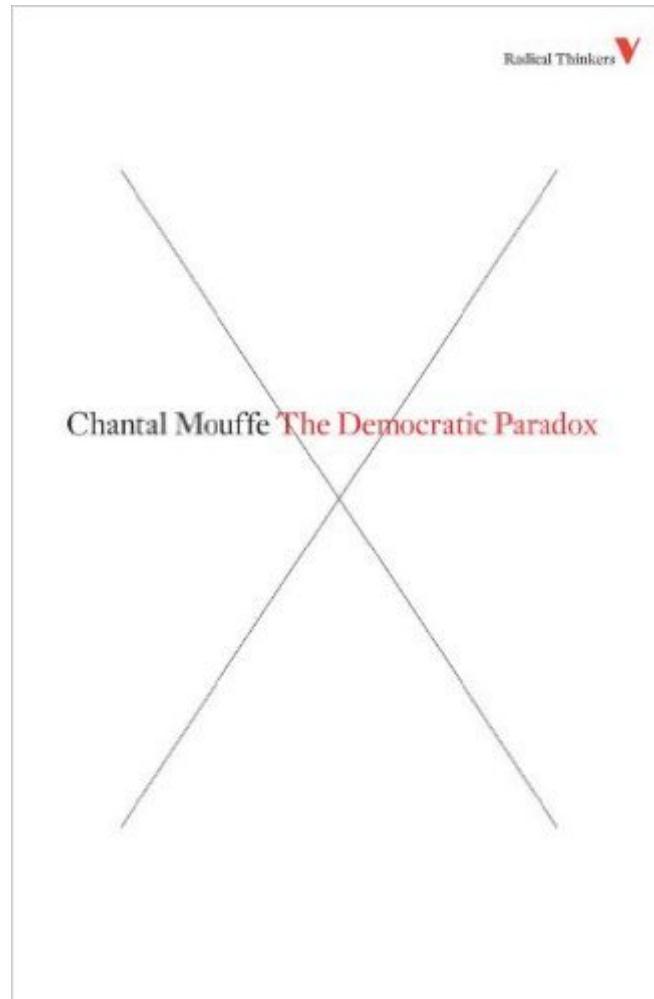


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The Democratic Paradox (Radical Thinkers)



Synopsis

From the theory of "deliberative democracy" to the politics of the "third way", the present Zeitgeist is characterized by attempts to deny what Chantal Mouffe contends is the inherently conflictual nature of democratic politics. Far from being signs of progress, such ideas constitute a serious threat to democratic institutions. Taking issue with John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas on one side, and the political tenets of Blair, Clinton and Schröder on the other, Mouffe brings to the fore the paradoxical nature of modern liberal democracy in which the category of the "adversary" plays a central role. She draws on the work of Wittgenstein, Derrida, and the provocative theses of Carl Schmitt, to propose a new understanding of democracy which acknowledges the ineradicability of antagonism in its workings.

Book Information

Series: Radical Thinkers

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: Verso; 59167th edition (June 9, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1844673553

ISBN-13: 978-1844673551

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.5 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars - See all reviews (2 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #502,744 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #125 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Ideologies & Doctrines > Anarchism #418 in Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Diseases & Physical Ailments > Nervous System #820 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Ideologies & Doctrines > Democracy

Customer Reviews

Chantal Mouffe- The Democratic Paradox - "Consensus in a liberal-democratic society is- and will always be- the expression of a hegemony and the crystallization of power relations. The frontier that it establishes between what is and is not legitimate is a political one, and for that reason it should remain contestable." - Chantal Mouffe
If you've read Mouffe's landmark work with Ernesto Laclau, *Hegemony And Socialist Strategy*, you can probably surmise what this work entails: it further elaborates theses presented in that work and Mouffe's *Return Of The Political*. These theses are, coincidentally, central to Žižek's work on the "quilting

point that unifies an ideological field (for more on this, see Žižek's appraisal of Laclau and Mouffe in the anthology *Interrogating The Real*). I shall try to indicate, for newcomers to Chantal Mouffe, the principal coordinates of her theoretical intervention: Society does not exist. This, for Žižek, is the central postulate of Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, one which he returns to at various points of *The Sublime Object Of Ideology*. When we say that "society does not exist", we mean that the sociological (ideological) fantasy of a homeostatic social whole is impossible. Society can never achieve a state of consummate closure, because it is divided from within by an irreconcilable schism. In Marxist theory, this rift assumes the form of the class struggle. There can be no rapprochement between classes, and the "truth" of society does not lie in a holistic, transcendent judgment that stands above this cleavage (the perspective of an omniscient God) but in this antagonism itself.

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