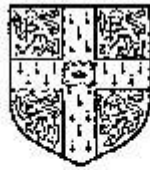


UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
FACULTY OF HISTORY



POLITICAL THOUGHT AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY  
RESEARCH SEMINAR 2013-14

Series 1

Monday 28 October 5.00 - 6.45  
Old Combination Room, Trinity College

## What Makes Representation Democratic?

Sofia Näsström  
Uppsala University

© 2013, Sofia Näsström  
Work in progress: not to be cited or further circulated without permission.

## **The author**

Sofia Näsström is Associate Professor of Political Science at Uppsala University. She has held visiting positions at Columbia University, the New School of Social Research and the European University Institute, and is co-founder of the journal *Ethics & Global Politics*. Näsström researches and teaches in the field of political theory and global politics, and has published articles on topics such as representation, the people, political equality and ‘the right to have rights’. She is currently completing a monograph entitled *The Spirit of the People: Thinking Democracy beyond the Nation-State*. The paper ‘What Makes Representation Democratic?’ is part of a chapter of this book.

## **The paper**

After many years of research on non-electoral representation, there is today a pressing need for criteria by which to distinguish democratic from non-democratic forms of representation. By extending Montesquieu’s classical analysis of “the principles” behind different forms of governments onto modern democracy, this paper offers such a criterion. It demonstrates that a scheme of representation is democratic if it is guided by the principle of equality. The merit of this principle is twofold. First, it offers a criterion for telling what is democratic about representation once it is decoupled from election. This is essential in order to distinguish democratic from other forms of representation—be they liberal or republican—and thereby to be clear about what can and cannot be claimed in its name. Second, it means that one can experiment with new representative arrangements within, across and beyond existing constituencies, and at the same time ensure that whatever institutional incarnation such a scheme of representation may take it enacts rather than displaces the power of the people.

**Keywords:** Montesquieu, Lefort, Rosanvallon, democracy, election, equality, representation, responsibility.