

Democracy: Philosophy, Politics and Power

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This course focuses on the development and application of utopian social criticism. We shall first evaluate and engage with different forms of utopian argument, before applying them to theoretical issues surrounding democracy, equality and freedom and, in turn, to contemporary social issues. The objective is to foster students' critical capacities, investigate the diverse ways in which individuals participate in, reproduce and change a wide range social structures, norms and institutions and develop a critical understanding of various interpretations of democratic values. The course combines class discussion, blog posts and group work and culminated in a research project in which students developed and defended their own utopian social proposal.

We will:

- Identify, analyse and critique the key claims and assumptions of key conceptions of democracy.
- Define, design and pursue imaginative research projects.
- Articulate and defend critical perspectives on important social issues and offer suggestions as to how best to understand and address problems.
- Recognize the way that democratic values can be manifested, or not, in a wide range of aspects of social life beyond those conventionally understood as central to democratic politics.

Homework:

Reading: For most classes you will be asked to read some scholarly material (though there are a couple of videos too!). These are mostly fairly difficult and in a form with which you are unlikely to be familiar. Try to read everything twice, take notes while reading and mark key passages or those you find most confusing. Some readings will also require a written response.

Writing: In addition to reading-response, there are a number of writing assignments. These will include informal 'issue' blog posts and responses. You will also gradually build up the elements of your final project, with assignments requiring you to apply key concepts to your particular issue.

Discussion: We will try to organize some discussion sections where Coleman will help you consolidate your understanding of the conceptual terrain, grapple with readings and develop your own projects.

Collaboration: There is scope for informal and formal collaboration on most projects, both in classes, discussion sections and your own time. Talk to me or Coleman if you want to formally submit joint work, as this means a deeper analysis of the topic is required.

Blog Account: We have our gmail/blogger account for ease of posting. SIGN ALL POSTS!
Username: demos.kratos42, password: dem0skrat0s
www.demoskratos42.blogspot.com

All written work should be in your own words and include references to your sources.

2nd July: Lesson 1:

Key themes:

- 1: Introduce idea of critique as a range of practices.
- 2: Introduce idea of utopia/dystopia as a form of critique.
3. Introduce politics.

Introducing Critique

- what is criticism? Is it just saying that something is wrong? Wrong how?
- why do we criticize? What sorts of things?
- why are mistakes important?
- what are the purposes of critique? Can it be used for education, humour...what else?
- are there different ways to express criticism?
- do we use critique in the classroom?

Introducing Utopia

- What is a utopia?
- and a dystopia?
- What makes things possible or impossible?
- What are some different forms that utopian thinking can take?
- What sorts of utopias are there...realistic, intentional, imagined, salutary, fantastical, beautiful,
- different purposes of utopian thinking - critique, humour etc.

Introducing Politics:

What is politics? Democratic politics? Key concepts e.g. justice, society, state, community, law...
What are key political practices? E.g. elections, votes, free speech, legislating...

Homework:

Come up with 3 political issues/problems you are interested in; at least one must be quite specific and another quite broad, can local or global. Write a very brief intro to two of them but some more detail on the third, including proposed solutions to the problems you identify (be ambitious!). About 300-400 words total. Start thinking immediately about what you might want to work more on next week. **Post these to the blog!**

If you are stuck for ideas try...

Guardian.co.uk

Nytimes.com

Motherjones.com

Wallstreetjournal.com

Mondediplo.com

Read

Selections from: Plato's *Republic*, Rawls' *Justice as Fairness* and Mills' *'Ideal Theory as Ideology.'*

3rd July: Lesson 2:

GOALS:

- 1: Generate utopian political ideas.
- 2: Explain an issue and defend a stance on it.
- 3: Introduce representative democracy.

When we ask ‘what is politics?’ is this a utopian question? Is it descriptive...or critical?

Utopias (cont.)

- how do we evaluate utopias?
- realism?
- usefulness?
- beauty?

American democracy:

What are the key features of American democracy? Are these features common elsewhere?
Are any of them unusual?

Homework: Read the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. Write short answers (approx 100 words) on each of these questions

- in what sense, if any, are these documents utopian?
- critical?
- ...political?
- how might we critique them, in turn?
- write an amendment! Not one that’s already been passed!

Read Cohen, ‘Why Not Socialism?’

This is fairly long but should be a quick read. Don’t worry too much about the small amount of economics and don’t get bogged down in his discussion of principles. Focus on the issues we’ve discussed in class about utopianism, critique and politics.

Wednesday July 4th: NO CLASS

Thursday July 5th: Lesson 3

GOALS:

1. Consolidate representative democracy
- 2: Introduce radical critique/ideal of ethos/personal politics.
- 2: Integrate these contrasting visions with ideas of critique and utopia.

How democratic is the American constitution?

Cohen: what was it all about? What is socialism, for Cohen? Think about the scope for sharing and

cooperation etc. How would you answer his question...why not socialism?

What is feminism? How might radical arguments challenge traditional conceptions of politics? In terms of scope, language or participation? Do they expand the scope of politics? To include what?

What types of utopian critique are there? How are different forms relevant to different sorts of political issue? Do they generate different conceptions of what politics is and should primarily be about?

Homework:

Read Archbugi, 'Cosmopolitan Democracy and its Critics: A review.

Watch video on globalization (tbc).

Write ~300 words on the follow questions:

- in what senses do we live in a global society? Cultural, economic?
- how is your life 'globalized'?
- what are some key global political issues?
- is global democracy possible? Is it desirable?

Write one 50+ word blog comment or two shorter comments on other people's issue blog posts.

