

Code of course: BTKD-FIL-POL-9
Title of course: Democratic Theory: History, Concepts, and Problems
Lecturer: Attila Mráz
ATTENTION! This course will take place on the following dates and times, in a <u>Blockseminar</u> format: September 14th, 16th, 21st and 23rd: 9:30am-3pm, September 24th: 9:30am-12.45pm. Please get in touch with the instructor before the first session if you want to enroll. General aim of the course: This course offers a PhD-level survey of some of the historically most salient and currently most discussed problems, concepts and ideals of philosophical democratic theory. A historical point of departure will allow us to approach contemporary questions with historical awareness too. We will first engage with the concept and challenges to democracy in ancient political philosophy, engaging with their contemporary repercussions too. We then proceed to discuss the ideals and characteristic normative challenges to the modern concept and ideals of democracy, including representation and party democracy. Then we will reflect on the relationship between democracy and capitalism, and finally ask what is the proper role of political conflicts in democracy, and how far and what kinds of political conflict should be tolerated in a democratic regime. Throughout the course, we will engage with the twin challenges of populism vs. elitism / technocratic rule—a theme that overarches the history of philosophical thinking about democracy in different ages. Content of the course: Topics covered will include: • What is democracy? What is the difference between ancient and contemporary conceptualizations? • How should we evaluate the participation of uneducated, uninformed, irrational citizens in political deliberation and decision-making? • What is popular sovereignty and how can it be realized, if at all, in a representative democracy • What is the proper role of political parties in democratic politics? • Is democracy about seeking consensus or accentuating political conflicts? What is the proper place of competition in democratic politics? • What is the role of the opposition in a democracy? • What is populism, and how is it related to political representation and competitive politics? • When can antidemocratic actors be excluded from political decision-making to defend democracy, if at all? Some of these topics will cover more than one class. <u>I. The rule of the masses: an ancient problem & modern responses</u> 1. What is democracy? (Aristotle) Aristotle, <i>Politics</i>, Book III, chapters 6–13. 2. The early epistocratic challenge to democracy (Plato) Plato, <i>Republic</i>, Book VIII, 555b–569c

3. Meeting the epistocratic challenge? (Landemore)

Hélène Landemore, *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press. Ch. 1: “The Maze and the Masses”, pp. 1-26; Ch. 8: “Political Cognitivism: A Defense”, pp. 208-231.

II. Modern democracy: it is really the people who (should) rule?

4. Popular sovereignty (Rousseau)

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, I.6-8, II.1, II.3-4.

5. Representative government, or the aristocratic twist (Manin)

Bernard Manin (1997). *The Principles of Representative Government*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP. Ch. 4: “A Democratic Aristocracy”, pp. 132-160.

6. Technocratic elitism (Schumpeter)

Joseph A. Schumpeter (1992). *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. London: Routledge. Chs XXI, XXII, XXIII: pp. 250–302.

III. Democracy and power relations

7. Deliberation and democratic legitimacy (Habermas)

Jürgen Habermas (1994). Three normative models of democracy. *Constellations* 1 (1):1-10.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8675.1994.tb00001.x>

8. Democracy and material power (Marx)

Karl Marx (1852) *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*.
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>

IV. Containing and managing political conflict

9. Agonism and conflict contained (Mouffe)

Chantal Mouffe (1999). Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism? *Social Research*, 66(3), 745–758.

Chantal Mouffe (2016). Democratic Politics and Conflict: An Agonistic Approach. *Política Común*, 9.
<https://doi.org/10.3998/pc.12322227.0009.011>

10. Legitimate opposition (Waldron)

Jeremy Waldron. (2016) The Principle of Loyal Opposition. In *Political Political Theory*. Cambridge, MA & London, UK: Harvard UP. pp. 93-124.

11. Populism and constructive representation (Laclau)

Ernesto Laclau (2007). *On Populist Reason*. London & New York: Verso. Ch. I: “Populism: Ambiguities and Paradoxes”, pp. 3-20.

Jan-Werner Müller. (2016). *What is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Introduction: “Is Everyone a Populist?”, pp. 1-7.

12. Militant democracy and democratic backsliding (Kirshner, Wolkenstein)

Alexander S. Kirshner (2014). *A Theory of Militant Democracy: The Ethics of Combatting Political Extremism*. New Haven, CT & London, UK: Yale University Press. “Introduction”, pp. 1–25.

Fabio Wolkenstein. (2023). What Is Democratic Backsliding? *Constellations* 30(3): 261–75. doi:[10.1111/1467-8675.12627](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12627).

Alexandru Volacu (2021). Should we revive the ancient practice of ostracism? *Justice Everywhere Blog*, 3 May 2021, <https://justice-everywhere.org/general/should-we-revive-the-ancient-practice-of-ostracism/>

V. Paper project presentations

13-14. Presentations of students’ paper projects; group discussion and feedback on the projects.

Grading criteria, specific requirements:

- Active participation in class
- Preparing questions related to the readings before class
- A presentation of a short research project related to the course, based on a short topic proposal developed in consultation with (and approved by) the instructor
- A term paper of ca. 2500 words, based on the presentation.
- Terms papers should be submitted together with a “**Declaration on the use of artificial intelligence**” (Appendix 1 of the Dean’s decree on the regulation of the use of artificial intelligence by students, No. II/2025 (XII.12.)). The use of artificial intelligence is restricted by said decree, as well as by the Rector’s decree no. 4/2025. (X. 28.). Term papers submitted without a declaration attached cannot be graded. Term papers submitted with an inaccurately completed declaration receive a fail grade. The use of artificial intelligence is permitted only in service of a very limited set of technically feasible aims, and only in highly specific ways (e.g., language checking, brainstorming). The instructor is happy to provide guidance if any uncertainty arises regarding permissible uses.

Required readings:

See above.

Suggested further reading:

See also above.

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