

Introduction

Democracy in the twenty-first century has failed to live up to its promise. It is widely noted that democratic governments have grown increasingly detached from the governed and incapable of standing up to the powerful economic interests that tend to dominate everyday life. Indeed, these interests have come to permeate politics itself, appearing to render “rule by the people” a bare ideal, seemingly remote and out of reach. Pervasive and persistent inequalities mark contemporary economies, which, though they may produce a wide range of goods and make effective use of new technologies, nonetheless fail to provide many with adequate livelihoods or dignified conditions of work. Even in societies where multiple sources of gratification and fulfillment are available, the limits of the “private sphere” and the informal contexts of interpersonal relationships leave many people dissatisfied and disempowered, whether because of their inability to realize their goals or develop their capacities, or in virtue of residual forms of oppression, racism, and group hatreds. What can political philosophy contribute to understanding and helping to remedy these contemporary problems? Why has democracy, in particular, been unable to fulfill its potential? And is it possible to deepen democracy while also achieving greater degrees of economic justice, not only locally but also more globally? What would make those dual aims achievable?

This book argues that to realize democracy and global justice we have to look beyond the strictly political forms and remedies to the underlying social conditions that would enable these norms to be met at local, national, and transnational scales. Democracy would have to be transformed from its static and purely formal state to a more dynamic, responsive, and interactive form of governance. And we would need to understand the ways that democracy is normatively connected to social justice, both at home and abroad. It is sometimes acknowledged that political equality among citizens presupposes a certain level of economic well-being, but it is equally the case, I will argue, that achieving global justice – say, through forms of aid or redistribution – requires democratic participation on the part of the people whom one proposes to help in

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these ways. To date, political philosophers have tended to focus on one or another of the norms of freedom, justice, human rights, and democracy, as if each operated independently of the other. Despite their abundant insights, however, these approaches have not been very effective guides to contemporary practice. I believe that to address these problems we need to understand how these various norms are interrelated, both in theory and in practice, and that progress in regard to one also requires some movement on the others.

A central thesis of this book is that democratic transformation is largely dependent on changes in and across society, and involves the cultivation of solidarities across borders, new social movements, innovative forms of managing economic life, along with institutional transformations in the political domain. We need to consider the motivations that might lead people to take seriously the human rights of everyone else – is reasoning sufficient or are caring and affective attitudes also necessary? If both are required, how are they related? Is it plausible to suppose that people can care about others at a distance, especially if it involves more than a few other people? If we want to aid these others and mitigate global poverty, do we need to hear from them about their needs, and introduce new forms of global democracy that would enable such input? How can democratic dialogue and deliberation across borders proceed in any case, given the continued pervasiveness of conflict, whether in the form of cultural misunderstanding, state violence, or gender violence? Can online networking and new social media help to facilitate the requisite communication transnationally, as well as within given political societies?

This work takes up and elaborates upon the emergence of a human rights framework worldwide, including the growing recognition of an economic right to the means of subsistence. It argues that the fulfillment of this right would be a crucial step toward global justice. But justice is not only an economic matter; it involves the recognition of people as equal, and, in the view here, gives rise to a requirement for democratic participation beyond existing electoral and representative forms. We have recently seen sustained efforts toward substantive democratic transformation in the Middle East and North Africa, and attempts to confront inequality and deepen democracy with the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States and the *Democracia Real Ya* (Real Democracy Now) movement in Europe. But in the face of powerful institutions of global governance and the economic dominance of transnational corporations, can democracy be of any use in holding these institutions and governments accountable for the impacts of their policies on people's lives? What forms would such democracy have to take? Would new types

of regional and global democracy be helpful in this regard, and if so, how could they be structured?

Building on my previous book *Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights*,¹ I propose that to get to the root of these pressing social and political problems, we need to take a distinctively *interactive* approach to understanding democracy. To this end, we need to start with a more interactive conception of individuals, social relations, and collective activity within a given society. This networking perspective is also important in comprehending how people can link up across borders, how movements can make a difference at a distance, and how contemporary democracies can function effectively with others in an increasingly interconnected world.

