Call for Papers

When is Democracy? Towards a Political Theory of Time

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The relationship between democracy and time is complex, ambiguous, and contradictory. As soon as one tries to capture how the notion of democracy relates to temporal categories and the (alleged) natural "flow of time," a series of antinomies come to the fore: Democracy, both as an idea and a practice, has evolved over history – and itself has made history as a driving force of emancipatory struggles. Democracy does not only thrive on a stable present, a fixed ground, or secure infrastructures. Instead, it is (potentially) strengthened in moments of uncertainty and insecurity. However, these moments may also threaten historic achievements. Democracy needs an open future to enable self-rule in meaningful ways. At the same time, it also needs to reduce the range of possibilities and manage expectations through institutions and procedures. Democracy flourishes on indeterminacy, while social precarity is countered by democracy's claim for equality and freedom. In its stabilizing moments, democracy refers to the continuity of constitutions, traditions, and memories. However, it does not settle into the normality of social hierarchies but disrupts "the normal" by allowing new, sometimes odd and queer, beginnings. Democracy can be understood as a fleeting, fragile, even fugitive moment in which political subjects emerge, while it is also a lasting condition for the appearance of political subjectivity. Democracy is a present reality – and yet "to come".

The last notion, Derrida's "to come," is one among many temporal concepts in political theory and philosophy: Notions like "utopia" (T. Morus, J.E. Muñoz, A. Brodsky and R. Kauder Nalebuff), "imagination" or "imaginary" (C. Castoriadis, B. Anderson, L. Olufemi), "horizon" (O. Marchart), "becoming" (W. Connolly), "prefiguration" (M. van de Sande), "natality" (H. Arendt) or "Jetztzeit" (W. Benjamin) describe political temporalities, phenomena of time in politics, or the temporality of politics itself. Often, these concepts undergird a critical stance on the teleology and idealism of a linear time that shapes politics from modern understandings of progress, growth, and goal-attainment. However, those critical notions of time have rarely been discussed and confronted with each other from systematic and explicitly time-theoretical perspectives. Moreover, the rich tradition of the philosophy of time reminds us that the (political) meaning of time in and for social realities is far from self-evident – with the common identification of time with the clock and the calendar only being one of several techniques of "representing" time. While time is crucial for democracy both as an institutional form, that we find, for instance, in election periods, and as a way of life structured by daily routines and social rhythms, it is anything but obvious how to theorize time in its relation to democracy (and vice versa).

As regards this challenge, political theory in general and democratic theory in particular still have relatively little to offer. Although temporal topoi and metaphors regularly feature in theorizations of democracy and democratic practices, for the most part, they remain implicit. They are only seldomly connected with time-theoretical reflections from the broader field of social theory. Here, attempts to go beyond reductionist notions of objective time and to come to terms with the social life of time are more explicitly on the agenda, for instance, in social phenomenology, pragmatism, systems theory, post-structuralism, deconstruction, or postcolonial studies. The conceptual linkages to democratic theory have yet to be established.

Against this background, the workshop invites to reflect on the possibilities and challenges of integrating time as a conceptual term within democratic theory. We aim at mapping the heterogeneity that comes to the fore when democratic theory is temporalized, i.e., when both "time" *and* "democracy" are given ample theoretical attention. More specifically, we are interested in (interdisciplinary) contributions that reflect on the following or related questions:

1. **Time in democratic theory:** What is the (implicit) role of time in different strands of thinking about democracy (e.g., in deliberative, communitarian, pragmatist, post-foundationalist, queer-feminist, or postcolonial strands)? Where and how is it possible to establish more nuanced understandings of time, as opposed to notions treating time as objective and self-evident, for theorizing democracy? How can democratic theory benefit from the different traditions of social theory where reflections on social time feature more prominently? To what extent do non-western and queer perspectives challenge euro- and androcentric conceptions of time and democracy?

2. **Temporalizing political concepts**: What are the implications of time-theoretical premises for concepts central to theorizing democracy, like freedom, equality, legitimacy, sovereignty, authority, power, representation, or emancipation? How do notions of time relate to other concepts carrying more or less obvious temporal connotations, like uncertainty, contingency, or complexity? Is it possible, necessary, dispensable, or problematic to establish "time" itself as a critical term of democratic theory?

3. **Temporalities of democratic practices:** What do we gain from theoretical perspectives that denaturalize time for critical analyses of specific democratic practices? How do constructions of time take effect on democratic practices, and how, in turn, does time emerge from democratic practices? How is it possible to develop theoretically nuanced perspectives on widespread and seemingly self-evident assessments of current temporal conditions of democratic rule like acceleration, urgency, or crisis?

We invite abstracts of up to 400 words from different fields of political and democratic theory. Please indicate the area (1, 2, or 3) your contribution ideally belongs. **Deadline for submissions: 21 April 2023**. Please send your abstract to both marlon.barbehoen@ipw.uni-heidelberg.de and mareike.gebhardt@uni-muenster.de.

The authors of accepted abstracts are expected to join us for an **in-person workshop on 5-6 October 2023** at Münster University where we will discuss first drafts of the papers. We plan to publish the final papers in a special issue of one of the leading political/social theory journals. We aim to bear the costs for travel and accommodation but cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.