My principal career objective is to obtain a PhD in political theory and to work at a good university in the United States or Poland.

During the first years of my academic studies, I was mostly interested in political philosophy and, especially, classical German political thought (Kant, Fichte, Hegel). Quite soon, I learned some analytical philosophy and became familiar with American research on normative aspects of social institutions. This experience turned me towards more formal approaches. I studied works of, among others, John Rawls, Kenneth Arrow, John Harsanyi, and Amartya Sen. Consequently, I came across game theory, decision theory, social choice, and their applications to politics. I completed a number of courses devoted to these theories at the departments of Economics, Philosophy, and Sociology. My most serious contact with analytical political science took place during the Summer School in Political Science. At the School, I took courses with Professors Jack Knight, Peter Ordeshook, and Tom Schwartz. I feel, however, that, in order to acquire proper tools for my substantive interests in political theory, I need to learn more formal methods. I am currently preparing to these future studies by upgrading my mathematical background.

I intend to study both descriptive and normative models within formal theory. However, my strongest interests are in normative issues, as compatible with my devotion to classical questions of political philosophy. I believe that institutional design has fundamental ethical relevance and should be analyzed with game theoretical tools. I became disappointed with general explanations of constitutional design and institutional maintenance in the spirit of contractarianism (e.g., Rawls and Harsanyi’s approaches to justice). I consider coordination and insurance games to be better tools for modeling the evolution of social norms. I am, therefore, more convinced to ideas of Douglas North, Thomas Schelling, and Russell Hardin on institutional change. Recently, I also became more interested in problems of local justice and games of fair division than in abstract principles of justice. In my MA thesis, I applied decision theory to the choice behind the “veil of ignorance.” My thesis was intended as a critical work on Rawls and Harsanyi’s ideas on designing social institutions.

My decision to apply to Columbia was strongly affected by the presence of Professor Elster at your Department. I am especially interested in the field of local justice of which Professor Elster is founder. During my undergraduate studies and the preparation of my thesis, I spent a lot of time on studying his work. I also look forward to studying game theory with Professors Cameron and Epstein.

Monika Nalepa
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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I intend to study both descriptive and normative models within formal theory. Normative issues, are compatible with my philosophical background. But I believe that problems of institutional design should be analyzed with game theoretical tools. The same concerns issues of representing voters’ preferences. I became disappointed with general explanations of institutional maintenance and preference representation in the spirit of contractarianism (e.g., Rawls and Harsanyi’s approaches to justice). I consider coordination games and games with incomplete information to be better tools for modeling the evolution of social norms. I am, therefore, more convinced to ideas of Peter Ordeshook and Russell Hardin on constitutional design. Recently, I also became more interested in problems of local justice and games of fair division than in abstract principles of justice. My thesis was intended as a critical work on Rawls and Harsanyi’s ideas on designing social institutions.

Your program offers a comprehensive set of courses in formal theory and political theory and is a home for many scholars whom I know personally or with whose work I have studied in my undergraduate or graduate courses.

I have completed a course with Professor Ordeshook at the International Summer School in Political Science. It was the most serious acquaintance of mine with formal theory applied to politics and it increased my interest in political games with incomplete information and problems of preference representation (how is it better for the voter to be pivotal, as member of the electorate, or through his representative in the legislature). After studying Professor Ordeshook’s “A Political Theory Primer” and “Game Theory and Political Theory” I have read some of the works he wrote with Professor McKelvey on rational expectations in Elections and multidimensional voting models. I look forward to studying Formal Theory with Professor McKelvey and Social Choice with Professor Plott.

I believe that your Department is one of the best places to develop my interests.

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I find your program in Political Economy extremely interesting because it promises an extensive use of game theory and other mathematical models of political processes. The intersection of politics and economics requires using methods which I am particularly devoted to. I would look forward to studying Formal Political Analysis or Economics and Public Policy with Professors Romer, Rosenthal, Lewis, and Fey.

Monika Nalepa