

Political Theory
Comprehensive Examination
Spring 2018

(Morning)

Discuss one (1) of the following questions. You will have approximately three hours to write your answer. Your essay should be comprehensive and detailed, but also well-focused and addressed to the question at hand.

1. John Rawls argues that an acceptable theory of justice must aim to ensure that the distribution of social goods and opportunities is not determined by the distribution of natural endowments (such as talents and interests) or social endowments (such as wealth and social position). These endowments should not determine a person's life chances because, Rawls argues, they are distributed through a morally arbitrary natural lottery. Discuss and evaluate this argument. Does Rawls mean to suggest that the distribution of natural goods, such as talents, is itself unjust? If not, where is the injustice located?
2. Robert Nozick argues that the use of an original position procedure for assigning grades would predictably fail to assign grades to the persons meriting those grades. This example, Nozick claims, illustrates the fallibility of an approach to justice that fails to ground its account of just distribution in historical entitlements. Evaluate Nozick's claim. How does Rawls justify the claim that the original position is a fair procedure for choosing principles of justice? Would this argument justify employing an original position procedure to assign grades? What would a Rawlsian response to Nozick reveal about the structure of justification in Rawls' theory?