

## Political Theory Comprehensive Exam, March 16, 2016

Answer one question from each of the three parts of the exam. You have 4 hours in which to complete the exam, not including breaks.

### I. Approaches to Political Theory

- a. Answers to the questions “What is political theory?” and “What should political theory accomplish?” depends crucially on answers to the question “What is politics?” or, alternatively, “What is the political?” Discuss the relationship between political theory and “the political” with reference to at least three political thinkers.
- b. What place should political theory have within political science? In particular, what is the proper relationship (if any) between normative and/or critical political thought and empirical political science? Discuss, with reference to at least three political thinkers.
- c. Alasdair MacIntyre makes a bold claim about “The Indispensability of political theory.” Explain the gist of MacIntyre’s claim and assess its validity and significance with reference to the ideas of at least two others thinkers on your list.

### 2. Thinker: Aristotle

- a. Concerned with the place of reflection under the constraints of politics, many strains of contemporary political theory now advocate “practical philosophy,” “practical wisdom,” or sometimes simply “judgment.” Aristotle’s conception of *phronesis* is the earliest statement of this ethos within political theory, and continues to inspire. Discuss Aristotle’s conception of *phronesis* in light of these more contemporary views of the place of political thought within political life. Include at least three of Aristotle’s interlocutors in your discussion.
- b. It is often claimed that there are two Aristotles relevant to political theory: The Aristotle of the *Politics*, and the Aristotle of the *Nichomachean Ethics*. Taking into consideration problems of political judgment—especially, its sources and authority—explain the important differences between these works. Are they reconcilable? Include at least three of Aristotle’s interlocutors in your discussion.
- c. From a contemporary perspective, there are obvious exclusionary and thus undemocratic aspects of Aristotle’s political theory. That said, there have been ongoing debates concerning what, if anything, Aristotle’s political theory can contribute to modern democratic theory and practice? What is your view of this question? Include at least three of Aristotle’s interlocutors in your discussion.

Over —>

**3. Theme: The demos and the boundary problem in democratic theory**

- a. It has often been claimed in democratic theory that the key collective problem that cannot be solved by democratic means is the constitution of the *demos*: before anything can be decided there must be a people who can decide. Do you agree or disagree with this claim? Discuss at least three thinkers in your answer.
- b. Many contemporary democratic theorists are resurrecting an old principle of inclusion, first stated in the Justinian Code: "What touches all must be decided by all" (*Quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus approbetur*). What are the arguments for and against the all-affected interests principle within democratic theory, and what are the alternatives? Discuss at least three thinkers in your answer.
- c. What if anything remains compelling in Robert Dahl's approach in *After the Revolution* to the question of "What People?" when he considered the democratic notion of rule by the people? Discuss Dahl's views as well as those of at least two other thinkers in your answer.