

A RADICAL ALTERNATIVE?  
A RE-EVALUATION OF  
CHANTAL MOUFFE'S  
RADICAL DEMOCRATIC  
APPROACH

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# Contents

<b><u>ABSTRACT</u></b>	<b>V</b>
<b><u>DECLARATION</u></b>	<b>VII</b>
<b><u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u></b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b>1</b>
<b><u>PART ONE: THE OTHER ALTERNATIVES</u></b>	<b>16</b>
<b>1. MARXISM &amp; SOCIALISM</b>	<b>19</b>
THE CRITIQUE OF CLASSICAL MARXISM	21
▪ ECONOMISM	23
Discourse	24
Hegemony	26
▪ CLASS ESSENTIALISM	28
Constructed Identities	29
Chains of Equivalence	33
▪ REVOLUTION	35
MOUFFE'S (LIBERAL) SOCIALIST STRATEGY	39
CONCLUSION	44
<b>2. DELIBERATIVE &amp; THIRD WAY THEORIES</b>	<b>45</b>
HABERMAS	46
▪ REASON	48
▪ THE PUBLIC SPHERE & COMMON GOOD	50
▪ IDEAL SPEECH SITUATION	58
THE THIRD WAY & THE 'POST-POLITICAL' TREND	61
▪ GIDDENS & BECK	62

▪ THE THIRD WAY	68
CONCLUSION	73
<b>3. LIBERALISM &amp; RADICAL DEMOCRACY</b>	<b>75</b>
LIBERALISM	76
▪ THE LIBERAL SUBJECT	79
▪ RAWLS	82
▪ NEUTRALITY	86
DIFFERENCE AS POLITICAL	89
AGONISM	95
CONCLUSION	98
<b><u>PART TWO: MOUFFE'S RADICAL ALTERNATIVE</u></b>	<b>102</b>
<b>4. MOUFFE'S RADICAL (RE)-THEORISING</b>	<b>104</b>
IDENTITY RE-THEORISED	105
▪ THE ROLE OF DISCOURSE	106
▪ SUBJECT POSITIONS	112
▪ AGENCY	115
PLURALISM	118
▪ AGONISTIC PLURALISM	119
▪ MOUFFE & WEBER	122
DEMOCRACY, POWER & HEGEMONY	127
▪ THE DEMOCRATIC HORIZON	127
▪ THE HEGEMONIC PROJECT	130
▪ POWER	135
CONCLUSION	138
<b>5. RADICAL DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP</b>	<b>140</b>
THE LIBERAL APPROACH	141
▪ NEUTRALITY VERSUS THE POLITICAL	148
THE COMMUNITARIAN APPROACH	154
▪ THE COMMON GOOD	159
THE BRIDGE: OAKESHOTT	162
RADICAL DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP	165
CONCLUSION	170
<b><u>PART THREE: THE RADICAL EVALUATION</u></b>	<b>173</b>
<b>6. A DEMOCRATIC &amp; LEFT ALTERNATIVE?</b>	<b>175</b>

RADICALLY DEMOCRATIC?	176
▪ INFORMING CITIZENSHIP	177
▪ INFORMING DEMOCRACY	180
▪ A POSTSTRUCTURALIST APPROACH	187
RADICALLY LEFT?	193
▪ EVIDENCE OF AN ALTERNATIVE	195
▪ RADICAL IMPLICATIONS	200
▪ THE PRINCIPLES AS KEY	203
CONCLUSION	205
<b>7. A RADICALLY DIFFERENT APPROACH?</b>	<b>208</b>
CHALLENGING THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTNERSHIP	210
▪ RADICAL RUPTURE: THE CONSTRUCTED SUBJECT	211
▪ RADICAL RUPTURE: AGONISM & THE POLITICAL	214
▪ RADICAL RUPTURE: THE PRINCIPLES AS EMPTY SIGNIFIERS	219
A NEW PARADIGM FOR DEMOCRACY	224
CONCLUSION	228
<b><u>CONCLUSION</u></b>	<b><u>230</u></b>
<b><u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u></b>	<b><u>238</u></b>

# Abstract

The catalyst for this thesis is the current debate addressing the nature and practice of liberal democracies. Many critics have argued that liberal democracies are failing their constituents, and in order to revitalise the key features of “robust” democracies, a number of alternatives have been proposed. Chantal Mouffe’s radical democratic approach offers one such alternative. Mouffe has written extensively on this subject and is considered an eminent proponent of a left, democratic, alternative and it is her body of work that I take as my explicit focus.

This thesis examines to what degree Mouffe’s alternative can be considered *radical*. There are three important elements to this evaluation, all of which relate to the different definitions of the term. Specifically, these criteria are embodied in the following questions: “How *different* to the other alternatives is Mouffe’s approach?”; “How *left* is it?”; and “How *democratic* is it?”. While it is clear that some of Mouffe’s work has progressive, disruptive, democratic, and therefore “radical” elements, this thesis argues that this radicalness does not reach its full potential. The lacunae in Mouffe’s work, which relate to a lack of detail and theoretical clarification on many important concepts, mean that Mouffe is unable, at this point in time, to present a comprehensive, useful, and radical alternative to rival the other approaches.

Laden within her work, however, there is the *potential* for radical democracy to become a paradigm changing approach to democracy. Central to this thesis is the claim that Mouffe should capitalise on the most radical aspects of her work – expanding the areas of re-theorisation, utilising them to inform the principles

of liberty and equality, and disrupting the paradigm of liberal democracy. In doing so, radical democracy could rival other alternative models of democracy, and present an important new approach in democratic theory and practice.

# Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Leah Skrzypiec and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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