Democracy Theory
POL 2010H (F)
Fall 2007, University of Toronto

Time: T 10-12
Location: UC 65

Contact information:

Amit Ron
Office Location: 210 Larkin Building, in the Centre for Ethics (6 Hoskin Avenue).
Email: amit.ron@utoronto.ca
Phone: 416-978-6301
Office Hours: Tu 12-1 or by appointment.

Course Description

The purpose of the seminar is to provide general introduction to the foundations of modern democratic theory and to current issues in it. The seminar seeks to explore the borderlines between political theory and emerging sites and practices of democratic governance.

The seminar is divided to three parts. The first part is a survey of central traditions and school in democratic theory. The second part examines questions related to the Canadian experiment of Citizens’ Assemblies on Electoral Reform and to the substantive recommendations of the Ontario Citizens’ Assembly. Since the referendum on the recommendations of the assembly will take place in the first part of the semester (October 10, 2007), we will devote the first meetings of the semester to this part (even though pedagogically it should proceed the ‘foundations' part). I believe that learning and discussing the recommendations of the Assembly in ‘real time’ is a useful exercise of citizenship. In addition, the unfolding events in Ontario before and after the October referendum can provide a fertile ground for empirical research on a ‘hot’ topic that is on the forefront of democratic theory. The third part of the seminar follows the deliberations of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission and examines the topic from the point of view of democratic theory. The Commission was established by the province of Quebec to examine accommodation practices related to cultural differences. It is co-chaired by Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor. The Commission is planned to carry on public consultation between September and December 2007 and will submit its report on March 31, 2008.
Course Outline and Reading Schedule:

Readings that are marked by an asterisk (*) are required. Additional readings are strongly recommended (at least to skim through) and will be discussed in class.

Many of the readings are available in an electronic format through the library's website. A link to these items is provided in the seminar's CCNET webpage: https://ccnet3.utoronto.ca/20079/po12010hf/

Methods of access to other reading material will be discussed in the first meeting of the class. Also, all readings (that are not in electronic form) are available on short-term loan in the Robarts Library.

Meeting 1 (September 11)
Topics: Introduction.

Citizens’ Assemblies in Canadian Politics

Meeting 2 (September 18)
Topics: The Citizens’ Assembly I: the Design of the Assembly

Readings:

The purpose of the readings is to provide a framework for discussion and evaluation of the institutional design of the Ontario Citizens’ Assembly in comparison to other experiments in citizens’ deliberative participation (note: we will suspend the question of why deliberation is important to meeting 9). The last two items are reports on the work of the Ontario Citizens’ Assembly. In addition to the suggested section, students are encouraged to skim through other parts of the reports.


Meeting 3 (September 25)

Topics: The Citizens’ Assembly II: the Marco-uptake, citizen representatives, the assembly and the referendum.

Readings:

In the previous meeting, we discussed the design of the Assembly itself. The purpose of the readings for this week is to think of the process in its entirety; to reflect upon the question of whether and how citizens’ assemblies can fit into a broader understanding of democratic governance. The three readings that discuss the BC Citizens’ Assembly were selected to provoke thinking about empirical case-studies. I can refer students who are interested in empirical studies to additional studies of the BC Assembly. The Centre for Ethics organized a Public Issues Forum that discussed the role of citizens' assemblies in democratic governance, I recommend watching or listening to the podcast of the event.


* Simone Chambers, “Quantity versus Quality: Dilemmas of Mass Democracy” [this manuscript is available on the seminar's CCNET site].

Meeting 4 (October 2)

Topic: Representation and Electoral Systems.

Short Paper I is Due [research route: article summaries are due].

Readings:

In this meeting, which takes place a week before the referendum, the focus is on the question of the substantive recommendations of the Assembly: how do we compare electoral systems, and which electoral system is best for Ontario? Norris presents different electoral systems and the trade-offs involved in choosing among them, Williams examines electoral systems from the perspective of group representation (and explains why we should be concerned about it), Rehfeld examines and questions the value of geographical representation, and Macpherson argues that electoral systems affect and shape the way parties tame the franchise. Finally, Persson and Tabellin study the empirical relations between electoral rules and economic outcomes. The Centre for Ethics organized a Public Issues Forum that discussed the ethical dimensions of the recommendations of the assembly, I recommend watching or listening to the podcast of the event.

