

Columbia University Department of Political Science
Written Qualifying Examination in Political Theory
August 2019

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. “It is accepted as democratic when public offices are allocated by lot; and as oligarchic when they are filled by election” – discuss this definition by Aristotle also in the light of more recent conceptions of the democratic selection.
2. Hume writes that “Polybius justly esteems the pecuniary influence of the senate and the censors to be one of the regular and constitutional weights, which preserved the balance of the Roman government.” Discuss.
3. Discuss critically ways in which any three of the following authors use social contract theory: Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant, and Rawls.

Part II Justice, Rights, and Law

4. What in your opinion are (some of) the things that no one should be able to buy for money?
5. What is the proper scope of justice: the national state, the global/internal order, regional authorities or spheres within states?
6. Are there forms of injustice that cannot, or should not, be expressed using the discourse of rights?

Part III Constitutionalism and Democracy

7. Democracy entails majority rule. Discuss referring to three authors who have addressed the issue of the role and legitimacy of majority rule and the problem of the tyranny of the majority.
8. In recent years, democratic theorists have engaged in a heated debate over whether “illiberal democracy” is a contradiction in terms, a coherent conceptual innovation, an increasingly prominent regime type, and/or a pathology to which democracies occasionally succumb. Adjudicate this debate.
9. Would democracy benefit if representatives deliberated and voted behind closed doors to prevent lobbyists and their employers from monitoring their behavior?

Part IV Citizenship, Identity, and Power

10. Given the existence of different groups and social identities in society, deep pluralism, and deep disagreement over politically salient issues is universalism a myth and is relativism unavoidable?
11. Can one tolerate only what one dislikes?
12. Compare and contrast the views of three of the following on the concept of power: Arendt, Foucault, Lukes, Habermas or Weber.