

AMSTERDAM CENTRE for POLITICAL THOUGHT



WORKSHOP: DEMOCRACY. PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE

KEYNOTE SPEAKER:

JOHN DUNN

KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

9-10 JUNE 2015

METROPOLITAN BUILDING, Z009

VU UNIVERSITY AMSTERDAM

This workshop invites participants to reflect on the changing and contested meanings of democracy from the past until the present as well as on the general historical development of democracy. Challenges following from how democracy is conceptualised will be approached from various scholarly disciplines. Registration of attendance is not required.

ORGANISERS:

THIJS BOGERS & ANNELIEN DE DIJN

The recently founded *Amsterdam Centre for Political Thought* seeks to bring together students, early career researchers and faculty members interested in political theory. The departments of History, Law, Philosophy, Political Science and Public Administration of both the University of Amsterdam and of the VU University Amsterdam are aligned with the Centre. For more information on the Workshop contact Thijs Bogers, lecturer in the History of Political Thought, VU University Amsterdam: t.j.bogers@vu.nl.



Program, 9 June

- 09.00-9.20 hrs. COFFEE & TEA
- 9.20-9.30 hrs. WELCOME
- 9.30 –10.30 hrs. •VALENTINA ARENA, *University College London*
'Roman political language of popular power'
- 10.30–11.30 hrs. •RICHARD BOURKE, *Queen Mary, University of London*
'Enlightenment perspectives on democracy, ancient and modern'
- 11.30–13.00 hrs. LUNCH BREAK
- 13.00–14.00 hrs. •LUCIA RUBINELLI, *Magdalene College, University of Cambridge*
'Constituent power or popular sovereignty: a contested foundation for democratic theory'
- 14.00–15.00 hrs. •JOANNA INNES, *University of Oxford*
'Explaining second-wave democratisation in Europe, 1830-50'
- 15.00–16.00 hrs. •ANNE HEYER, *Leiden University*
'What do elections mean for representative democracy? Making sense of elections in the party organisations of German Socialists and British Liberals, 1865-1885'

Program, 10 June

- 09.00-9.30 hrs. COFFEE & TEA
- 9.30–10.30 hrs. •JOHN DUNN, *King's College, Cambridge University*
'Democracy and good government: geographical disparities in perspective and the quality of political judgment'
Discussant: BERT DREJER
- 10.30–11.30 hrs. •BEN CRUM, *VU University Amsterdam*
'Collective self-determination and the internationalization of politics'
- 11.30–12.30 hrs. •MARC DE WILDE, *University of Amsterdam (tentative)*
'Protecting democracy against antidemocratic parties'

NB, John Dunn will also be speaking on 10 June at 17.00 hrs. at the UvA.
Title of his talk: 'Does democracy still govern well?'
See p.7 for more information.



Abstracts of papers

- VALENTINA ARENA, *University College London*

'Roman political language of popular power'

This paper investigates the way in which the Romans of the late Republic came to express and envisage the power of the people. Not only was the *populus Romanus* the ultimate source of law (in theory as well as, to a certain extent, in practice), but also acted as the political authority within Rome, which not only entrusted the administration of the *res publica* onto magistrates but also acted as the ultimate legitimating power.

The paper will focus on the notion of *auctoritas populi*, the theory of which is not systematically preserved in our sources. By excavating the dominant ideology in Rome, however, it is possible to reconstruct the history of this notion and show the presence in Rome of a different way of conceptualising the notion of the power of the people.

- RICHARD BOURKE, *Queen Mary, University of London*

'Enlightenment perspectives on democracy, ancient and modern'

Understanding democracy has been made difficult by two longstanding trends in the literature: first, by the habit of subjecting it to moral criticism; and second, by the tendency to think about it in terms of a search for its definition. The former approach confuses democracy with ethical approval, while the latter reduces it to a set of abstract features. The alternative to both these approaches is historical reconstruction. But where should such a history of democracy begin? If we start with the ancients we face a radically discontinuous story; if we begin with the moderns we lose the meaning of democratic aspiration. One key bridge between modern democratic values and ancient democratic practice lies in enlightenment attempts to understand the republics of antiquity. This paper explores aspects of how democracy was interpreted from the middle of the eighteenth century, and poses the question of how this impacted on later ideas of popular government.