* “One Ballot, Two Votes: Recommendation of the Ontario Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform.” [online]


* Andrew Rehfeld, The Concept of Constituency (Cambridge University Press, 2005), chapters 1, 10 (pp. 3-28, 240-4)


Macpherson, The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy, 64-69 (“the taming of democratic franchise”)

Foundations: Traditions of Theorizing about Democracy

In the following seven meetings, we will follow different traditions of theorizing on democracy. The survey is organized in a loose chronological order according to the order in which they appeared on the stage of Western democratic theory.

Meeting 5 (October 9)

Topics: The Greek and Republican Traditions

Readings:

Dahl and Pettit present stylized histories of the Greek and the Republican visions of democracy. Macpherson discusses the way the republican tradition envisioned a one-class society of small property-owners.


Meeting 6 (October 16)

Topics: Rights, Liberties, the tyranny of the majority and the problem of consensus

Readings:

* This week's readings address the question of the relationship between democracy and rights. Mill and Dahl examine the need to protect public opinion from itself. Rawls examines the way agreement about basic rights emerge out of the need to live in a world with diverse opinions.


Meeting 7 (October 23)

Topic: The Marxist Tradition: Between “Bourgeoisie Democracy” and “True Democracy”

Two reading reports have to be submitted by this date.

Readings

Understanding Marx’s criticism of bourgeois democracy is crucial to the understanding of the critical streams of democratic theory. Nimtz argues that Marx was a leader in the democratic struggles of the 19th century and that his theories have to be understood as part of this struggle (and are useful for our own struggles). In the Manifesto Marx and Engles analyze, in a template form, the nature of capitalism to argue that the struggle for democracy must cut across national borders. Less than seven decades later, Rosa Luxemburg explains to Lenin why democracy is indispensable, even in moments of crisis.


* Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto, sections I, II, and IV (1-21, 31-2) [online]


Meeting 8 (October 30)

Topic: Democracy and Bureaucracy, the early 20th century debate

Short Paper II is Due [research route: initial outline is due].

Readings:

The first part of the Twentieth Century witnessed growth in both in the scope of suffrage and the size of the bureaucratic political machine. Schumpeter and Dewey examine the relationship between bureaucracy and democracy. Schumpeter takes Marx’s idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a point of departure and develops his famous alternative elitist theory of democracy. Dewey argues that the theories and terms through which we understand recent social developments (democratization, industrialization, and bureaucratization) are
inadequate and as a consequence “the new age of human relationships' has no political agencies worthy of it” (p. 109).


**Meeting 9 (November 6)**

**Topic:** Deliberative Democracy, foundations

**Readings:**

In this meeting, we pick up from where we left in the first few meetings of the seminar and discuss the role of argumentation and persuasion in democracy, with two now-classic articulations of the idea of deliberative democracy.


**Meeting 10 (November 13)**

**Topic:** Deliberation and Aggregation, problems and prospects

**Research paper route:** detailed outline is due.

**Readings:**

These two readings explore the debate between aggregative and deliberative conceptions of democracy. Those who are interested in exploring the topic further details can consult the suggested chapters from Mackie.


**Meeting 11** (November 20)

Topic: Deliberative Democracy and the Public Sphere.

Readings:

While earlier theories of democratic deliberation contrasted deliberation and institutions, recent theories examine the ways democratic institutions such as voting and representation can become more deliberative. This is what James Bohman describes as the “coming of age of deliberative democracy.” Scheuerman summarizes the influential argument of Habermas in *Between Facts and Norms* and offer a criticism.


Re-read, Simone Chambers, “Quantity versus Quality: Dilemmas of Mass Democracy” (from week 3).

**Democracy and Cultural Accommodation**

On February 2007, the Government of Quebec established a Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences. Extensive public consultation is planned to take place during the fall of 2007. In the last two meetings of the semester, we will catch up on this debate and discuss the ways in which Democratic Theory can contribute to the framing and understanding of these issues.

**Meeting 12** (November 27)

Topic: Cultural Accommodation – Theory.

