Call for Papers

Democratic Theory Beyond Deliberation
New Approaches to Representative Democracy

Organisers: Joseph Lacey (University College, Oxford); Lise Herman (Sciences Po, Paris); Stuart White (Jesus College, Oxford)

Location: University College, Oxford

Date: Thursday, 22nd to Friday, 23rd June 2017

Speakers: Jonathan White, Lea Ypi, Nadia Urbinati, others to be confirmed

Over the past fifteen years, political theorists have demonstrated a renewed interest in processes of representation and in the institutions of mass democracy. Such an evolution has been a response in part to political developments, in part to prevailing academic trends. Politically, representative democracy as both an ideal and a practice has been uniquely called into question in recent times. Low voter turnout, the decline of mass parties and the electoral success of populist forces, amongst other factors, have all contributed to this challenge. Academically, for some time, democratic theory had focused on procedural legitimacy and refining the deliberative ideal. Political representation and the institutions of mass politics – with their supposedly non-deliberative connotations of rhetoric, elite competition, the pursuit of self-interest, majoritarian aggregation, etc. – constitute areas of research that have been largely left to the minimalist theoretical accounts responsible for shaping the study of politics for much of the post-war era. From both conceptual and normative perspectives, it is increasingly recognised that the realities of political representation and the institutions of mass politics are under-theorised and should no longer be left to minimalist approaches.

A number of contemporary theorists have sought to remedy this state of affairs. They have attempted to cast light on the nature of current democratic malaises, while providing new conceptual tools with which to understand different forms of political representation and reassess the extent to which these representative modes live up to established normative standards. Although some scholars have focused on the idea of representation and the role of the individual representative, others have more recently turned their attention to political parties as the central institution of representation within modern democracies. Among the lattermost scholars are Jonathan White and Lea Ypi, who have recently contributed a book length treatment of the idea of partisanship. The Meaning of Partisanship (2016) is a systematic treatment of the nature of this phenomenon and of its potential normative value.

This publication provides us with an opportunity for taking stock of the expanding literature outlined above, as well as encouraging a dialogue between the different strands of this literature. During this two-day workshop, our aim is to bring together scholars that approach the processes and institutions of representative democracy and mass politics from a variety of perspectives. In the first part of the workshop, we will discuss the main themes and arguments of The Meaning of Partisanship with the authors. The second part will be dedicated to independent research papers. We welcome theoretical papers, but are also open to more empirically-minded work that is in direct dialogue with recent theoretical literature on representative democracy.
For more specific guidance, papers may seek to address some of the following themes:

a) Contemporary problems of representative democracy (e.g. analyses of populism, apathy, the decline of mass parties, etc.)

b) The relationship of political representatives and parties with the political community (understood to include individual citizens, civil society organizations, the political culture over time, etc.)

c) Inter and intra party dynamics (e.g. the relationship between individual representatives and their parties, the relationship between parties within a party system, the appropriate structure for political parties, etc.)

d) The relationship between political representatives/parties and institutions (i.e. the impact of various institutional designs on representative/party behaviour, and vice versa)

Abstracts should be no more than 500 words, and must be submitted by March 15th, 2017. Please send two copies of your abstract, one with your name and affiliation and the other without any identifying information to facilitate blind review. Abstracts and further queries can be sent to: beyonddeliberationworkshop@gmail.com

Abstracts will be assessed by the beginning of April.

Dependent on funding, some support may be available for graduate students or colleagues without access to research funds. For selected papers from Sciences Po, OxPo may also fund travel expenses. If you would like to be considered for this, please make a note of it upon submitting your abstract.