

WHAT IS DEMOCRACY AND WHAT IS IT WORTH?

PHIL 4403-01 Spring 2023

INSTRUCTOR: MICAH LOTT micah.lott@bc.edu

OFFICE HOURS: Tues 1:30pm and by appointment

COURSE TIME AND LOCATION: Tues / Thurs, Noon-1:15pm (Stokes 111S).

What differentiates democracy and oligarchy from each other is poverty and wealth: whenever some, whether a minority or a majority, rule because of their wealth, the constitution is necessary a oligarchy, and whenever the people rule, it is necessarily a democracy. But it turns out, as we have said, that the former are in fact few and the latter many. For only a few people are rich, but in freedom all share.

Aristotle, *Politics*, III.8

For really I think that the poorest he that is in England has a life to live as the greatest he; and therefore truly, sir, I think it's clear that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government; and I do think that poorest man in England is not at all bound in a strict sense to that government that he has not had a voice to put himself under. And I am confident that when I have heard the reasons against it, something will be said to answer those reasons – insomuch that I should doubt whether he was an Englishman or no that should doubt of these things.

Colonel Thomas Rainborough, *Debates at Putney*, 1647

In choosing a representative, all citizens in the various districts should have the right to vote except those whose estate is so humble that they are deemed to have no will of their own. A great vice of most ancient republics was that the people had the right to make resolutions for action, resolutions which required some execution, which altogether exceeds the people's capacity. The people should not enter the government except to choose their representatives; this is quite within their reach.

Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 1748

Did you, too, O friend, suppose democracy was only a name for elections, for politics, and for a party name? I say democracy is only of use there that it may pass on and come to its flower and fruit in manners, in the highest forms of interaction between men, and their beliefs – in religion, literature, colleges, and schools – democracy in all public and private life, and in the army and navy.

Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, 1871

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the nature and value of democracy. We will focus on democracy as a normative theory of political rule – i.e., as an account of what good government looks like. We will also consider democracy in a broader sense, as a cultural ideal or way of life. We will pay special attention to two values that animate and justify democracy: freedom and equality. In addition, we will consider criticisms of democracy, rooted in both normative and pragmatic concerns. Our approach is philosophical (rather than social scientific), but we will also pay attention to social and historical context, and to the literary and rhetorical features of the texts we read.

TEXTS

The following texts are required and available in the BC bookstore. Please purchase the translations/editions available in the bookstore. I strongly encourage you to get a *physical copy* of all the texts. You will need to bring a copy of reading to class each day (see policy on electronics below).

- LIPPMANN, *Public Opinion*
- POSTMAN, *Amusing Ourselves To Death*
- SKINNER, *Liberty Before Liberalism*
- WHITMAN, *Democratic Vistas*

Shorter readings will be made available via Canvas.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

I) ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION. If you choose to take this class, it is mandatory to attend and participate actively.. This course is designed to be rich in discussion, and you will be expected to offer comments and questions on the readings. There is a lot of reading, and much of it is fairly dense. If you are looking for a straight lecture where you sit back and take notes, this is not the class for you!

II) ASSIGNMENTS:

- First writing assignment: short answer (about 5 pages: 20% of final grade)
- Second writing assignment: short answer (about 5 pages: 25% of final grade)
- Third writing (about 5 pages: 25% of final grade)
- Video assignment (30% of final grade)

GRADING

You will receive both letter and numerical grade. Numerical and letter grades correspond as follows:

A 94 – 100	A- 90 – 93.99		
B+ 87 – 89.99	B 84 – 86.99	B- 80 – 83.99	
C+ 77 – 79.99	C 74 – 76.99	C- 70 – 73.99	
D+ 67 – 69.99	D 64 – 66.99	D- 60 – 63.99	F = <60

ELECTRONICS

All electronic devices should be switched to silent mode before coming to class. Because laptops and smart phones tend to be a distraction and an impediment to discussion, their use is strictly prohibited. I repeat: NO LAPTOPS OR PHONES! If you have an electronic device that can function simply *as a reading device* – i.e., a tablet of some sort, Kindle, iPad, etc. – then you may bring that to class to function as your copy of the text. (But please do *not* bring keyboard to turn your tablet into a quasi-laptop).

