Democratic Theory

Trinity College
POLS 337 - Fall 2012
Course Time: MW, 2:40PM-3:55PM
Course Location: McCook 102

Professor Rebekah Sterling
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Office: Downes Memorial 211
Office Hours: MW 11-12

Course Description
This course explores debates about the meaning and practice of democracy in contemporary societies. Should we understand democracy as a form of government, a practice, or a way of life? Are actually existing democracies sufficiently democratic? Is liberalism essential to democracy or in tension with it? What forms of participation does democracy require? We will explore competing ideas of democratic politics and arguments about the challenges facing it, such as depoliticization and apathy, corporate and elite power, and oppression and exclusion based on class, race, gender, and culture.

Required books
  ISBN 0231130899
  (indicated as DD in weekly schedule)

Course pack – Readings from the course pack are marked by CP. You must purchase the course pack from the Professor.

Summary of Course Requirements and Key Dates
Paper 1 (5-6 pages)  25%  Due Wed. Oct. 3
Paper 2 (5-6 pages)  25%  Due Wed. Nov 14
Paper 3 (8-10 pages)  30%  Due Wed. Dec. 19
Participation  20%, which includes:
  -- Reflective writing assignments;
  -- Attendance, in-class discussion, and presentation

Course Format and Expectations
This is an upper-level seminar based on close readings and class discussion. It is essential that you read the materials closely, carefully, and thoroughly, bring the readings with you to class, and come prepared to engage actively, thoughtfully, and respectfully in our discussion. The readings are sometimes difficult, and so it is important to approach them slowly and inquisitively, taking notes and asking questions of the texts as you read, then bringing your thoughts and questions to class.

You will quickly find that the authors we will read do not agree with one another about what constitutes democracy, or about the challenges and problems facing democracy. Moreover, you will also find that debates about democracy very rarely take the form of a two-sided argument: things are almost always more complicated. One of the challenges of this class, then, will be to unpack and appreciate the nuances of the theories and arguments we will read: examining assumptions, assessing evidence and implications, and exploring the relationships between theories.
You will also find that you do not agree with many of the readings, and in our discussions, that we do not always agree with each other. It is crucial that we maintain a constructive and civil discussion, where we can debate – and disagree – thoughtfully and respectfully. Our discussions should be a safe space for all of you to try out ideas and debate them.

At the same time, our discussions are a space for you to develop your skills of analytic thinking and scholarly argument. This means that I’ll often ask you to provide support for claims you make, clarify your assumptions, think through the implications of your claims, and consider objections and complications to your arguments. One of the main goals of the seminar is for you to develop and articulate your own arguments about democracy and about the questions and topics raised in the readings. That means more than just having an “opinion,” however; it means developing considered, cogent, and well-supported arguments through careful analysis of the texts and ideas – both in our discussions and in your writing.

Reading, thinking, discussing, and writing all go together. Discussing the texts collaboratively in class will help you flesh out your understanding of the readings and begin to work out your own arguments about the central topics. Moreover, writing regularly will also help you to clarify what you do and don’t understand and to flesh out your own ideas and arguments. To that end, this class emphasizes writing, not only in the three formal essays, but also in shorter reflective writing exercises that we will do throughout the semester.

Finally, a brief word on classroom etiquette: please show respect for your fellow seminar members by arriving on time, listening attentively when others are speaking, and avoiding noisy, distracting, or disruptive behavior. Computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices may not be used during class; they must be turned off and put away.

**Participation**

Participation in this class has two major components:

- **Contributions to in-class discussion:**

  Your in-class participation grade will reflect not simply how much you speak, but the quality of your contributions, as well as your degree of preparedness, attentiveness, respect for others’ contributions, adherence to class policies, regular (and punctual) attendance, and factors like improvement over the quarter.

  In addition, each student will be responsible for leading class discussion in one session: this will involve a 10-minute presentation setting out 1) key points from the week’s reading and 2) questions for class discussion. I will distribute a sign-up sheet during week 2.

- **Reflective writing:**

  In several weeks, I will ask you to do short reflective writing exercises. These might take the form, for instance, of a one-page critical response to the week’s reading, a post on the class discussion forum, or a short reflection applying the readings to some aspect of current events. These will not be individually letter-graded, but altogether they will count toward your participation grade at the end of the semester. I will mark them on a ✓+, ✓, or ✓- scale. The goals of these short assignments are for you to flesh out your ideas and thoughts about the material, to practice using course concepts, and to develop your skills of analysis and argument.

**Attendance:**

Students are expected to attend class regularly, barring illness, emergency, or other unavoidable situations. Missing more than 3 class sessions will adversely affect your final grade. If you do have to miss class due to illness or another documentable reason, please let me know as soon as you are able, and preferably before the class session; also, you are responsible for the material covered, so you should get notes from your classmates. Students who anticipate absences due to religious
observance or other circumstances should come see me at the beginning of the semester to make appropriate arrangements.

**Papers:**
You will write two short papers of 5-6 pages each, and one final paper of 8-10 pages. I will circulate topics and guidelines in class. Papers must be submitted in hard copy and in electronic copy (via Moodle). I may also assign preliminary writing tasks and in-class writing workshops to help you plan and prepare your papers; I will announce such assignments in class.