Readings:

While Taylor's now-classic essay does not discuss democratic theory directly, it does set the terms of the debate about cultural accommodation (and it will surely affect the way the Commission approaches the question). Benhabib critically examines different perspectives on the question of the accommodation of groups...
(including Taylor's) and examines the ways in which a deliberative theory of democracy can help addressing this question.


**Meeting 13 (December 4)**


Short Paper III is Due.

Readings:

The readings for this week examine, from the perspective of democratic theory, two Canadian practices of cultural accommodation: the once planned Muslim Court of Arbitration, and the Aboriginal Sentencing Circles. In addition, we will read the report of the Commission on Accommodation Practices.


Assignments and Grade Break-down.

I. Attendance and Participation, and reading reports: 20%.

Reading Reports: For five of the meetings throughout the semester, you have to submit a reading report (2 pages, double-spaced). The report has to be submitted in class. The report will be graded for either a ‘pass’ or a ‘fail.’ To receive a ‘pass’ grade, the report has to show that you have read the relevant text and took the assignment seriously.

For the report you have to select one item from the readings for that week (either one chapter from a book or one article). In the report, you have to summarize the main argument. Write the report in such a way that the main argument can be understood by a reader who has not read the piece. Notice that you are not asked to summarize the piece but to identify the main problems or questions that their authors set and the answers they provide. If you wish to do so, you are welcome to add to the summary other kinds of engagement with the argument (criticism, comparison to other pieces, thoughts it provoked, agreements, disagreements, etc.). This assignment has two purposes: to make sure that we are able to discuss the 'big picture' of the argument of each piece, and to initiate a process of reflection (in writing) about the piece.

It is your choice of which five reading reports to submit. However, at least two of them have to be submitted by October 23 (after this date, only three reports will be accepted).

Only one report can be submitted for each meeting (you cannot write two reports on two items for the same weeks). Since the purpose of the report is to promote class participation, late reports or reports from students who miss class will be accepted only in very exceptional circumstances.

Please note that a ‘pass’ grade does not indicate that the content of the summary is satisfactorily accurate but only that the summary testifies of a satisfactory effort to comprehend the readings prior to class discussion.

These reports are part of the participation requirement for the class. For any report not submitted, two points will be taken off the grade for participation (for example, if only three reports are submitted, the grade for attendance and participation would be weighted 16% of the final grade rather than 20%).

II. Students in the seminar can choose one of two routes: submitting a 15-20 pages research paper (80% of the final grade) or submitting three short papers, each 5 pages-long (1st paper 20%, 2nd and 3rd papers 30% each). The short paper option is the default option. Students who want to write a research paper should speak to me to get my approval by September 25. The research paper route is recommended for
doctoral students or for students who come into the seminar with a clear research question that they seek to explore.

1. Research paper route:

   1) Article Summaries (15%): for the meeting of October 2nd, identify five articles from scholarly journal or book chapters (published in the last ten years) that discuss your topic. Write a half page single-space summary of the main argument for each of the articles (remember, a summary of the main argument is not a summary of the article). The summary should be written in such a way as to convey the main thesis of the article to a reader who has not read the article.

   2) Initial Outline (5%): For the meeting of October 30, write an initial outline of your planned paper and a draft of an opening paragraph.

   3) Elaborate Outline (10%): For the meeting of November 13, write a detailed outline of your planned paper (which sections would be included and a brief description of the main argument of each section), and a draft of an opening paragraph, concluding paragraph, and of an abstract.

   4) Final Paper (50%): The final paper is due on the last meeting of class on December 4.

2. The short-papers are due on October 2, October 30, and December 4. The purpose of the short-papers is to allow you to develop your own ways of making sense of the theoretical terrain. For each paper, you have to choose two pieces from the material we studied so far and to critically engage with the argument presented in both pieces. You can defend one piece against criticism made by the other, point at similar presuppositions or shortcomings of both pieces, discuss how one helps to close a gap in the argument of the other, and many other options. Part of the challenge of this assignment is to be able to identify the two pieces and the framework that will allow you to offer a meaningful discussion. The expectation is that the second and third papers will include at least one article from material that was recently covered (thus, you cannot write all three papers on articles from the first part of the seminar).

   Keep in mind that five pages is not very much space. You should think carefully about the argument that you want to make and about how to present it in a systematic way that will allow you to both present the issues at stakes fairly and engage in meaningful criticism.