

## CFP: Special Issue in *Democratic Theory* 6 (2), Dec 2019

### *What is democratic theory?*

Head to your university library website and enter the search term: “what is democratic theory?” It’s likely that your search will either yield “no records found” or perhaps you’ll score a direct hit with James Alfred Pennock’s *Democratic Political Theory* (Princeton, 1979). Standard internet searches return a similar paucity of results. There is very little literature demarcating the meaning and purpose of democratic theory and the task of the democratic theorist.

This is a surprising finding. This lack of literature devoted to the definition of a field of study is unusual – especially for one as widely known and discussed as democratic theory. The question “what is political theory?”, for example, returns dozens of academic articles and books. Why not for democratic theory?

Pennock (1979) provides an answer. “The phrase [democratic theory] is often used as though it stood for a clearly demarcated and agreed upon body of doctrine; but that is far from the case. Even the question of what topics it should include,” Pennock continues, “is the subject of wide disagreement.” Democratic theory “has been quite properly called ‘a loosely knit family of ideas’”.<sup>1</sup> This lack of scholarly attention is even more startling considering the normative contestation around the meaning of the term “democracy” itself. While Pennock aptly points out this problem, he leaves the labour of solving it to posterity.

In the near 40 years since the publication of Pennock’s book, these questions have received little attention. Is democratic theory, for example, a subfield of political theory or an interdisciplinary endeavour, taking in not only political science but law, economics, public administration and international relations? Is the task of a democratic theorist to develop a normative conception of polity, or work with democracy as an essentially contested concept? These questions also gain topicality in the light of a recent debate about the role of models of democracy. Models conceptualizing democracy in participatory, realist, pluralist, agonistic or deliberative terms have been at the centre of debates in democratic theory for several decades now. The usefulness of this debate between models has, however, recently been called into question. Is there a future in democratic theory beyond model thinking? Or does it need new, different or simply further developed existing models of democracy?

*Democratic Theory* will mark this 40-year anniversary with a special issue encompassing a chorus of voices striving to define democratic theory in its plurality, demarcate its boundaries, and reflect on both the makings and workings of democratic theorists.

Our intention is to take a democratic approach to this undertaking by inviting shorter than usual submissions (3,000 – 3,500-word arguments), which will be published as a peer-reviewed symposium in one to two issues of *Democratic Theory*.

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<sup>1</sup> James Roland Pennock. 1979. *Democratic Political Theory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. P. xviii.

We welcome submissions from scholars working in different democratic traditions and from a range of academic disciplines. Submissions from scholars in the Global South and from non-English-speaking backgrounds are especially encouraged. It is also our ambition to achieve gender parity among the authors participating in the symposium.

Colleagues are invited to address the following questions or ones like them:

- What is democratic theory?
- Is there such a thing as democratic theory? As Robert Dahl wrote in his *Preface to Democratic Theory*, there is no theory of democracy, only democratic theories...
- What distinguishes democratic theory from political theory and/or political science?
- What is the democratic theorist to do? What is the role of the democratic theorist?
- What makes a theorist of democracy? How does one become a democratic theorist? Who *is* and who *is not* a theorist of democracy?
- What is the history or genealogy of democratic theory?
- What is the role of models of democracy? Is model thinking to be overcome or does it have a purpose in democratic theory? What are the alternatives to models of democracy?
- Is democratic theory a recent, or 'just becoming', field of study? Or, is democratic theory a field destined to be (perhaps always) on the margins?

If you are interested in submitting a contribution to this symposium, please send a manuscript of **no more than 3500 words excluding the reference list by April 15, 2019 to [dt@berghahnjournals.com](mailto:dt@berghahnjournals.com)**.

Contributors are asked to consult the *Democratic Theory* style guide when preparing their submission. The link to the guide can be found here:  
[http://journals.berghahnbooks.com/uploads/dt/democratic-theory\\_style\\_guide.pdf](http://journals.berghahnbooks.com/uploads/dt/democratic-theory_style_guide.pdf).

With best wishes and our kind thanks in advance,  
Jean-Paul Gagnon, Rikki Dean, and Hans Asenbaum

Questions? Please write to:  
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