

Columbia University Department of Political Science

**Written Qualifying Examination in Political Theory
August 2017**

Instructions

All students should answer **one** question from Part I of this examination.

For the **minor**, students should also answer **one** question from **any other** part of this examination (Part II, III, or IV).

For the **major**, students should answer **two** additional questions, one each from **any two** additional parts of this examination (e.g. one question from Part II and one from Part IV).

You should incorporate into your answers discussion of the theories you deem most relevant to the question. Make sure, however, to answer the question directly as well as you are able; do not simply offer a literature review.

Part I Core

1. Does methodological individualism necessarily generate a commitment to individual liberty? Discuss with reference to three modern thinkers (16th - early 20th c.).
2. In order to understand a text from the history of political thought, must one determine the truth or falsity of the arguments it contains?
3. "The reason why there are many different constitutions is to be found in the fact that every city has many different parts." Discuss this statement by Aristotle and reflect on whether it differs fundamentally from contemporary understandings of the constitution.

Part II Justice, Rights, and Law

4. According to Marx it makes no sense to judge a socio-political system in terms of justice as impartiality. Explain why and contrast this view with contemporary theories of justice.
5. Does sovereignty entail the right to decide whether, when, and where persons can move across the borders of a state?
6. Does the principle of the rule of law have discrete normative content, or is it an empty formalism that amplifies the existing ideological content of any given regime?

Part III Constitutionalism and Democracy

7. How do the institutions that organize interactions between states affect the institutions that organize the interactions of individuals within states?
8. Empirical studies often suggest that the majority of voters lack basic knowledge about how their political institutions work and/or about the candidates and parties they are voting into office. How far does this finding undermine the case for democracy?
9. Populism is based on the notion that 'the people' are one; that divisions among them are not genuine conflicts of interests but are merely self-serving factions; and that the people will be best looked after by a single non-political leadership that will put their interest first. Discuss these ideas in light of modern and contemporary conceptions of the political community.

Part IV Ideology and Identity`

10. "The legitimacy of a regime can refer to its 'right to rule' and to its subjects' belief in its right to rule. Because it oscillates between these two meanings, the concept of legitimacy is at best unstable and at worst incoherent." Discuss.
11. Reflect on Arendt's problem of "how it is possible to live without belonging to any polity."
12. Are there certain individuals or groups of individuals within any given polity whose opinions regarding the pressing policy questions of the day should be given special priority in public debate and decision-making?