- LUCIA RUBINELLI, *University of Cambridge*

'Constituent power or popular sovereignty: a contested foundation for democratic theory'

Theorists of agonism try to rescue democracy from liberalism by relying on Sieyes' idea of constituent power. This, they claim, embodies a radically democratic account of people's sovereignty against and beyond the limits of liberal constitutionalism. However the use agonistic theorists make of Sieyes' thought is historically wrong and politically mistaken. Not only Sieyes deployed the idea of constituent power to underpin a highly liberal political project, but he also mobilised it to propose a conceptualisation of the people's power that was alternative to the Jacobin idea of popular sovereignty. This reveals a problematic reading of the history of political thought and questions the way in which historical sources are used as guides to contemporary democratic theory.



• JOANNA INNES, *University of Oxford*

'Explaining second-wave democratisation in Europe, 1830-50'

The concept of 'democratisation' is used somewhat unconventionally in this paper to denote first, willingness to affirm 'democracy' as an ideal, or at least as a possible political arrangement with something to recommend it and secondly, willingness to experiment with and adopt (even if transiently) one or another device to enable mass participation in government. Both tendencies were manifest in Europe in the 1790s, and there continued to be occasional experiments with the second – that is, with incorporating massive elements of the people in practice – through the early nineteenth century. Only from the 1830s however was 'democracy' increasingly affirmed; 1848-9 saw both unprecedentedly wide use of the term, and much talk of and some experiments in mass political participation. This paper explores ways of understanding these phenomena.

• ANNE HEYER, *Leiden University*

'What do elections mean for representative democracy? Making sense of elections in the party organisations of German Socialists and British Liberals, 1865-1885'

From today's perspective, it seems like democracy is unthinkable without elections and political parties, but the interplay of these two features was contested in the early phase of representative democracy. In the late nineteenth century, the size of the electorate increased dramatically. Early mass parties benefited from this trend and emerged as vital actors. They were faced with the dilemma of the powerful promise and multiple challenges inherent in the electoral process. By focusing on the understanding of electoral campaigning in the early British National Liberal Federation and the German Social Democratic Party, the paper analyses the role of elections in democracy.

• JOHN DUNN, *King's College, Cambridge University*

'Democracy and good government: geographical disparities in perspective and the quality of political judgment'

Democracy is a widely coveted title for ruling legitimately. It is also a singularly implausible description of the way in which any modern state is ruled and at best a vague and confusing category through which to interrogate and assess the merits and limitations of particular decisions, policies or even practices of rule. Through the fog of terminological dispute over its application as a political category there is at least one pressing political division in the world today where that application as a formula of commendation is crucially moot. Is the conventional form of constitutional representative democracy operating with relatively unmolested electoral choice on a basis of universal suffrage on balance still a decisive advantage in handling the political needs of a society, or has it become on balance a handicap in comparison with ruling practices based on older and less explicitly articulated conceptions of legitimate rule?



- BEN CRUM, *VU University Amsterdam*

'Collective self-determination and the internationalization of politics'

This paper reconsiders established conceptions of democracy in light of the challenges that follow from the internationalization of politics. In particular, I consider what, if anything, these conceptions offer for the democratization of international politics and how they evaluate the impact of internationalization on national democracies. After offering an analytical reconstruction of the likely responses of a communitarian and a liberal conception of democracy, the paper zooms in on the republican position. The paper suggests that the republican tradition may be most fruitfully employed in the context of the challenge of internationalization by shifting its central focus from the value of non-domination to that of collective autonomy.

- MARC DE WILDE, *University of Amsterdam*

'Protecting democracy against antidemocratic parties'

