This seminar surveys some classic and contemporary writings about political democracy. To qualify as just, must a society be democratically governed? Why or why not? If we say that a legitimate government is one that rightfully issues commands and enforces them, is being democratic necessary for legitimacy? Under what circumstances, if any, are individuals within the jurisdiction of a national government morally obligated to obey its commands? Do these circumstances include the requirement that the government be democratic? What features appropriately belong to the ideal of democratic governance? To what degree is conformity to this ideal mandatory or optional for a society?

Course requirements: Be prepared to talk about the readings each week. Do a seminar presentation introducing one of the readings for one seminar session (or two seminar presentations; this will depend on enrollment). Write a term essay due at the end of final exam week. This paper may expand on your seminar presentation.

I will place copies of readings not included in the course texts in the Department Library (8th floor HSS; NE corner of the floor). I will also compile a longer reading list of additional essays relevant to the themes of each week’s seminar meeting. I will make this expanded reading list available before the start of this term.

Week 1.
Further reading: Frederick Neuhouser, “Freedom, Dependence, and the General Will,” Philosophical Review (1993). (See also Estlund reading from week 7.)

Week 2.
Further further reading: Dent, Rousseau, chapters 6 and 7.

Week 3.
[Scheduled now for October 14, this class will have to be postponed and rescheduled.]
Reading: Mill, Considerations on Representative Government, chapters 3-5.

Week 4.
Reading: Mill, Considerations on Representative Government, chapters 6-8.

Week 5.
Reading: Mill, Considerations on Representative Government, chapters 9-14 and 16-18.

Week 7. An Epistemic Conception of Democracy.

Week 8. Democracy derived from Justice as Equal Advancement of Everyone’s Interests.


Week 10. Equal Opportunity for Political Influence.

Another possible topic: Democracy and legitimacy.
Reading: Allen Buchanan, “Political Legitimacy and Democracy”, in Ethics (July, 2002); also A. John Simmons, “Justification and Legitimacy,” reprinted in his book of essays of the same title.