**EPISTEMOLOGY AND DEMOCRACY**

*Philosophy 577*

Fall 2013  
W 3:30-6:30pm  
Cohen 493

**Professor: Alexander Guerrero**  
Email: aguerr@upenn.edu  
Office: Cohen 424  
Office Hour: W 11am-12pm and by appointment

**Course Description**

This course will look at a number of issues relating to bringing epistemic considerations to bear on the understanding and evaluation of political and legal institutions: questions and problems that arise when one considers how political institutions attempt to incorporate information, expertise, individual preferences, and the value of truth into political decision-making, while at the same time satisfying norms of political legitimacy (autonomy, popular sovereignty, justice, equality, etc.).

In the first part of the course, we will discuss and assess several epistemic arguments for democracy, arguments that suggest that democratic systems of government are good political systems because of their epistemic credentials (perhaps in addition to other reasons). These arguments offer different and even competing views about what “democracy” is and requires, and they present different and even competing views about why democracy is epistemically good.

In the second part of the course, we will discuss and assess a number of concerns about the use of epistemic arguments in political philosophy, particularly as a way of justifying or legitimating democratically imposed law. These arguments note that reasonable disagreement about facts and values is a central feature of what makes political philosophy political, and worry about the use of epistemic norms on the grounds that those norms presuppose some common view about the truth in these domains.

In the third and final part of the course, we will move from abstract assessment of the epistemic virtues of “democracy” to more concrete issues regarding the structure and design of particular core democratic political and legal institutions, including elections, political representatives, criminal courts, constitutional courts, and administrative agencies. Our question throughout this section will be: if we are concerned about the epistemic merits of this institution or the system as a whole, what does that mean for how these institutions should be designed?

**Required Text**

Hélène Landemore, *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2013) (it is available at Amazon, but there is no special stock at Penn)

All other readings will be posted on Blackboard under the relevant course meeting folder under the heading “Course Documents.”

In addition to Landemore, we will read significant portions of


so you might acquire those as well.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

I. TALKING

(A) Come to class, be prepared, talk regularly.  (15% of grade)

(B) In addition to that, each person taking the class for credit will be required to be a “commentator” on one of the readings for one of the meetings of the course. This role should be treated as if you were serving as a commentator for a conference (like one of the American Philosophical Association conferences) and you have been assigned a paper on which to comment. (15% of grade)

You will have no more than 7 minutes total for your comments and you will be expected to make a handout.

You need only offer as much description and summary as is necessary to understand your critical points (which might be focused entirely on one part of one argument), and you should see your role as offering critical commentary on an argument or claim made by the author of the relevant reading.

You will need to practice giving your comments so that they can fit in the allotted time, and you will need to meet with me and send me your handout at least one day in advance of the course meeting at which you will offer your comments.

II. WRITING

Undergraduates have two options:

- Option One: (a) 2000-2500 word paper, due 10/30 (30% of grade)
  (b) 2500-3000 word paper, due 12/11 (40% of grade)

- Option Two: 7000-7500 word paper, due 12/18 (70% of grade)

Graduate students have one option:

- 7000-7500 word paper, due 12/18 (70% of grade)

Details will be provided in class.

PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to be familiar with and to abide by Penn’s policy on academic and intellectual integrity: http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/index.html
## PLAN FOR COURSE AND READINGS

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<th>Day</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
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• Alvin Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World*, preface, 3-7  
• Hélène Landemore, *Democratic Reason*, prologue, pp. 1-9 |
| **I. EPISTEMIC ARGUMENTS FOR DEMOCRACY** | | |
| 9/4 | An Overview of Epistemic Arguments for Democracy | • Hélène Landemore, *Democratic Reason*, pp. 53-88  
• Aristotle, *Politics* book III, chapter 11  
• Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, book I, Chapter 58 |
| 9/11 | Talking, Deliberating, Arguing | A • Hélène Landemore, *Democratic Reason*, pp. 89-144  
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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>10/2</td>
<td>Counting, Aggregation, Large Numbers (II)</td>
<td>• Alvin Goldman, <em>Knowledge in a Social World</em>, pp. 315-348 (Professor Goldman will attend the seminar on this day.)</td>
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| 10/9 | Disagreement, Justification, and Legitimacy | G • Jeremy Waldron, *Law and Disagreement*, pp. 1-17, 88-118  
| 10/23 | Public Reason and Reasonable Pluralism | N • Excerpts from John Rawls, “The Idea of Public Reason” and “Postscript”  
### III. Epistemic Evaluation of Particular Political and Legal Institutions

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<th>Date</th>
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S • Jason Brennan, The Ethics of Voting (Chaps. 3, 4, 5, 7) |
| 11/13  | Political Representatives: Should we have them? How should they act (as delegates, or trustees)? How should they be selected (by lottery, for their expertise)? | T • Alex Guerrero, “Against Elections: The Lottocratic Alternative” (manuscript)  
U • John Stuart Mill, Considerations on Representative Government, Chapters 6-9  
V • David Estlund, Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework, pp. 206-222 |
• David Luban, Lawyers and Justice, pp. 67-81, 92-103  
• Handout: “Adversarial and Inquisitorial Systems: A Brief Overview of Key Features”  
• (skim) Alvin Goldman, KSW, pp. 272-314 |
**OPTIONAL CLASS:** Constitutional Courts: Should we have them? What should they do? How should they be populated?