Preliminary Examination in Political Theory
Fall, 2013

Instructions: Write an essay of about 2500 words in response to one question from each of the following three sections. Your essays should be responsive to the questions and demonstrate your understanding of the most relevant literature in the subfield that has addressed these questions. While you will be expected to demonstrate some breadth in your answers, by citing a variety of appropriate sources, you should refrain from providing extensive bibliographies that merely mention key writings without adequate discussion of the substance of these writings. You should use APSA-style citations (last name of author, year of publication, and relevant pages). Your three essays should be submitted to Linda at lpicke@ku.edu by 5pm on Tuesday, Sept. 24. You may omit your list of all references in your APSA-style citations at that time, but must then provide Linda with a complete list of all work cited within 48 hours of the exam.

General

1. Social contract theory/doctrine has had a long history in political theory, beginning with the Greek sophists and extending to classical liberalism and several of its derivative schools of political thought. Discuss the main formulations of social contract theory/doctrine and the way these formulations have influenced scholarly understandings of politics. Discuss as well at least one criticism in the political-philosophical tradition of the social contract approach. What have been the strengths and weakness of social contract approaches?

2. Leo Strauss argued that political philosophy emerges when we consciously and articulately consider the characteristics of the best political regime and that Aristotle's regime typology has greatly influenced subsequent theorizing on the issue. Have 2500 years of thinking on this question produced any kind of scholarly consensus on the best regime? If so, what is that consensus? If not, what are some possible reasons for the failure to reach consensus? Be sure to discuss the most important thinkers who have given affirmative and negative answers to this question of consensus, the reasons for their answers, and your own assessment.

3. It has been observed — perhaps anachronistically — that "ancient political thought was largely communitarian while modern political thought was (has been) largely liberal." Is this observation, for all its potential anachronisms, accurate? After providing an introduction that summarizes the key differences between the classical and modern traditions in political thought, assess the validity and value of this generalization including leading examples and counter-examples. What have been the gains and losses of working within these two broad orientations to political life? Have there been successful (or at least analytically or practically helpful) efforts to synthesize the two?

4. Is political philosophy a Wissenschaft (specifically: Geisteswissenschaft) in the classical (German) sense of that term? Yes or no, how or how not, why or why not? Justify your answer with due attention to primary and secondary sources in the field.
**Justice and violence**

1. John Rawls' seminal work, *A Theory of Justice*, has spawned a huge literature concerning the just distribution of social goods. Why is his work so highly regarded? Or has it merely served as a foil for others to criticize and generate alternatives? Put another way, what in Rawls' theory has survived and what has been supplanted by better understandings of justice?

2. What is the relevance of spatial theory for questions of torture and questions of democracy. Exploit the differences and similarities of at least three spatial theorists to answer the question. Compare and contrast with at least one other approach to the question of torture and of democratic rule.

3. Imagine that you have just gotten a job teaching in a good liberal arts college and have been told that you should develop a new course: Violent and nonviolent responses to injustice. Develop and defend the essential readings on your syllabus. How would you convince your students that this will be the best course they have ever taken?

4. While Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* has spawned a huge literature on just distribution, it is not clear that he has had much to say about the use of violence as a just or unjust response to enduring injustices. To what extent and in what ways have current scholarly work on violence been stimulated by Rawls’ work in *A Theory of Justice* and his subsequent writings – both by things he explicitly claimed and by matters that remained either implicit or unaddressed in his writings. Have the most important advances in our understanding of violence occurred outside the liberal tradition in which Rawls worked? Put another way, are there certain elements in the liberal tradition that help us understand recourses to violence or that deflect us away from serious consideration of the uses of violence?

**Epistemology**

1. Discuss the link between the Perestroika movement in political science and postmodernism. Beyond describing the key elements of these stances and how they challenge dominant approaches in political science, provide an assessment or how they have furthered and hindered scholarship. Your essay should provide examples of the best (and worst) works in these traditions and how these works have been received by professionals in the discipline.

2. What is constructivism? What are the best formulations, defenses, and examples of work in this tradition? What are the strengths and difficulties of doing political theory using this approach?

3. Consider any three major thinkers in the tradition of political philosophy extending from the fifth century BCE to 2013CE. What is the relationship between what these three thinkers claim to know on the one hand and their diagnosis and prescriptions concerning
the human predicament (with regard to political life) on the other hand? Compare and contrast.

4. Establish what was the background and what was at stake to what Benjamin Barber in the APSR’s centennial edition (in 2006) called the “Wolin-Strauss Dust-up of 1963”. How is engaging that debate relevant to the position of political theory vis-a-vis political science today? Or is it not relevant and therefore should it be left to the dustbin of intellectual history?