Editorial

Jean-Paul Gagnon and Emily Beausoleil

This seventeenth issue of *Democratic Theory* marks a major shift for the journal: this will be its last general issue until further notice. We have received many excellent special issue proposals and have also developed various special issues internally in order to speak to unfolding events and current scholarly developments. Given the journal has two issues per year, this has meant *Democratic Theory* no longer has space in the years to come for unsolicited, single-article submissions. We are excited about the direction this takes us, opening as it does far more opportunity for concerted dialogue and collective inquiry on timely themes, particularly given platforms for special issues can be rare in the discipline. We welcome future proposals for special issues and look forward to those already in development contributing to the broader conversations in contemporary democratic theory.

This issue consists of three research articles (Emma Turkenburg, Nathan Vandeputte, and Burcu Özçelik), a critical commentary (Benjamin Abrams), two review essays (Hans Asenbaum and Juan M. del Nido), and five book reviews (Dominik Austrup, Marion Repetti, Thomas Bottelier, Andreas Avgousti, and Antonin Lacelle-Webster).

In "Televised Election Debates [TEDs] in a Deliberative System," Emma Turkenburg (Leuven) asks whether TEDs are a blessing or a curse for democracy. Her answer: TEDs "should be critically approached as communicative venues with potential deliberative qualities." And so, she recommends a balance of optimism and caution. "Due to their confrontational, mediated format," Turkenburg writes, TEDs "also have benefits that suggest these debates could play a constructive role in spiking reflection and engagement, precisely because of strategically used raming and emotional appeals." Turkenburg, therefore, argues "we should refrain from hastily dismissing TEDs as 'just a show' and stop paying any attention to them. Rather, these debates need to be critically assessed to learn how they can benefit democracy and what can be done to improve them."

In "A Radical Democratic Lens to Rejuvenating European Union Democracy Support," Nathan Vandeputte (Ghent) "seeks to bridge current analysis of (EU) democracy support with the theoretical debates on organizing pluralism within the literature of democratic theory." His article

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scrutinizes "assumptions within current literature on EU democracy support, thereby offering a stronger theoretical approach for assessing the substance of EU democracy support in its relation to its recipients." He ends with a provocative, and promising, conclusion: that a "closer engagement with radical democracy would allow for better reflection on how the contestation over 'liberal democracy' can be democratically dealt with, and how this could be incorporated in the design and practice of democracy support."

In "What Can a Political Form of Reconciliation Look Like in Divided Societies?" Burcu Özçelik draws together key dimensions of deliberative and agonistic democratic theory to offer new resources for understanding political reconciliation. Seen in this light, deliberation and agonism are not as at odds, as is often conceived. Rather, Özçelik argues, the deliberative "right to justification" and corollary duty to justify can be remodeled so that reconciliation achieved through such deliberative means is understood agonistically: ever partial, contingent, and contestable. This novel integration of deliberative and agonistic approaches would both enable each to address the historical oversights and limitations of the other, and provide a far more relevant and ultimately effective approach to political reconciliation, not least for war-torn or divided societies.

Benjamin Abrams (Cambridge), in "The Rise of Despotic Majoritarianism," puts forward a critical commentary on a dynamic that seems to have been interpellated by the "authoritarian wave" currently rolling through the world, which is "that the once heralded 'golden age of Liberal Democracy' is giving way to an era of 'Despotic Majoritarianism.'" The problem for Abrams, which he picks up from Tocqueville's warning to the then-burgeoning American republic (before its twentieth-century fall into empire), is that majorities in the polls are conflated with the voice or the will of the people. This conflation has been used, time and again, to legitimize the decision-making of political elites, which has and continues to come at the expense of diverse minority voices. The ideology of "majoritarianism" can, Abrams argues, be despotic.

In "Beyond Deliberative Systems," Hans Asenbaum (Canberra) synthesizes Donatella della Porta's *How Social Movements Can Save Democracy,* Albert Dzur's *Democracy Inside,* Alexander Kioupkiolis's *The Common and Counter-Hegemonic Politics,* and Marie Paxton's *Agonistic Democracy* to establish the notion of "democratic ecosystems." Asenbaum argues that this concept can help us understand democratic systems beyond the model of deliberation.

In "Democracy, Ethics, and Neoliberalism in Latin America," Juan M. del Nido (Cambridge) reads A. Ricardo Lopez's *Makers of Democracy* and Susan Hellen Ellison's *Domesticating Democracy* to argue that neoliberalisms

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and democracies (given here as plurals, as both terms have many meanings) have had a complex relationship in Latin America. Intriguingly, it is not necessarily a negative story, as certain conceptions of neoliberalism do, in their normative orientations, seek to progress certain rights-bearing, individualist, and apolitical conceptions of democracy.

This issue closes with book reviews of William A. Galston's *Anti-Pluralism* by Dominik Austrup (University of Hamburg), Gergana Dimova's *Democracy Beyond Elections* by Marion Repetti (University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Western Switzerland), David Stasavage's *The Decline and Rise of Democracy* by Andreas Avgousti (Simon Fraser University), G. John Ikenberry's *A World Safe for Democracy* by Thomas Bottelier (University of Utrecht), and Cristina Lafont's *Democracy Without Shortcuts* by Antonin Lacelle-Webster (University of British Columbia).

We would like to end by extending our sincere thanks to Afsoun Afsahi for her work in chairing the book reviews and review essay section of *Democratic Theory* from 2019 to 2021. What great fortune it was to be able to collaborate with such an extraordinary colleague, and the journal has most certainly benefitted from her contribution to it.

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