Going beyond liberal understandings of the individual (whether in terms of rational choice or utility maximization), the theory of social reality (or *social ontology*) that underlies this work takes people to be “individuals-in-relations.” As subjects, they have a capacity for freedom, but also require a set of basic conditions to make this freedom effective, including equal forms of social recognition and access to the material means of life. The human rights that protect and give expression to their freedom go beyond bare legal requirements to moral desiderata; they serve as goals for developing political, economic, and social institutions that would help to fulfill them. They will be interpreted not only or mainly as rights of individuals against others or against the state, but as claims on others to cooperate in setting up, supporting, and sustaining these institutions.

Justice is understood in an egalitarian way to require equal rights of access to the basic conditions that people need for their self-transformative or self-developing activity throughout their lives; it is understood in terms of what I call “equal positive freedom.” Although this conception makes room for the political claims of local communities and nation-states, justice extends beyond their borders in cosmopolitan or global directions. One of the most central of the conditions for people’s freedom is, I argue, taking part in common or cooperative activities with others. Equal positive freedom as a principle of justice can thus be seen to require rights of democratic participation in determining the direction of the various common activities in which people engage.² In this view, democracy gains its significance not by instrumentally producing

¹ Carol C. Gould, *Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

² See Carol C. Gould, *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economy, and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), chapter 1.

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just outcomes (though it may tend to do so), but because it is required by this equal freedom of persons, as active and social beings.³ And the scope of democracy in this view is considerably broader than generally understood: It applies not only to politics but to institutions within economic and social life as well, supporting the development of new forms of democratic management, for example, within firms or workplaces.

I will argue that in order to achieve justice in its more global or cosmopolitan reach, we need to understand its social bases, and specifically, the types of interconnections among people and groups that it requires: first, the formation of *transnational solidarities*; second, forms of care and recognition across borders; third, the achievement of gender equality and the overcoming of oppressive social relations; fourth, the ways in which “power over” others can be replaced by “power-with” others; and fifth, the conditions for effective dialogue and deliberation, both online and off. Beyond deliberation, the possibilities that the Internet offers for more participatory forms of democracy will be explored, together with the problems it raises concerning control over information.

These various social factors will be seen to support a conception of *concrete universality*, in which norms are understood not only in their abstract significations extending across time and space but also in their diverse manifestations as they emerge from various social and historical contexts. Although, in a sense, norms are constructed over time, I will argue that this does not eliminate their universal import.

The term *interactive democracy* highlights certain crucial features of this new conception and the accompanying forms of practice that it needs: It speaks to the dependence of real democracy on cooperative relations in social life and on a social understanding of persons. It signifies the interdependence between political democracy and the organization of the economic, social, and personal spheres. It connotes the interrelations of participatory, deliberative, and electoral modes of democracy. And crucially, it takes seriously the emergence of cross-border, transnational, regional, and even global forms of community and governance, such that any one existing expression of political democracy has to be understood in connection with the others.

Conceptually, too, the term *interactive* suggests that democracy can only be understood in relation to other core social and political norms and values. Political theories have tended to emphasize only one of the relevant norms in the last decades, focusing on justice *or* freedom *or* human rights *or* democracy *or* care *or* recognition. This book regards each of these

³ For a discussion of the relation between the norms of justice and democracy, see Gould, *Globalizing Democracy*, chapter 1.

foci as having much to contribute to our social and political understanding of the problems we face and the alternative arrangements we wish to propose. It sees the strengths of the existing theories, which, however, have tended to contradict each other on key points. The methodology advanced here attempts to reconcile conflicting views but not by averaging them or seeking compromise. Instead, it aims to develop a broader or more comprehensive approach in which preexisting theoretical perspectives have their place. Despite its contemporary subject matter, this book follows a classical philosophical approach in self-consciously aiming to be systematic and in adopting what could be called a dialectical method. It draws on and integrates elements from a variety of traditions in political philosophy, including feminism, Marxian approaches, existentialism, and liberalism, along with participatory democratic and critical social theory. In doing so, it attends to the ways that aspects of these traditions can cohere with each other and thereby contribute to our understanding, by reinterpreting them within a new, more synthetic perspective.

