of view.

There are no formulaic answers to any of these questions. It is incumbent upon you through your essay to demonstrate that your answer has met the criteria above and deserves a high grade. While these essays ask for your interpretations of major political theories, these are not questions of arbitrary opinion. You need thoughtful and well-constructed arguments to do well on this exam. There is equally no set length, but it would be difficult to answer any of these effectively in less than **3-4 pages**.

**(1)** Locke portrays the 'public interest' in terms of the 'consent of the governed'. Rousseau suggests that the public interest ('general will') has a more objective existence beyond the will of the majority. Which perspective offers better guidance for recognizing whether the actions of government are or are not in the public interest? Use concrete examples from modern day American politics to illustrate your argument.

**(2)** Conservatives, like Edmund Burke, argue that our institutions possess the 'accumulated wisdom of the ages' and thus should not be tampered with lest greater harm be done. Liberals, like J.S. Mill, suggest that people should be free to do anything as long as it does not harm others. Elaborate the logic behind each perspective. Which view do you think offers the best guidance for political decision-making? Use the current debate on same-sex marriage to illustrate your arguments.

**(3)** Marxism is held by many to be a good idea in theory, but not in practice. Is that a fair assessment of Marx? Was it a theoretically and morally valid approach to politics and economics that was perverted by those, like Stalin and Mao, who implemented it? Or is the theory of Marxism morally flawed and practically unworkable, and thus we should not be surprised that it failed? Make sure to fully elaborate the core tenets of Marxism in answering the question.

**(4)** Friedrich Hayek was a materialist and an intellectual pessimist. He championed the superiority of free markets because: (1) they are most likely to provide society with its material wants; and (2) the information processed in markets (via prices) far outstrips man's capacity to understand and direct economies. Examine Hayek's main arguments. Is he correct in his assessment of the superiority of the market? Is accumulated material gain a sufficient gauge of a 'just society'? Is Hayek's approach a recipe for social progress or social disorder? Given your answer, how should America deal with the issue of globalization (which encompasses the spread of free markets in the international economy)?

(5) John Rawls' theory of justice is based on the fundamental principle of 'justice as fairness'. Outline the principles of his theory and use it to examine the United States today. How well does our political, social, and economic system accord with Rawls' theory of justice? Do we fall short? If so, how? What, if anything, can or should be changed to correct this?

**PART II: Critical Book Review** -- Write a critical book review of EITHER John Mueller's *Capitalism, Democracy, and Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery* or Dinesh D'Souza's *What's So Great About America*. As with the essay questions, while there is no set length to your review, a thorough and thoughtful review would run somewhere between 4-8 pages. Your review should consist of two parts:

**(A) SUMMARY:** Summarize the basic arguments of the book. There is no precise format for the summary; how you organize it is a stylistic choice. However, you want to summarize the broad thesis and arguments of the book, not present a chapter-by-chapter recap. The summary, moreover, is intended to support rather than overshadow your critique. It should not, therefore, take up *more than* half of your review. (NOTE: Even though I am reading your critique and I have read both of these books, write it as if 'the reader' has never read the book.)

**(B) CRITIQUE:** The second part of the review should consist of a critique of the book. To 'critique' is to closely examine the arguments, logic, and evidence that the author presents. The idea here is not *per se* to tear the book apart, but to examine its arguments with a critical eye, articulating both its weak points and its strong points. A valid critique can be either glowingly positive, completely negative, or something in between. Moreover, since both of these books are explicitly dealing with values questions, you need to elaborate why you do or do not agree with the author (or what aspects of his argument you accept, which you reject, etc.). Thus the final element of a successful critique is elaborating your own arguments.