

Political Science 306
Contemporary Democratic Theory
Peter Breiner

Required Books

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings* (Hackett)

James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (Penguin)

Robert Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (Yale)

Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy* (Princeton University Press)

Tony Judt, *Ill Fares the Land* (Penguin)

Amy Chua, *World on Fire* (Anchor)

In addition, there will be a reading packet which I will have run off by Velocity Printers and will be available at Mary Jane Books on Western and Quail.

This course focuses on modern theories of democracy. However, even contemporary democratic theories have to resolve two questions that go all the way back to the original Greek definition of democracy as popular power or popular rule: first, how much direct self-government is necessary for a political community to be called a democracy; and second and how much equality of status, wealth, political goods are required for citizens to have equal membership and equal influence on decision-making? From these questions a number of others follow. Is the equality guaranteed to all citizens in a democracy satisfied if we have nominal voting rights, representation, and protections in our private pursuits; or must political equality in addition allow for active participation in deliberating upon and influencing the outcome of legislation? Does democracy require the egalitarian distribution of social and economic goods or should such distributions not be part of democratic decision-making? Is democracy reconcilable with large nations? Is the struggle for political equality finished? What should the relation be between democracy and the economy?

We will tackle these questions by reading some of the major arguments in both classical and contemporary democratic theory. First we will read two of the classical theorists of democracy: Rousseau and Madison. Rousseau famously argues that the only legitimate republic is one in which the citizens directly give themselves the laws that they will obey. Madison by contrast argues that the job of a republic is to balance factions against one another and provide ways to filter out the common passions of the public by putting barriers to direct popular self-rule in the name of protecting private liberty.

We will then discuss a number of contemporary theories that take up the questions raised by the Rousseau-Madison debate. On the one side, we will read a number of political theorists who argue that democracy and the rule of elites can be made compatible. We will then examine number of “models” that have been proposed to deepen democracy in modern societies: among

them democratic procedures that render citizens more effectual in influencing decisions; economic democracy, deliberative forms of democracy, and mass protest (which in a sense isn't a model at all).

Finally, we will examine series of issues central to contemporary debates over democracy:

1) whether the capitalist market is compatible with democratic citizenship; 2) what is the meaning of the influence of finance and banking for our understanding of democracy; 3) whether or to what degree democracy requires a welfare state providing a wide array of public goods 4) whether the political parties in the US further or diminish inequality of income and wealth and whether the majority vote their interests on this matter 5) whether the theory of "democratization" applied to foreign countries that have overcome authoritarian rule turns out to make good on its promises; 3) whether the American constitution is sufficiently democratic, in particular whether it allows its citizens to hold politicians accountable and whether it is a model worthy of being followed by other polities. Throughout this course you will be asked to engage with these arguments--to analyze them, to find their strengths and weaknesses, to play them off one another, and ultimately deploy them to forge your own theory of democracy.

Course Requirements

The assignments for this course will be the following:

- 1) A 4-6 page essay on Rousseau and Madison due on **Monday, September 26.**
- 2) A take-home midterm on Schumpeter, Dahl and Walzer and Pateman focusing on democratic elitism and its critics, Dahl's right to a democratic procedure, and the theorists of economic democracy and deliberative democracy on **Monday October 24.**
- 3) A take-home final essay exam on the following issues in democratic theory: democracy and protest; the tension between democracy and markets; the question of whether democracy requires a welfare state; the question of whether political parties make a difference on income inequality; the adequacy of the concept of democratization; and problems of the American Constitution. The take-home exam will be handed out the last day of class. Topics will be handed out at least a week in advance, except in the case of the final.
- 4) I may ask for short one page response papers to stimulate discussion. There is no make-up on these papers.

Grading: Each large assignments will count for roughly 30% of the grade while 10% of the grade will be allotted to the response papers and participation. I take improvement into account. You will be graded not just on your knowledge of the arguments but on your analytical skill in taking them apart. Good writing will be expected, and poor writing will obviously effect your grade negatively. I will put some instructions on e-reserve on writing good political theory papers.

Class attendance: I should stress that you are expected to attend class. If you do not attend for three sessions your grade will go down by a half. Each additional day will have the same result.

E-reserve: I will put the syllabus, assignments, guides to writing, and possible recommended

readings on e-reserve. The password will be: pos306.

