

TAKE HOME MIDTERM EXAM

Politics and Values (VA 466) – Fall 2004



Due on Monday, October 4 (start of class)

Answer **TWO** of the following questions. Your exam should be typed, double-spaced, have normal margins and fonts, include a cover page, and be stapled. Read the questions carefully and make 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.

ESSAY QUESTIONS:

(1) Respond to the following: “The ideological basis of American politics is strikingly narrow. Both Democrats and Republicans agree on the political fundamentals. Our political divisions are just disputes at the margins of a dominant political consensus. We would be much better off if a political party were to emerge that shook up American politics by adopting the tenets of one of the other dominant ideological perspectives. Then we’d finally get things done for the people.” Make sure to illustrate your points with appropriate examples.

(2) Plato and Aristotle offer radically contrasting visions of what the ‘just society’ would look like. One sees man as perfectible with the creation of proper institutions. The other sees individuals and societies as flawed; institutions can only try to guide people towards creating the ‘good life’. What are their respective visions of a ‘just society’? Which offers the more useful vision for constructing government? Why?

(3) Law and government are fundamentally based on ethics, morals, and values. Authors such as Augustine and Aquinas argue that God is the source of values and hence law. Yet such an ethical construction creates practical difficulties (i.e., translating religious principle into law without becoming the Taliban) and grates against our modern, secular beliefs. If the core principles of law that structure our society do not come from religion, however, from where do they derive? What is our moral and ethical basis for constructing laws? If religion is the source of laws, how can we maintain a reasonable separation of church and state?

(4) Machiavelli makes a strong argument for the necessity of leaders acting amorally in order to achieve moral ends. Outline the arguments of Machiavelli and make an argument for the ‘morality of amorality’, using specific instances from history or current events to illustrate your points.

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(5) Both Hobbes and Locke portray political systems in terms of a 'social contract'. What is the 'social contract' and how does it work? Compare and contrast the different constructions of this idea. What precedes the social contract? Why do men enter into it? Who is 'sovereign'? What are the 'terms' of the contract? Under what conditions can it be broken and by whom? Which of these different viewpoints offers the proper conception of the social contract? Finally, do you think that the modern American political system still fits this 'contractualist' model? Why or why not?

(6) Assume it is 2006 and we have successfully established a democratically elected government in Iraq. But the Iraqis still have a long way to go in fortifying their democratic system. Which of the authors that we have covered in class would you have the new Iraqi leaders read? (You must include *at least* two authors, but may include more.) What do these authors have to say about creating a new government? Why would these readings (either singularly or collectively) provide a sound foundation for constructing a free, stable, and democratic political system?

NOTE: In all honesty, this is by far the hardest of the six questions.