

Brooklyn Institute for Social Research
Fall 2018, Tuesdays 6:00-9:00 pm
Chapterhouse, 620 S 9th Street, Philadelphia, PA
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What is Democracy?

The definition of democracy seems simple—rule of the people. But what a democracy looks like—and what it *should* look like—is a widely contested, and perennially relevant, question. Is it strictly a matter of institutions, of the right to vote and to representation? What bearing do social and economic conditions have on democracy conceptually and as a functioning reality? Are capitalism and private property the very bedrock of democracy, or are they in some fundamental sense its antagonists? How is a democracy to be constituted in a modern nation state? How are the rights of minorities to be balanced with the prerogatives of the majority? Is the United States meaningfully democratic—and, if not, how might it become so?

This course turns to some key works in modern democratic theory in an attempt to come to a critical understanding of democracy as it's currently said to exist. In it we'll read classical and modern authors, including Aristotle, Rousseau, and Tocqueville, and a range of contemporary thinkers—from the conservative (Joseph Schumpeter) to the liberal (Robert Dahl, John Dewey) to the radical (Sheldon Wolin, Chantal Mouffe). As we proceed, we'll ask and hope to answer: what are the prerequisites for a political regime to be considered democratic? How do democratic procedures and institutions relate to democracy as a normative ideal? And what is the relationship between the (related but not identical) philosophies of democracy and liberalism?

Format and Requirements

This course is a seminar! The only basic requirements are completing the reading assignments, coming to our meetings, and participating in our discussion.

I have assigned a set of readings intended to be manageable for people who are not full-time students; we aim for less than 100 pages per week. Some of them will be more difficult than others, but don't let that scare you off! Instead, make a note and post your thoughts and questions on our Google Group (below), and we will work through these parts together in class. I will direct the discussion, and do my best to answer your questions, but this class is a collaborative effort and it will only benefit from your ongoing participation and engagement.

All readings can be downloaded from the BISR Intro to Democratic Theory folder.

I have set up a class Google group, BISRDemocraticTheory, that we can use for communication. Each week, I will use this feature to post questions and things to pay attention to in the readings. These will be meant as reading guides, and you do not have to respond to any of the questions I pose. But don't shy away from posting your own excerpts from the readings—anything you find interesting, problematic, or just difficult to wrap your mind around! Also feel free to ask questions and to respond to each other's posts. During our meetings, we will use these conversations as launching points or incorporate them into our discussion.

Feel free to email me if you would like to share any thoughts, comments, questions, or would like suggestions for additional readings.

Course Schedule

Session I, November 27: **What is Democracy? Some Classic Views**

Aristotle, *Politics*, pp. 77-85, 106-113, 176-184

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract*, pp. 147-150, 156-159, 179-180, 205-207

Publius, *The Federalist*, No. 10 (pp. 42-49), No. 51 (pp. 267-272), No. 63 (pp. 325-332)

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 235-242, 248-249, 479-488

Session II, December 4: **Visions of Democracy: Elite, Pluralist, Participatory**

Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, pp. 250-273 (optional: pp. 284-302)

Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory*, pp. 133-135, 145-151

Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, pp. 1-44

Session III, December 11: **Deliberation and Power in the Public Sphere**

John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, pp. 143-184

Jurgen Habermas, "Three Normative Models of Democracy", pp. 21-30

Iris Marion Young, "Communication and the Other", pp. 120-135

Chantal Mouffe, "Democracy, Power, and 'The Political'", pp. 17-35

Session IV, December 18: **The Boundaries of the Democratic Community**

Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy", pp. 31-45

Chantal Mouffe, "Feminism, Citizenship, and Radical Democratic Politics", pp. 369-384

Jan-Werner Muller, "The People Must be Extracted from within the People: Reflections on Populism", pp. 483-493

Juliet Hooker, "Black Lives Matter and the Paradoxes of U.S. Black Politics: From Democratic Sacrifice to Democratic Repair", pp. 449-469

Elizabeth Anderson, "Democratic Ideals and Segregation", pp. 89-111 (optional)