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is forbidden. Plagiarism undermines the enterprise of learning. It is dishonest. It is disrespectful to your fellow students, to your instructor, and to yourself. Do not plagiarize. For penalties and guidelines, please see the BC website. If academic dishonesty is proven, this will result in disciplinary consequences. If you are tempted to plagiarize because you are in crisis, it is always better to speak to the professor, your advisor, the academic deans, the counseling center, or another trusted authority on campus who can help you handle the crisis.

A Note on Robots

Advances in artificial intelligence (e.g. ChatGPT) are providing new ways for people to outsource their academic tasks, and to deceptively pass off someone else's work as their own. For the purposes of this course, do *not* use ChatGPT or any other robot to complete your assignments. Any evidence that you have used such a tool, or borrowed words or phrases from such a tool, will be regarded as plagiarism.

Given the nature of our assignments, I doubt you would find a robot very helpful. But in any case, the use of AI tools to complete assignments undermines the whole point of this class, which is for *you* to learn, to analyze, to interpret, and to work through ideas and arguments *for yourself*. If you're not interested in doing the work for this class on your own, please don't take this class. If you do take this class, the your written work must be your own – i.e., *your own words, phrases, sentences, arguments*.

SPECIAL CONCERNS

If you have any questions or concerns – including any concerns related to a disability or special need – please feel free to speak with me or email me. I am happy to make accommodations. I want all of you to be able to learn in a safe, comfortable environment. If you require any accommodation, speak to me at the *beginning* of the term. Do not wait till assignments are due to bring this to my attention.

The Disability Services Office is available to empower students with any kind of disability:

<https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/offices/student-affairs/sites/dean-of-students/disability-services.html>

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

I will be following the BC health guidelines concerning vaccination, masks, social distancing, hand-washing, etc. I expect all of you do the same. Let us keep in mind that following these measures is a way of taking personal and social responsibility. It is also a way of demonstrating solidarity with vulnerable and at-risk members of our society.

If you are dealing with illness but are well enough to come to class, please consider *wearing a mask* as a courtesy to me and your fellow students – especially if you are coughing. This is an easy practice for us all to adopt, and it will promote a healthier environment for all of us.

TITLE IX AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

In the event that you choose to write or speak about having survived sexualized violence, including rape, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, Boston College policies require that, as your instructor, I share this information with Melinda Stoops, Boston College's Title IX Coordinator for students. Melinda will contact you to let you know about accommodations and support services at Boston College as well as options for holding accountable the person who harmed you. You are not required to speak with her.

If you do not want the Title IX Coordinator notified, instead of disclosing this information to me, you can speak confidentially with the following people on campus and in the community. They can connect you with support services and help explore your options now, or in the future:

- BC's Sexual Assault Network, available 24/7 at 617-552-2211
- University Counseling Services at 617-552-3310
- Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC), available 24/7 at 800-841-8371

- Fenway Health, a LGBTQ+ focused care center, available at 617-927-6250

MORE CAMPUS RESOURCES

If you are feeling stressed, having challenges managing your time, sleep, or making choices around alcohol and food, the Office of Health Promotion (OHP) offers Individual and Group Health Coaching appointments with a trained Health Coach. Please reach out by visiting the Health Promotion website: <https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/offices/student-affairs/sites/health-promotion.html>

The Women's Center is open to all students, offering information about a range of topics (including sexual assault, health, and body relationship) and support. Located in Maloney 44. <https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/offices/student-affairs/sites/womens-center.html>

The Thea Bowman AHANA and Intercultural Center supports the undergraduate community—with a particular focus on AHANA (people of African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American descent), multicultural, multiracial, and OTE (Options Through Education) students—in navigating college life and fulfilling their potential. Located in Maloney 45. <https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/offices/student-affairs/sites/ahana.html>

LGBT+ Support: The Office of Student Outreach and Support Services supports gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning students and their allies by providing individual support and connecting them with campus support services. Please visit the website and check out LGBT+ mentoring programs, clubs, and events. <https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/offices/student-affairs/sites/student-outreach-and-support-services/lgbtq-support.html>

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

NB: EACH READING IS TO BE COMPLETED **BEFORE** CLASS ON THE DAY IT IS LISTED.

