

REDIRECT Online Workshop on
Modern Representative Democracy:
Origins, nature, and principles – State of the debate
Friday 9 February, 3.30pm (UK time)
4.30pm CET / 10.30am ET

The Workshop intends to explore the issue of Modern Representative Democracy from both historical-institutional and philosophical-conceptual perspectives. It is meant as a conversation aimed to explore the key ideas and the state of the contemporary debate on the formation and on the normative and institutional principles and practices of ‘representative democracy’ as form of modern government. The focus of the discussion is on the European and Atlantic experiences as the historical contexts within which modern representative democracy first emerged and established itself. But it is also open to reflections on its application, adaptation to other historical and cultural contexts, and the lessons that come from them.

The Workshop will address three main questions:

1. An understanding of the nature and historical formation of ‘representative democracy’ as a distinctive modern form of government, combining or being torn between two different vocations and interpretations: as a more ‘elitist’ or ‘popular’ form of government. How these two understandings of representative democracy combine or interact, conceptually, normatively or through its practices and institutions.
2. What is the relationship between representative democracy and other forms and ideals of democracy: participative, deliberative, and agonistic; or with ideals such as democratic autonomy and/or good governance. How the idea of democratic representation relates historically and conceptually to a constellation of modern political concepts such as: sovereignty and legislation; the state and the nation’ the people and popular will; constitutionalism and the division of power; majority rule and minority rights.
3. Are there core institutional and normative principles and processes that characterize representative democracy as a modern form of government? Does Bernard Manin’s influential analysis of representative government as resting on: (a) regular elections; (b) relative autonomy of the representatives (free mandate); (c) freedom of public opinion; (d) trial by discussion (public deliberation) captures the basic structure of modern representative democracy. Or is this characterization in need of additions or changes, as others have suggested?

The conversation around these broad questions will be guided by the reflections of Professors Céline Spector (Paris Sorbonne) and Nadia Urbinati (Columbia University, NY), and chaired by Dario Castiglione (Exeter University).

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