Representation, the people and contemporary democracy
FW-MA0006
MA course ESPhil EUR 2020-2021, fall 2020

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Content

Ever since the concept of 'we the people' was born, with Rousseau and the American and French revolutions, there has been a search for how to represent this sovereign yet elusive entity, 'the people', the product of the abolition of fixed social categories like estates. Social relations have now become a matter of contestation and proclamation fueled by association and mobilization. Combined with processes of emancipation, and division of labour, this has led to ever shifting ideas and practices of who represents whom. Parliament, government, the magistrature, labor unions, new social movements, the media, populist politicans: all claim to speak in name of the people and to somehow represent either some part, or all of the people. Democracy, as it unfolds in thought and in practice, both enriches and complicates representation through its claim that 'the people themselves' are both willing and able to participate in processes of representation. In its radical form this implies that the people could, and should, represent themselves. As 'natural' or traditional representation has vanished, yet 'the people' can never be present, the place of power in democracy is 'empty', or structurally vacant; and the shaping of both the people and whomever represents them becomes a matter of symbolic practices, which temporarily assign roles and legitimize procedures.
In this course we look at manifestations, conceptualizations, and institutionalizations of the people in forms such as crowds, masses, parliaments, movements, and assemblies. We discuss phenomena like populism, anarchism, communism, and post-politics in their relation to more established forms and ideologies of politics and democracy. Nowadays think, for instance, of #metoo and #blacklivesmatter. We will be reading and discussing authors such as Claude Lefort, Frank Ankersmit, Nadia Urbinati, Warren Breckman, Jacques Rancière, Pierre Rosanvallon, Chantal Mouffe, and Judith Butler.

Learning objectives

- understanding the basic concepts around democracy and representation;
- understanding the relation of the basic concepts around democracy and representation in historical and cultural context;
- understanding how to apply the basic concepts around democracy and representation to societal issues and problems

Work format

Interactive seminar, Mondays 11-13.45h, October 5 through November 16.
Due to Covid-19 restrictions, not all students may be able to join all seminar sessions physically. Seminars can always be followed online, though, and will be recorded.

For on-campus participation, you must register through the Canvas course page.
Either offline or online, active participation is expected.
Read all texts *prior* to the meeting! (and re-read them afterwards). All text are available on Canvas, under Literature.

Examination form

1. Two assignments during the course, to be provided by the instructors. The first one, to be handed in October 26, consists of a (potential) blogpost for a medium like Bij Nader Inzien or Hofvijver (Dutch examples), or e.g. Crooked Timber. Length: ca 800 words. The second one, to be handed in November 9, concerns a short research assignment, in which you discuss a course topic also using relevant reports, notes, newsletter &c issued by one or more political or policy institutions. Length: ca 1500 words. These will together count towards 30% of your grade. Hand in through Canvas, under Assignments.
2. One 2500 word final essay, on a self-chosen subject plausibly related to the seminar theme and topics. The essay has to be handed in within one week after the end of the course. Note however that you may subsequently be asked to revise (part of) your text, based on comments by the instructor(s). The essay will count for 70% of your grade. Hand in through Canvas, under Assignments.
NB: for all assignments, use proper referencing whenever necessary or useful. Do not just refer to e.g. "Breckman 2013" but, whever possible and useful, give page references, e.g. "Breckman 2013, 156".

Weekly schedule

1. *Introduction: representation, democracy, politics* [October 5, G3-46, 13 seats available]
1. Andrew Schaap, 'Hannah Arendt and the philosophical repression of politics', in: Deranty & Ross (eds.), Rancière and the contemporary scene, Continuum 2020, 145-165
2. Jacques Rancière, Ten theses on politics, Theory & Event, 5/3, 2001
3. Etienne Balibar, 'Historical dilemmas of democracy and their contemporary relevance for citizenship', Rethinking Marxism, 20/4, october 2008, 522-539 [week total ca 55p]

2. *Representation and modern politics* [October 12, T3-29, 12 seats]
4. Hobbes, Leviathan, 1651. ch 16: Of persons, authors, and things personated [5pp]
5. Paul Dumouchel, 'Persona. Reason and representation in Hobbes' political philosophy', Substance, 25/2, 1996, 68-80
6. Pierre Manent, An intellectual history of liberalism, Princeton up 1995 (originally: Histoire intellectuelle du libéralisme, Calmann-Lévy 1987), ch.3: 'Hobbes and the new political art', 20-38 [37pp]

3. *Towards a modern idea of representation* [October 19, Y1-17, 16 seats]
7. Hanna Pitkin, 'Representation and democracy', Scandinavian political studies, 27/3, 2004, 335-342
8. Pierre Rosanvallon, Counter-democracy, Cambridge up 2008 (orig: La contre-démocratie, Seuil 2006): 'Fichte and the idea of a modern ephorate', 142-249
9. Pierre Rosanvallon, id., ch.6: 'Self-critical democracies,' 150-172

10. Hans Arentshorst, Towards a reconstructive approach in political philosophy: Rosanvallon and Honneth on the pathologies of today's democracy, Thesis Eleven, 2016, 134/1, 42-55 [45pp]

4. The modern symbolic dimension of political representation [October 26, G3-46, 13 seats]
11. Warren Breckman, Adventures of the symbolic. Post-marxism and radical democracy, Columbia up 2013, ch.6: Democracy between Disenchantment and Political Theology, p.139-158
12. Claude Lefort, Democracy and political theory, Polity 1991, ch1: The question of democracy, 9-20
13. Frank Ankersmit, 'Representational democracy: An aesthetic approach to conflict and compromise', Common knowledge, 8/1, 2002, 24-46   [44p]

5. Representation and radical democracy [November 2, Y1-17, 16 seats]
14. Michael Hardt & Toni Negri, Multitude. War and democracy in the age of empire, Penguin 2004: Democracy of the multitude, p.328-347
15. Hardt & Negri, Assembly, Oxford up 2017, ch.3: Contra Rousseau, p.25-46
16. Chantal Mouffe, Agonistics, thinking the world politically, Verso 2013, ch.4: 'Radical Politics Today', p.65-84
17. Volkan Gül, 'Representation in minipublics', Representation, 55/1, 2019, 31-45   [75pp]

6. Accounting for the people [November 9, Y1-17, 16 seats]
18. Nadia Urbinati, Me the people. How populism transforms democracy, Harvard up 2019, ch.2: 'The true people and its majority', p.77-95
19. Judith Butler, Notes towards a performative theory of assembly, Harvard up 2015, ch.5: 'We the people – notes on freedom of assembly', p.154-192   [58pp]

7. Representation, democracy and citizenship [November 16, Y1-17, 16 seats]
20. Pierre Rosanvallon, Democracy past & future, Columbia up 2007, ch. 10: The transformation of democracy and the future of Europe', p.218-234
21. Pierre Rosanvallon, Democracy past & future, 'Postscript: Democracy in an era of distrust', 235-252
22. Lisa Disch, 'Representation as "spokespersonship": Bruno Latour's political theory', Parallax, 14/3, 2008, p.88-100
23. Jakeet Singh, 'Decolonizing radical democracy', Contemporary political theory, september 2019, 18/3, p.331-356 [70pp]

Total: 390pp.