Do one or more of the following:

- Add more information/a different argument for or against the proposed solution.
- Respond directly to an argument or assumption.
- Link to another issue...say why this is interesting or important.

Think about our discussion of classroom critique! Be constructive!

Come up with an initial idea of for your final project - write ~100 words and submit to me.

- Whats the issue?
- Why is it worth looking into e.g. what key questions/concepts does it raise?
- What is your critique?
- What utopian vision do you appeal to?

Remember: Small issues can illustrate huge problems; huge problems can have 'simple' solutions.

Friday July 6th: Lesson 4

GOALS:

- 1: Introduce/critique idea of global citizenship.
2. Introduce range of forms of political action and how they might be evaluated.

What are some examples of global culture, economics and society? What are some key global political issues?

Is the idea of a global community utopian?

What implications does globalization have for citizens?

What is political action? What sorts of action? What makes it political? Are some more critical or

utopian than others? Are some more appropriate than others? In which circumstances?

Homework: Read: Anderson, 'Equality'.

Assignment: write ~300 on a particular form of action. Evaluate it with respect to

- its effectiveness
- how well it manifests or contributes to democratic values.
- When it might be most useful
- When it is not appropriate

Expand your project proposal in light of our comments. Can still change subject if you like but speak to us first. Write one page to me:

- what's the problem – is it practical, technical, normative?
- how should it be fixed?
- Why is this the best solution?
- What's the biggest weakness of this solution? How do you propose to address this challenge?

Be ready to present to group – short 5 minute presentations. Your arguments here are not set in stone so don't be afraid be unsure right now: be bold!

Lesson 5 (Monday 9th)

GOALS:

- 1: Consolidate first week's work, continue developing mutual critique skills.
- 2: Practice critiquing each other!
- 2: Develop basic grasp of key conceptions of equality.

Be ready to listen to your classmates and help with their projects. They will help you too!

Equality: what do/should we mean by it? Is it sameness/uniformity? Is inequality the same as difference? Is inequality the same as injustice?

Homework: Write ~300 words applying the idea of equality to your case.

- In what ways is this value relevant to understanding or solving the problem?
- Might you want to develop this further?

Post to the issue blog! A new issue or a substantive comment on someone else's.

Read: Ian Carter, 'Positive and Negative Liberty'; Sharon Krause, 'Agency, Inequality, and the Meaning of Freedom.'

Lesson 6 - Tuesday 10th July

GOALS:

- 1: Critically evaluate different conceptions of democratic equality.

2: Develop basic understanding of the concept of political liberty.

Equality and democracy: what's the link? Political equality: what are different interpretations?

What is political participation for? Should everyone participate?

What should our utopian vision of political equality be? Think back to different forms of political action. Could a shift towards equality help solve political problems?

Should everyone vote?

Liberty/Freedom:

In what ways can people be unfree? Are all of them relevant to politics? Why not?

What are key characteristics of each kind of unfreedom - negative, positive, non-domination, linguistic/structural.

Is equality in tension with liberty? Can we be equals while each still being free?

Homework: **Write** ~300 words applying the idea of liberty to your case.

- In what ways is this value relevant to understanding or solving the problem?
- Might you want to develop this further?

Think about how to integrate the various aspects of your project – critique + utopia + proposal + relevance of equality/liberty/democracy. **Revise** previous sections in light of comments. **Continue** research.

Read short extracts on: direct democracy, representative democracy and deliberative democracy.
TO BE CONFIRMED

Lesson 7:

GOALS:

- 1: Deepen understanding of liberty, specifically breaking it down into different liberties and linking to democracy.
- 2: Gain initial grasp of competing conceptions of democratic self-rule.

Liberty is a general category but it can be broken down into lists of rights or liberties or expanded into a substantive (but unclear?) ideal of agency.

Can our liberties come into conflict? What should we do when this happens? What are the limits to freedom?

In what sense is democracy related to freedom? Must democratic citizens also be free? Are there specifically political freedoms?

The challenge of combining freedom and equality, is, in a sense, the challenge of the possibility of democracy. Tensions between liberties can perhaps be understood as problems to do with equal liberty - how much freedom can we all have such that we are all equally free?

What different forms can democracy take? How can we evaluate these different models? Are they utopian?

Homework: Read short piece on electoral systems (tbc)

Keep writing final project. Write ~300 words applying ideal of democracy to your case:

- Is it best understood as a failure of democracy?
- Or is it caused or sustained, in part, by democratic pressures?
- Could some form of democratization contribute to a solution?
- Also, revisit and revise other sections in light of my comments.

Lesson 8

Goals:

- 1: Basic grasp of the way different electoral systems work and manifest different democratic values.
- 2: Critically engage with innovative forms of citizenship.

What are different ways in which votes can be aggregated and combined? How do these different methods embody democratic values in different ways? What about informal norms and political culture? How much does the electoral system matter if these are good/bad?

Is there scope for new forms of citizenship? Can you think of any innovative ways in which people can act politically? E.g. sharing music, shopping locally, hacking websites... How might we evaluate these practices?

Homework: Research for tomorrow's issue workshop - maybe in groups/pairs.

Write ~300 words on your dream of democracy and citizenship. How would you most like to be politically active and how would this be part of an overall democratic system? This is supposed to tie up various parts of the course so look back over your old notes etc.

Final projects are due tomorrow or over the weekend.

Lesson 9

Goals:

- 1: Engage in substantive, nuanced debate on a current political issue.
- 2: Consolidate work on scope of politics, values of equality, liberty and democracy.

Review and class debate!
THANKS GOODBYE!