

# Laudation

## For the 2023 Political Theory Prize

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The jury has this year chosen to award the prize to **Maxime Lepoutre** for the book **Democratic Speech in Divided Times** (Oxford University Press, 2021).

The jury reported the following:

This work is a fascinating book dealing with the complexity of democratic deliberative discourse in contemporary society. The book tackles a question that is inevitable for current reflection in political theory: can the importance and democratic value of inclusive public discourse be defended even in the face of epistemic inequality, antagonism, and political polarisation?

Lepoutre persuasively argues that inclusive public discourse can serve crucial normative functions even under non-ideal circumstances, and indeed that many of those circumstances are less threatening than they are often portrayed, while other difficulties can be overcome through appropriate norms of public discourse and wise public policy. In other words, the non-ideal reality of nowadays democratic practices including hate speech, misinformation, and affective polarisation should not lead us to reject or minimise the role for public discourse within politics and democratic theory. Instead, the book defends the democratic value and inclusiveness of public discourse even in the face of persistent inequalities and increasing antagonisms.

Furthermore, the author proposes a number of social changes that will enable democratic discourse. The book is normative in that it looks for solutions that are within our reach, but that require radical and demanding social changes.

Lepoutre takes seriously the role of political theory in identifying relevant, normatively-informed, empirical hypotheses, which can then be tested by social scientists. The book is thus full of insightful hypotheses ripe for future empirical investigation.

The topic is a classic in democratic theory, but it is treated in an innovative way. Lepoutre makes extensive use of the systemic approach to deliberative democracy, shows the value of that approach in a much more detailed and applied way than was previously present in the literature. Emotive speeches are analysed as important not only for expressive reasons, but also epistemic ones: they can overcome epistemic divisions and provide an explanatory function which enables communication between divided social groups by signalling inequalities among communicators.

The jury welcomes the major contribution of the book to political theory, but also prizes the capacity of the author to work at the overlap between epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, psychology, sociology, and political science.

### **Ladislav Cabada (Chair)**

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On behalf of the Political Theory Prize jury  
European Consortium for Political Research