

# POSC 4821: Democracy and Its Problems

Professor Darrell Dobbs  
Office Hours: 1:00 - 4:00 Th & by appointment  
421 Wm. Wehr Physics

Marquette University  
Class time: 11:00-12:15 T TH  
418 Wm. Wehr Physics

## Course Rationale

It has been said that democracy is the *worst* form of government -- except for all the others. Prior to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was difficult to find a respectable person who would call himself a democrat. Classical political theorists regarded democracy as an aberration, the swelling of political power in a mob unable to distinguish statesmen from demagogues and prepared to betray liberty to tyrants. Yet today nearly all Americans agree in supporting democracy. How has the reputation of democracy managed to achieve so striking an ascent in the estimate of decent people? Were remedies found for the maladies that plagued democracy in earlier times? Or have social conditions conspired to blind us to the danger? What are these maladies? If remedies have been found, what are they and how effective are they? It is the aim of this course to shed light on the nature of democracy, to assess its strengths and vulnerabilities, and thus to deepen our understanding of the challenges inherent in our own citizenship.

## Requirements, Expectations and Grading

You are to attend every meeting of this class, having read the assigned texts carefully. During class sessions, you will be asked to form small group panels to introduce passages, to raise and to respond to questions, and to write three brief but detailed accounts of what you have learned. These three papers will determine 30% of your final grade, and the in-class panel presentations another 30%. Your contribution to general class discussion will determine 20%, and your citizenship (effort, respect for class mission, and general deportment) another 10%. There will be a comprehensive final exam or final paper determining the remaining 10% of your final grade. Absences may be excused, upon written request made via email by class time of the day of your absence, at your instructor's sole discretion. In any case, you will be expected to make up any missing work.

## Class Schedule

### Unit One: The Glory and Self-Destructiveness of Democracy

Weeks 1-4      Introductions; Preliminary consideration of democracy as a form of government;  
Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, I.67-78; 2.34-46;  
Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* I; II;  
Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* III; Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 5.84-116

### Unit Two: Classic Analyses of Democratic Life

Weeks 5-6      Plato, *Republic* 550c-564a; 564a-576b; Aristotle, *Politics* III chs.7-13; J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, chs.1-2

### Unit Three: Democracy in the American Political Experience

Weeks 7-8      *Declaration of Independence*; *Federal Papers* #s 1, 10, 51;  
Diamond, "Ethics and Politics: The American Way" pp.75-92; pp.92-108

## Spring Break

Weeks 9-15      Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Mansfield and Winthrop, trans.) pp.3-15; 27-53; 56-120;  
**Easter Break**; 120-186; 187-235; 235-302; 302-396; 399-428; 428-476; 479-524; 525-578; 578-635;  
639-676