

Philosophy of Democracy: Introduction

Peter H. Denton

The Royal Military College of Canada and Red River College

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Contact author: phdenton@shaw.ca

The Call for Papers for this issue of *Essays in Philosophy* summed up the intent:

“Democracy is a provocative idea. From its Greek roots to its series of expressions in the history of Western philosophical thought, what it means has been fiercely debated and heatedly discussed.

But that historical trajectory assumes some philosophical continuity through to the expressions of democracy found around the globe in the 21st century. That assumption carries with it the baggage of Enlightenment liberalism and the inevitable coloring of political relations by the aftermath of the treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

Is democracy in the 21st century tragically flawed by perspectives that are Eurocentric and colonialist, making it inevitably the philosophical tool of Empire? Or are there emergent forms of democracy that step outside this trajectory and offer new possibilities and new hope?

This issue will not be focused on promoting or defending the continuity of 21st century democracy with Enlightenment philosophy. Rather, the intent is to explore the philosophy of democracy, encouraging the development and discussion of ideas emerging from movements for democracy in the early 21st century. Papers focused on the Arab Spring or popular movements for democracy in the global South are especially welcome, as are papers on the reactions to democratic regimes reflected in the Occupy or Idle No More movements (in North America) and their equivalent elsewhere.”

I appreciate the work of the contributors whose articles are included here, because this is a large and somewhat daunting subject, with far fewer road marks than other areas of philosophy enjoy. I especially thank David Boersema, the General Editor of *Essays in Philosophy*, for taking the risk that there would be scholars willing to contribute to such an issue and for allowing me to repeat as guest editor ten years after my issue on the philosophy of technology.

The issue begins with Michael S. Perry's "Four Dimensions of Democracy," in which he carefully deconstructs the circumstances in which we need to consider what democracy means at this point in the 21st century. It is followed by two considerations of the recent democracy movements. First is Fuat Gursozlu's "Democracy and the Square: Recognizing the Democratic Value of the Recent Public Sphere Movements," in which he explores how these kinds of movements have value as public efforts to articulate the meaning of 21st century democracy. Then HollyGale Millette considers in "Porous Protest and Rhetorical Performance: Democratic Transformation at Occupy" what the actual performance of "occupation" means for understanding both the Occupy Movement and its goals in relation to public democracy. Expanding the focus, Cyril-Mary Pius Olatunji considers the current debate over Africa's path forward toward both development and democracy in his article, "Beneath the Rots in Post-Colonial Africa: A Reply to Henry Kam Kah and Okori Uneke."

The issue concludes with an essay of my own, "The End of Democracy." I have never been happy with the conclusion that all philosophy is a footnote to Plato, nor that somehow the work of historians since could never match what Thucydides accomplished. Nor, in recent times, is all philosophy necessarily obeisance or objection to Immanuel Kant. If thinkers in earlier times articulated the new ideas required to manage the critical issues of their day, I hold out the same possibility for thinkers today. We need new words, as well as new ideas, if we are to choose and live toward a sustainable future for us all.

I am convinced there is a discontinuity between 21st century democracy and the liberal representative forms and institutions that emerged from the Enlightenment tradition. This discontinuity is both unnerving, for those of us who continue to enjoy such institutions, and energizing, for those who want democracy but not its colonial and cultural baggage. We need desperately to find some collective way forward as a global community if we are to manage the challenges of resource insufficiency and conflict in climate-changing world. A rethinking of the nature and expression of democracy in this context might suggest such a path.