PART I: ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

* Background reading for Part I: *The Constitution of Athens* by Aristotle

Tue 1/17

- Introduction to course themes and structure
 - o *Demos* and *Kratos*. Class hierarchy, wealth, and political power.
 - o Distinguishing democracy from other ideals – e.g. justice, wisdom, effectiveness.
 - o Democracy’s core values: freedom and equality.
 - o Democracy as political arrangement; Democracy as cultural ideal and way of life.

- Herodotus, Persian debate over forms of government

Thurs 1/19

- Pericles “Funeral Oration” from Thucydides *Peloponnesian War*
- Plato *Republic* book 8

Tues 1/24

- Aristotle *Politics* III.6, III.7, III.8, and IV.4

Thurs 1/26

- Aristotle *Politics* III.11, VII.8, VII.9
- Polybius “The Roman Constitution in Its Prime” *The Histories* 6.11-18

PART II: REPUBLICAN LIBERTY AND SELF-GOVERNMENT

Tue 1/31

- Milton: *The Readie and Easie Way to a Free Commonwealth* (entire)
- Skinner *Liberty Before Liberalism* chapter 1 “The Neo-Roman Theory of Free States”

Thurs 2/2

- Milton: *The Readie and Easie Way to a Free Commonwealth*
- Skinner *Liberty Before Liberalism* chapter 2 “Free States and Individual Liberty”

Tue 2/7

Milton and Skinner continued

PART III: DEBATING THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

* Familiarize yourself with the Declaration of Independence and Constitution prior to Part III

Thurs 2/9

Montesquieu – *Spirit of the Laws* (Book 2, chapters 1-2; Book 3, chapters 1-2; Book 11, chapters 1-6)

Tues 2/14

- “Centinel” (Samuel Bryan) I and II
- James Wilson, Oct 6, 1787
- “An Officer of the Late Continental Army”, reply to Wilson

Thurs 2/16

“A Citizen of America” (Noah Webster)

Tues 2/21

“Brutus” I, III, and IV

++ First writing assignment due 2/22 ++

Thurs 2/23

“Publius” (James Madison) *The Federalist X and XXXIX*

Tues 2/28

“Publius” (James Madison) *The Federalist XLIX and LI*

Thurs 3/2

* TBD: Contemporary arguments concerning the US Constitution

3/6 – 3/10: BC Spring Break

PART IV: DEMOCRACY AS A WAY OF LIFE: WALT WHITMAN

Tues 3/14

Whitman “Democratic Vistas” (entire)

Thurs 3/16

Whitman “Democratic Vistas”

PART V: A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE? MASS SOCIETY, MASS MEDIA, AND DEMOCRACY

Tues 3/21

Lippmann *Public Opinion*, Chapters I - IX

Thurs 3/23

Lippmann *Public Opinion* Chapters XIV – XX & XXIII – XXVI

Tues 3/28

John Dewey *The Public and Its Problems* Chapters 5 & 6 “Search for the Great Community” and “Problem of Method”

Thurs 3/30

Postman: *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (part I)

Tues 4/4

Postman: *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (part II)

Thurs 4/6

NO CLASS – Easter Holiday

Tue 4/11

Film: *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (watch prior to class and come prepared to discuss)

++ Second Writing Assignment due 3/29 ++

Thurs 4/13

- “Capital Assets” (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/capital-assets-11665673055>)

- Guest speaker: John West

Tues 4/18

NO CLASS – BC Monday Schedule

PART V: CONTEMPORARY THEORIES AND DEBATES

Thurs 4/20

Brennan “The Right to a Competent Electorate”

Tue 4/25

Gutman and Thompson “What Deliberative Democracy Means” from *Why Deliberative Democracy*

Thurs 4/27

- Cole; Selection from *Guild Socialism*

- Robinson “The Need for Workplace Democracy”

Tues 5/2

TBD: Issues in contemporary democracy

Thurs 5/4

TBD: Issues in contemporary democracy

++ Third Writing Assignment 5/3 ++

++ Video Assignment Due 5/12 ++