

Democratic Freedom and Its Enemies

Winter Semester 2024

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Democratic Freedom and Its Enemies

The course introduces students to the great texts of democratic theory, beginning with Aristotle and concluding with John Rawls. The class also introduces democracy's most penetrating critics, from Karl Marx to Carl Schmitt. Class-room work will focus on close reading of key texts: for example, Locke's Letter on Toleration, Tocqueville's Democracy in America, Marx On the Jewish Question. Students will learn to situate these texts in their historical context and to see their relevance to contemporary dilemmas and debates. The overall aim is to show that what democracy is and what it should be are never settled questions. The controversies that divide democracies today can be illuminated by returning to the great thinkers of the past. The key themes will be how democratic theorists have thought about toleration, inequality, colonialism and empire and inclusion. Students will be expected to think for themselves on these questions, and to learn how to explain texts to their fellow students, demonstrating their historical context and contemporary relevance.

All readings are on Moodle. The pages to be read are in the syllabus.

Biography

Michael Ignatieff is Rector Emeritus and professor of history at CEU.

Ignatieff came to CEU after serving as Edward R. Murrow Professor of Press, Politics, and Public Policy at Harvard University's Kennedy School.

He served in the Canadian Parliament and was Leader of the Liberal Party. His books include *The Needs of Strangers* (1984) *Blood and Belonging* (1993), *The Warrior's Honour* (1997), *Isaiah Berlin* (1998), *The Rights Revolution* (2000), *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry* (2001), *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (2004), *Fire and Ashes: Success and Failure in Politics* (2013), and *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in a Divided World* (2017). His latest book is *On Consolation: Finding Solace in Dark Times* (2021)

Course Syllabus

Week 1

January 8

What is Democracy?

Thucydides Pericles "Funeral Oration" (450BC) excerpt
Aristotle *Politics*, Book IV, Ch. 4, excerpt

January 10:

Toleration and Democracy

Democracy exists to enable people who disagree on fundamental issues to share the same government. If toleration is essential, who should be tolerated? Whose views are intolerable?

Locke, John, *A letter concerning toleration*. London: 1690, ps. 6-10, 33-38

Week 2. January 15-17

Revolution and the Consent of the Governed

Democracies govern with the 'consent' of the governed. Revolutions occur when majorities refuse consent. If revolution is always possible—i.e. if the people can withdraw consent at any time—how can order and stability be maintained?

Edmund Burke *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1790, 89-92

Tom Paine *Rights of Man*, 275-280

Week 3, January 22-24

Democratic Freedom and the Sovereignty of the People

Democracy means sovereignty of the people. Should the people's power be unlimited?

Jean Jacques Rousseau *The Social Contract*, (1762)

Benjamin Constant *The Principles of Politics* (1815)

Week 4, January 29-31

Democratic Freedom and Partisanship

Can democracy survive political partisanship and the battle for power?

Madison, James. Federalist No. 10: " *The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection.*" (1787)

The class on Wednesday January 31 will be cancelled

1st Assignment Due February 1, 5pm

Week 5, February 5-7

Tyranny of the Majority and Freedom of Opinion

Democracy depends on consent and majority rule. When do consent and majority rule threaten freedom of thought and opinion?

Tocqueville, Alexis de, *Democracy in America* (1835-1840) Ch. 7, ps. 403-426

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty* (1859) ps. 5-13

Week 6: February 12-14

Democracy and Empire: Who is Freedom For?

Why did European theorists of democracy deny democratic rights to colonial peoples? Why did they deny those rights to women?

Tocqueville, Alexis de. " *Essay on Algeria*" (1841) ps. 59-75

Mill J.S. (1977b) " *Civilization*" (1836), ps. 119-127.