Humanities Requirement: This course meets the Humanities Requirement of the General Education Category in the following ways: It addresses central topics in political philosophy, understands theories in their cultural and historical contexts, promotes an ability to assess the strengths and weaknesses of arguments and examines the assumptions underlying both present and canonical works in political philosophy. It ultimately involves the interpretation of texts and arguments.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism means to pass off someone else's work as your own. Please be warned that should I find you have plagiarized, you will receive an immediate E in the course and further actions will be taken including sending your case before a university committee.

Office Hours

Uptown: M, W, 10:20-11:20 am and by appt. in Humanities B-16. I will always be happy to meet with you after class as well. (If these times are difficult to make you are welcome to visit me in my downtown office, Milne 204, Rockefeller College. Since this is my main office, it will often be easier to meet there for an extended discussion). Downtown office hours: Mon 2-4 and Wed 2-4 in Milne 204. Office phone in Milne 204: 442-5277. Phone in Humanities B-16: 442-3112. E-mail: breiner@albany.edu

Course Outline

- I. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Legitimacy, Self-interest, and Popular Sovereignty
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Bks I, II, III, IV, chs. 1, 2 in *Basic Political Writings*
Paper on Rousseau and Madison due in class September 26th.
- II. James Madison, Self-Interest, Equilibrium, and Republicanism
James Madison, *Federalist Papers*, no. 10, 48, 49, 51 (read 10 and 51 very carefully).
Editorials Madison wrote after the ratification of the U.S. constitution (in readings).
- III. Democracy as Method and the Elitist Theory of Democracy
A. Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, chs. 20-23 (in readings).
B. Robert Dahl, *Preface to Democratic Theory*, "The American Hybrid" (in readings)
- IV. The Criticism of Elitist Democratic Theory
Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Chapter 1, "Recent Theories of Democracy" (in readings)
Robert Dahl, "Pluralism Revisited" *Comparative Politics* 10, 2 (1978) (in readings)
- V. The Attempt to Recover a More Democratic Polyarchy—A Right to a Democratic

Procedure

Robert Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, chapters 2, 6, 8*, 9, 12, 15 (pp. 220-224), 16, 23* (*read with special care.)

VI. Economic Democracy

Michael Walzer, "Property/Power" from *Spheres of Justice* (in readings).

Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Chapter 2, "Participatory Theory" (in readings)

Reread, Robert Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics*, pp. 328-332.

VII. Deliberative Democracy

Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere" (in readings)

Joshua Cohen "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy (in readings)

Take-home midterm essay on debate over elite theory, Dahl's right to democratic procedure within polyarchy, workplace democracy and deliberative democracy due October 24th.

VIII. Democracy, Representation, and Protest.

David Beetham, "Political Participation, Mass Protest and Representative Democracy," *Parliamentary Affairs*, 2003: 597-609 (in readings).

Issues in Democratic Theory

IX. Issues in Democratic Theory I: Democratic Politics vs. Markets.

A. The priority of the market over democracy:

Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* chs. 1, 2 (in readings).

Friedrich von Hayek, "'Social' and Distributive Justice" (in readings)

B. The imprisonment of democracy by the market.

Charles Lindblom, "The Privileged Position of Business" and "Consequences for Polyarchy" from *Politics and Markets* (in readings).

C. Too big to fail? Finance and Democracy.

John Lanchester, *IOU: Why Everyone Owes and No One Pays* (selection in readings)

Joseph Stiglitz, *Freefall* (selection in readings)

X. Issues in Democratic Theory II: Democracy and the Welfare State

A. Democracy and public goods: the case of medical care.

Kenneth Arrow, "Uncertainty and the Welfare Economics of Medical Care," *American Economic Review*, 53,5, 1963: 941-973

T. R. Reid, "Five Myths About Health Care" *Washington Post*, 8/21/2009 (in readings)

B. A social democratic defense of the welfare state vs. neo-liberalism.

Tony Judt, *Ill Fares the Land* (entire)
Reread Friedman and Hayek above, section IX/A.

- XI. Issues in Democratic Theory III: Income Inequality and Democracy?
Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy* (sections to be announced)
- XII. Issues in Democratic Theory IV: Who Benefits from “Democratization.”
Amy Chua, *World on Fire*, pp. 1-76; 127-176; 189-198; 259-294.
- XIII. Issues in Democratic Theory V: Is the American Constitution Sufficiently Democratic?
Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution* Chs. 3 (“The Constitution as Model”), 5 (“How Well Does the Constitution Perform”) (in readings).
Recommended: ch. 4 (“Electing a President”).

Take home final due one week from last day of class. Questions handed out on last day.