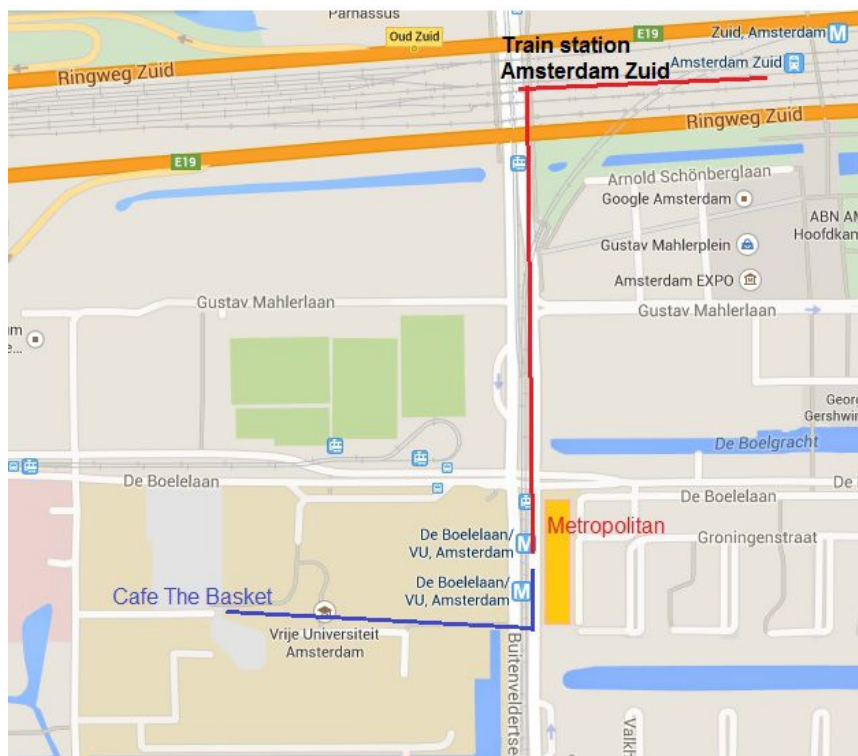
The question addressed in this paper is how to respond to political parties that make use of democratic rights and the neutrality of democratic procedures with the very purpose of undermining democracy itself. The paper begins by examining how in the Weimar Republic, in the face of the existential threats posed to democracy by National Socialism and Communism, a theory of "militant democracy" was developed, which held that democracies should not remain neutral towards their enemies, but restrict their democratic rights. It continues by exploring how after WW II, this historical legacy influenced European courts and, more particularly, the European Court of Human Rights to develop specific criteria for limiting the rights of antidemocratic parties, including the freedom of association, the right to participate in elections, and freedom of speech. As I intend to demonstrate, the case law of the ECtHR testifies to a paradox, since it tends to consider these parties' electoral success (more particularly, their potential to effectively communicate their message to the electorate) as an important reason for restricting their democratic rights. In doing so, the ECtHR proposes a substantive conception of democracy which treats values such as tolerance, broadmindedness, trust, and recognition of equal dignity as constitutive values underlying a "democratic society."

Location

The workshop will take place in room Z-009 of the Metropolitan building of the VU University. The Metropolitan is an office building which is located opposite the VU campus (address: Buitenveldertselaan 3-7). The seminar room is located on the ground floor. After entering through the building's main entrance, walk to the right, past the lifts, through the doors and room Z-009 is on the left hand side.



VU University main building & campus to the right, Metropolitan building to the left. Tram & Metro stop 'De Boelelaan/VU' in the middle. View when walking towards VU University from train station Amsterdam Zuid.



How to walk from train station Amsterdam Zuid to the VU University (approx. 8 min. walk).

University of Amsterdam Political Science Departmental Seminar

with

professor JOHN DUNN

King's College, Cambridge University

'Does democracy still govern well?'

Wednesday, 10 June, 17.00-18.30 hrs.

Followed by drinks reception.

Location: Agnietenkapel (Oudezijds Voorburgwal 229)



Oudezijds Voorburgwal 229 -
231
1012 EZ Amsterdam



Abstract

Democracy is the sole surviving global candidate for a good form of government. The self-conception and self-presentation of contemporary representative electoral democracy is intelligible as a version of what democracy might still mean in today's world. It has never been a wholly convincing way to see what is going on, but in the last four decades its implausibility has become drastically more conspicuous. That shift in apparent blatancy has had a natural, obvious, and all but universal impact on the judgments and feelings of the citizens it purports to represent and endeavours to command. It has weakened its political efficacy relentlessly whilst the demands that history places upon it have risen inexorably. Its continuing power in de-authorizing regimes which have clearly failed gives it very little capacity to legitimate most of the life or allocative decisions of any society. We need to face what this means.