**Deadlines, late penalties, and extensions**
Late papers will be penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade per 24 hour period. Late reflective writing assignments will not receive credit. On rare occasions, I may grant extensions. However, extensions must be requested well before the deadline, and require proof of need (e.g. documentation of family or medical emergencies, other unusual circumstances).

**Intellectual honesty**
I take intellectual honesty very seriously. As the Student Handbook explains: “Intellectual honesty assumes that students do their own work and that they credit properly those upon whose work and thought they draw” (p. 19). Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of intellectual dishonesty will result in an F for the assignment, and may also lead to disciplinary hearings and failure of the course as a whole. All students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic honesty and dishonesty, and for adhering to the Integrity Contract and the Student Handbook.

**Course Communications**
I will regularly email the class with important class announcements, discussion questions, and information on assignments. You are responsible for the information in these emails, so make sure that you check your email regularly.

I am happy to answer questions by email, and I try to answer emails within 24 hours during the work week or 48 hours over the weekend. Email is well suited for quick and simple questions; for more complex questions and issues, though, it’s best to come and talk to me in person. Please do make use of my office hours to ask questions about the course or to discuss the materials further. If my office hours conflict with your schedule, please email me to set up an appointment at another time.

**Accommodations and other circumstances**
If you have a disability that requires accommodations, please come and see me at the beginning of the semester, either in my office hours or by appointment, and bring your official accommodations letter from Trinity College. Students must request accommodations from professors no later than 10 days before the accommodations are needed. For information on how to apply for accommodations at Trinity College, contact the Disability Coordinator, Lori Clapis, at Lori.Clapis@trincoll.edu or in her office at the Health Center, and see:
http://www.trincoll.edu/StudentLife/DisabilityServices/students/Pages/default.aspx
Schedule of Readings

Introduction: Concepts, Tensions, Dilemmas

Week 1  9/5  Introduction (no reading)

Week 2  9/10  *Rousseau, Social Contract (selections) (CP & Moodle)

              9/12  *Federalist Papers, nos. 10, 51 (CP & Moodle)
              *Tocqueville, Democracy in America (selections) (CP & Moodle)

Publics, Masses, and Elites

Week 3  9/17  John Dewey, The Public and its Problems, chapters 1 and 4

              9/19  Dewey, The Public and its Problems, chapter 5


              9/26  *Joseph A. Schumpeter, “The Classical Doctrine of Democracy” and “Another Theory of Democracy,” from Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (CP)

Liberalism and its Discontents

Week 5  10/1  Carl Schmitt, Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy

              10/3  Schmitt (cont.)

              - PAPER 1 DUE -

Week 6  10/8  NO CLASS: Trinity Days

              10/10  Rawls, Political Liberalism (selections)

Week 7  10/15  Rawls (cont.)

Participation, Deliberation


Week 8  10/22  Jürgen Habermas, “Three Normative Models of Democracy,” in DD

              Seyla Benhabib, “Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy,” in DD

              10/24  Joshua Cohen, “Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy,” in DD

Week 9 10/29  *Lynn M. Sanders, “Against Deliberation,” *Political Theory* 25, no. 3 (June 1, 1997): 347–376. (CP)  
Iris Marion Young, “Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy,” in *DD*  

**Injustice, Oppression, and Exclusion**  


11/7  Anne Phillips, “Dealing with Difference: A Politics of Ideas, or a Politics of Presence?” in *DD*  
Will Kymlicka, “Three forms of Group-Differentiated Citizenship in Canada,” in *DD*  
Carol C. Gould, “Diversity and Democracy: Representing Differences,” in *DD*  

**Radical Democracy: Contesting (Super)Power**  

Sheldon Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy,” in *DD*  

* Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization,” *Political Theory* 34, no. 6 (December 1, 2006): 690–714. (CP)  

- PAPER 2 DUE –  

Week 12 11/19  *Sheldon Wolin, “Democracy’s Prospects,” from* *Democracy Incorporated* (CP)  
Video: Bill Moyers interview with Sheldon Wolin  

11/21  NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break  

**Rethinking the sites and spaces for democracy**  

Week 13 11/26  *Young, “City Life and Difference,” from* *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (CP)  
*Susan Bickford, “Constructing Inequality: City Spaces and the Architecture of Citizenship,”* *Political Theory* 28, no. 3 (June 1, 2000): 355–376. (CP)  

Week 14 12/3  *David Held, “Democracy: From City-states to a Cosmopolitan Order?,”  
*Melissa S. Williams, “Nonterritorial Boundaries of Citizenship,” in Identities,  
Affiliations, and Allegiances, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Ian Shapiro, and Danilo  
Petranović (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 226–256. (CP)  

12/5  Discussion of contemporary examples  
(Readings to be announced)  

Week 15 12/10  Conclusion and review  
(Readings to be announced)  

Paper 3 due by Wednesday, December 19 at 3pm.  

Note: this syllabus, including the schedule, may be subject to minor changes during the semester; any changes will be announced in class.