Winter 2020

Democratic Theory

Lecturer: János Kis

Office: Faculty Tower 907
Phone: 327-3078
E-mail: kisjan@ceu.hu

Office hours:
Tuesday 10-12 am
Thursday 10-12 am.

Course Description

This is an advanced course in the normative theory of democracy. The core question of normative political theories is, States claim to have a right to rule—can this claim be justified? The anarchist response is, No, there is no such a thing as a justified right to rule. Opponents of the anarchist thesis hold that the claim of states to a right to rule can be justified, and so states can have legitimate authority, at least under certain conditions. Democratic theory insists that the democratic nature of political rule is part of the necessary conditions of the legitimacy of political authority. This course is dedicated to the examination of this claim. We will address the problem of what the claim to a right to rule amounts to, what must be the case for that claim to be justified, what role democracy plays in the justification, and what conception of democracy can fulfill that justificatory role. We will also face the issues of the relationship between the normative concept of democracy and the empirical study of democratic systems as well as certain issues of the contemporary crisis of democracy.

There are two types of normative democratic theory. The first identifies the virtues of democracy with its capacity better to promote some independent aims (such as advancing collective well-being, securing justice, protecting human rights, or simply maintaining a peaceful and orderly succession in office). The second starts out from the proposition that democracy as a procedure of taking and carrying out collective decisions has some inherent moral virtue.

The course will consider both types of arguments. We will also examine certain alleged paradoxes of democracy: the paradox of voting, the paradox of recognizing the authority of mistaken official decisions, and the paradox of constitutional review as a democratic device.

Course requirements and evaluation

This is a four-credit elective course for doctoral students in Political Science or Philosophy. MA students can join it upon a discussion with the instructor.

As to the format: there will be alternating seminars and lectures, each topic will typically be introduced by a seminar discussion of a key reading and concluded by a lecture.

The grade will reflect class participation (25%) including at least one seminar presentation based
on a written hand-out (25%), and a 4500-5000 words long final essay to be submitted at the end of the Winter term (50%). Except for the requirement to submit a hand-out, there will be no short assignments.

**Expected learning outcomes**

Deepening the grasp of the ideal of democracy and its role in interpreting the phenomena of the contemporary crisis of democratic systems.
Understanding the nature of arguments in political philosophy and of the way they differ from arguments made in institutional political theory.
Fostering the ability to make such arguments.
Enabling critically to present a philosophical text.

For each seminar, the reading(s) selected for discussion will be announced one week before.

**Week 1**

**Introduction I: The Problem of Legitimacy**

**Introduction II: What is Democracy? Why democracy matters?**

What is a state? Why states have to make legitimacy claims? What are the conditions of legitimacy? Democracy as a legitimacy condition.
The concept of democracy: a “thick” ethical concept. Democracy as an ideal. Ideal and non-ideal theory. Real world democracies and how they are related to the democratic ideal.

Readings:


**PART ONE:**
The Democratic Principle

**Week 2**

**Democracy’s Value**

Is democracy valuable as a means for achieving other valuable aims or is it valuable for its own sake? Why does the intrinsic value of democracy matter? What makes democracy intrinsically valuable?

Readings:
Week 3

**Political equality**

Democracy is claimed to be the instantiation of political equality – but what is political equality?


Week 4

**Popular Sovereignty**

What is popular sovereignty? Is popular sovereignty constitutive of the liberal conception of democracy or do the two conflict with each other?

Readings:


PART TWO:
The Democratic Process
Week 5
Models of Democracy

Political principles need institutions procedures to be realized


Week 6
The Minimalist Conception

Democracy as a means for securing peaceful and regular succession in office. What makes this interpretation interesting?

Readings:


Week 7
The Market Model

The market model of representative democracy. The median voter theorem.

Readings:


Week 8
Preference Aggregation

Indeterminacy of the outcome of aggregation. The constitutive role of procedures and its significance.

Readings:


Week 9
The Deliberative Model

The role of common deliberation in the democratic process. The deliberative model as a way of stating the ideal of democracy.

Readings:


PART THREE:
Liberal Democracy

Week 10
Constitutionalism

C. Brettschneider: “The Value of Democracy”. In Brettschneider: Democratic Rights.

11. Objections to Liberal Democracy I: The Argument from Majority Rule

The claim: constitutional constraints on majority decisions violate political equality.

12. Objections to Liberal Democracy II: The Case Against Judicial Review