The book will advocate a somewhat similar approach for practical dialogues and deliberation, so that seemingly divergent views can be related to each other across political and cultural traditions. Beyond calling for more open and inclusive attitudes on the part of the interlocutors, there may be new ways to highlight misunderstandings of the meaning of the terms and concepts employed in such dialogues. But emphasizing intercultural perspectives is not to say that we have to remain uncritical about oppressive practices, for example, regarding the treatment of women, whether within distant cultural contexts or our own. On the contrary, the discussion presupposes some measure of critical engagement within these dialogues.

To say that this work aims at conceptual coherence is not to claim that it is complete. The book notably lacks an adequate treatment of environmental and ecological matters. There is ample room for developing such an account within the theory proposed here, in light of the emphasis it places on the material conditions for human activity, its broad reading of justice (which would encompass environmental justice), and its grounding in a human rights framework, which would recognize a right to an environment adequate to support health and well-being.⁴ The proposals offered for dealing with the crisis in democracy – along with attention to transnational communities and their alternative forms of decision-making – could facilitate the future development of a more effective and democratic response to the climate crisis. But a substantial account of

⁴ See Tim Hayward, *Constitutional Environmental Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), chapter 1.

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this and other ecological challenges, along with the most effective ways of dealing with them through more global forms of cooperation, are not yet developed in the way these serious problems would merit.

The book is divided into three parts: The first lays out my theoretical framework and distinguishes my approach from alternative social and political theories; the second explores some of the social roots of global justice; and the third develops the idea of interactive democracy in several of its conceptual and practical dimensions. A brief overview of the chapter contents will give the reader a prospective look at the key problems to be taken up, the main theses, and the general line of argument.

Part I lays out the fundamentals of the theory and its accompanying practice. It begins by developing an approach to global justice premised on the realization of people's economic and social human rights; it then proceeds with some practical suggestions for institutional changes along those lines. It raises some conundrums, compares this understanding of global justice to other cosmopolitan theories, and shows how this human rights approach is broadly egalitarian but is also more practicable than some others in prioritizing the fulfillment of basic human rights. This part then moves to consider alternative ways of justifying human rights philosophically, taking up both individualist and social/practical understandings of them (Griffin, Gewirth, Habermas, Beitz). It goes on to propose a social ontological and relational basis for these rights, which takes them beyond their status as legal protections by nation-states. These rights are understood as cosmopolitan moral and social norms, and as goals for transnational institutions of social, political, and economic life.

The core concept of positive freedom (or effective freedom) is analyzed next and defended in the face of Isaiah Berlin's critique. Freedom is understood to presuppose the protection of liberties, as Berlin insisted, but also requires freedom from oppression and exploitation, as well as access to a set of enabling material and social conditions. Inasmuch as the freedom in question is that of "individuals-in-relations" and is given a dynamic reading in which it develops over time, the conception goes beyond standard notions of autonomy and even the feminist conception of relational autonomy. The historical emergence of the norms of freedom and human rights is considered as well, as is the challenge of interpreting them from a variety of cultural perspectives. Here, too, will be noted the relation between my conception of positive freedom and the capabilities approach of Sen and Nussbaum.

The part concludes with an argument for democracy as a human right, defending that view against critics like Joshua Cohen. It gives an initial account of two criteria for determining the proper scope of democratic decision-making – "common activities" and "all-affected" – and then

shows how they apply to emerging transnational communities, in the first case, and to the exogenous effects of policies and decisions on people outside a given community, in the second. The question arises whether equal rights of participation are possible here or only lesser forms of democratic “input.”

Part II of the book addresses the fundamentally social bases of the norms of global justice. It starts with a conceptual analysis of solidarity in networked transnational contexts, contrasting it with humanitarian aid, and connecting it to notions of “fellow feeling,” as well as those of mutual concern and mutual aid. It considers the sense in which transnational solidarity networks are helpful for fulfilling such norms, or whether a more unified form of solidarity within a global community would be needed to support global redistributive justice. Given that a truly global solidarity is likely unachievable, and may not even make sense, would that vitiate the possibility of achieving global justice as well? It will also be of interest to consider whether solidarity is required beyond justice, as an additional value to be realized in its own right.