Mill JS and Taylor, Harriet " *The Enfranchisement of Women*" (1851)

Week 7: February 19-20

Democratic Freedom versus Revolutionary Freedom

Marx and Nietzsche contrasted the freedom of democracy—taking part in elections, expressing your opinions freely—with a true freedom that would come when, in the case of Nietzsche, men were able to rise above the common herd and express their true greatness, and for Marx, when capitalism and private property were abolished and men

could step beyond 'bourgeois freedom' to the freedom of man's 'species being'. Are these criticisms of democratic freedom valid?

Marx, Karl. "*On the Jewish Question*." (1844), ps. 1-20

Nietzsche, Friedrich. "*The Greek State*" in *The Genealogy of Morals* (1871) pp. 164-173

Week 8: February 26-28

The Ethics of Democratic Freedom: Responsibility versus Conviction

What values must guide democratic leaders: their own convictions or their responsibility to their electorate? What values should prevail in a crisis?

Max Weber, "*Politics as a Vocation*" (1919), ps. 23-30

2nd Assignment Due March 1 5pm

Week 9: March 4

Democracy and Fascism (1)

Fascist movements claim they are democratic. What makes a fascist a danger to democracy?

Adolf Hitler On Democracy: https://www.azquotes.com/author/6758-Adolf_Hitler/tag/democracy

Benito Mussolini The Doctrine of Fascism
https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14058/14058-h/14058-h.htm#THE_DOCTRINE_OF_FASCISM

March 6:

Democracy and Fascism (2): The Rule of Law

Why is the fascist challenge to the rule of law a danger to democracy?

Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*, (1932) pp. 19-37

Schmitt, Carl. "Definition of Sovereignty" in *Political Theology*, (1922) 5-16

Week 10, March 11-13

Democratic Freedom: Liberalism versus Conservatism

What is the liberal version of democratic freedom? What is the conservative version?
How do they differ?

Berlin, Isaiah. *"Two concepts of liberty"* (1958), Sections 1,2, ps. 118-134

Michael Oakeshott "On Conservatism"

Week 11, March 18-20

Democratic Freedom and Justice

Democracies must be just, but what kind of distributive justice is compatible with democratic freedom?

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. (1970) "Political Justice and the Constitution", pp. 195-228

Week 12, March 27:

Democratic Freedom's New Enemies

Democratic freedom is challenged by regimes that claim to be democratic but are actually single party autocracies. Why is autocracy on the march and freedom in retreat?

Jingping, Xi. "CCP's 100th Anniversary." Speech, Beijing, 2021. NikkeiAsia;
<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Full-text-of-Xi-Jinping-s-speech-on-the-CCP-s-100th-anniversary>

Orban, Viktor. "Address on Illiberal Democracy." Speech, Bálványos Free Summer University and Youth Camp, Băile Tuşnad, Romania, 2014.

Second Assignment Due: March 29, 5pm

Course Requirements and Grading

Students are required to do all the reading. Class attendance in person is mandatory. Please inform the instructor if you must miss class for any reason. Students missing more than a third of the classes, whether excused or not, risk failing the course.

60% of the grade will be awarded to written work, in the form of 2 analyses of the key issue raised by a text, together with an evaluation of the relevance of the historical context to the solution proposed by the text's author. Each of the analyses should be no longer than 750 words.

30% of the grade is awarded for participation in group presentation of material. These presentations will occur in the Wednesday class. Students should form into self-selected groups of up to 4 persons, pick a theme, discuss it with the professor or TA and then present for no more than 15 minutes. Each student should speak.

10% of the grade is awarded for participation in class discussions.

Students are reminded of CEU's policies on plagiarism. The policy is available on Moodle. It is a serious offense and can lead to being given a failing grade, or in a serious case, being referred to the disciplinary committee. Students must submit their own work in their own words. Allowance is always made for those who are working in a second language.

Class Schedule

January 8-March 27

Monday: 1150am-1250pm

Wednesday: 1520-16:20

Office Hours: B205

After Class, Both Days, First Come, First Serve

Contact

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