The role of care and care work in global contexts is considered next, with attention to new ways of supporting this work politically. Forms of recognition needed for global justice are analyzed, along with the relations between care, empathy, and the recognition of equal dignity that is presupposed in respecting others’ human rights. We also ask whether care as a basic condition of life is adequately recognized within the existing international human rights documents, and whether there is a human right to care per se. The book then broaches some hard questions and political paradoxes concerning gender equality and women’s human rights, in view of the practices of cultural or religious groups that do not recognize such equality. The idea of using human rights as a limit on tolerating cultural practices is proposed, but the complication concerning the status of alternative cultural interpretations of these human rights and varying views on their priority has to be analyzed as well. This cross-cultural variability is illustrated with two cases of human rights adjudication that bear on women’s freedom and their equality in public and private realms.

Next, we turn to the conditions for communicating across cultures, which come to the fore when we focus on the case of humor, and specifically the sociality of jokes. The connection of jokes to a particular audience that can understand them, and to which they are directed, will be seen to raise interesting questions both of inclusion and exclusion that are relevant to social and political uses of speech. Can jokes be understood across cultures? Hard cases of misunderstanding and of hate via humor are considered, exemplified by the case of the 2005 Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad. Other uses of political humor in the

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context of protest and resistance can also shed light on unexplored social dimensions of speech and the prerequisites for effective communication transnationally.

This second part of the book concludes with an elaboration of the notion of “power-with” and a consideration of the ways in which it may be mobilized to help address transnational forms of violence. Building on the work of Hannah Arendt and Iris Young, it analyzes the contrast they drew between power and violence, and takes up its implications for democracy. The part concludes with an argument that recognizing a human right to democracy in practice (while also addressing economic rights) can help in the mitigation of violence. The discussion of the collaborative and cooperative potential of new forms of “power-with” to replace existing forms of power over others points ahead to the notion of interactive democracy.

Part III draws out the import of the earlier sections for theorizing democratic participation and deliberation in interactive forms beyond the nation-state – at transnational, regional, and possibly global levels. It begins by considering how democratic deliberation and dialogue across borders can be enhanced both online and off, and calls attention to the problem of misunderstanding terms and concepts in cross-cultural contexts. It goes on to analyze the role of social media and mobile technologies in democratic transformations, beginning with their use in the Arab Spring of 2010–11 and the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011–12. The focus here is on how new media may enable participatory modes of democratic protest and organization – beyond e-government or e-voting or even “crowd-sourcing” – by way of new opportunities for collaboration, decentralized communication, and user-generated content. Some of the dangers and dilemmas of networking are discussed, as are issues of open access to information, surveillance, and the role of anonymity in online politics.

This part goes on to elaborate the two criteria for extending democracy beyond the nation-state – rights of participation in new transnational communities and rights of input into the policies of global institutions on the part of all those importantly affected by them – and discusses their connection to regional and global human rights frameworks. It then moves to consider some new directions for facilitating democratic input into the “epistemic communities” of global governance institutions and developing forms of transnational representation at that level. The possibility of introducing deeper, broader forms of democratic management within firms is then explored and justified philosophically. The import of such innovations is assessed for an understanding of workers’ labor rights around the world (currently limited to the prevention of exploitation and

the protection of collective bargaining). The book concludes with an evaluation of the alternate emphases on regional vs. global democratization as possible frames for the future development of interactive democracy. The concern in both of these directions would be to find ways to give people more input into the growing number of transnational decisions and policies and the power structures that affect them.

By way of these arguments, this book thus aims to develop an integrative normative approach that can overcome existing theoretical conundrums, while helping to frame our increasingly transnational relations in the coming period. The hope is to show how we can expand the scope of democracy and make it more responsive, at the same time that we address our global responsibilities to support institutions that fulfill people's human rights and meet their basic needs. This new approach arises not only through reflections on alternative theories, but also by drawing on ideas that have emerged from social networks, social movements, and other elements of contemporary life. Its success, too, will depend on the degree to which people will find it useful as a guide to their own practice, above all in their common action.