Astrolabio. Revista internacional de filosofía
Año 2011 Núm. 12. ISSN 1699-7549. pp. 66-75

Cosmopolitanism and Global Democracy

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In Gillian Brock's recent fine book *Global Justice: a Cosmopolitan Account* (Brock 2009), the relationship between cosmopolitanism and democracy is articulated in two ways. First, through Brock's own account of "Responsive Democracy", and secondly through her application of Elizabeth Anderson's theory of "democratic equality." My reflections here are driven by a tension that appears to exist in Brock's account. On the one hand there are the interests, outcomes and the effectiveness of a politics that privileges the well being of the individual –the politics that is at the heart of a cosmopolitan account of global justice–. This leads Brock to privilege responsive or interest models of democracy over participatory or moral/political agency models, which she argues are unsatisfactory at the task of providing for peoples' justice interests. On the other hand, cosmopolitanism's focus on the autonomy of that same individual, and her freedom to pursue her own ends, and to do so in concert with her political confreres, would seem to require the participation of these individuals in the discourse which determines what their interests are said to be, what their flourishing consists in –in other words, requires the agency model which Brock puts aside. To put it slightly differently, the concern is that the democratic egalitarian autonomy which is generated by the individualism at the heart of liberal cosmopolitanism is not adequately accommodated by Brock's Responsive Democracy.

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Brock directly deals with the question of global democracy in two chapters, one midway through the book, and one at the end. Chapter 4 is titled "Global Governance and the Nationalist Challenge: What does authentic democracy require", and chapter 12 is titled "Equality, Cosmopolitanism, and Global Justice". Brock commences the first of these two chapters thus: «So far I have argued that global justice requires that all are adequately positioned to enjoy prospects for a decent life, which requires we attend especially to enabling need satisfaction, protecting basic freedom, and ensuring fair terms of cooperation in collective endeavours» (84). In this chapter Brock is concerned to consider global governance arrangements which will satisfy these goals, and she is particularly concerned to satisfy the worries of those who think that such a cosmopolitan agenda would «undermine goods of importance to the nation, notably authentic democracy or national self-determination» (84).

What is "authentic democracy" –or as it is sometimes parsed, "genuine democracy"? In this chapter the argument about democracy is closely linked with arguments about national self determination and national identity. I am less concerned with these per se, than with where Brock's discussion of them leads her with respect to the nature of authentic democracy. Brock's way into the discussion is to moderate a debate between David Held and Will Kymlicka, juxtaposing Held's cosmopolitan democracy project against Kymlicka's democratic nationalism –both well known positions, which need little rehearsal here (see especially Held 1995, Held 2004 and Kymlicka 2001). In Brock's analysis, the issues at stake concern the preconditions necessary for the functioning of democratic mechanisms of governance at the international level. Kymlicka argues that common national identity generates trust and solidarity, that this is required for authentic deliberation, in turn required for authentic democracy; and since nothing can take the place of this internationally, democracy will not be achievable. Held articulates «at least seven clusters of rights» which guarantee political participation in communities, and focuses on mechanisms to gather the views of those being affected by decisions. Brock concludes that on Kymlicka's own reasoning we should be able to develop –and extending her argument, perhaps already have developed– a global thin identity that is sufficient for us to see our choices as bound up with the

survival of our global society and its institutions into the indefinite future (to echo Kymlicka's words (98)).

What emerges out of this rehearsal of the Kymlicka/Held debate is the primacy of the need for "meaningful democratic life"; on Brock's analysis it may be possible to harmonize both views, at least in part by arguing for a picture where "language demarcated political communities are the primary forums for genuine *participatory* democracy", forums which are complemented by –or, more strongly, are undergirded by– democratized international institutions (103).

The next subheading in this chapter asks a key question, and it is one that points to a tension at the heart of this book which I suggest is never fully explored, nor resolved. «Taking stock: what do we want from our global governance arrangements anyhow? Does it matter whether they are democratic?» (104). *Does it matter whether they are democratic?* Following Daniel Weinstock, Brock argues that there are two conceptions of democracy, and that which one we opt for is crucial in knowing how to answer the "does it matter?" question: «On the first…model, global democracy is desirable because it would enhance political agency…. On the second account, realizing more democracy globally would be desirable because it would enhance the realization of people's interests». Brock favours the second of these accounts, and thus the answer to the «does it matter?» question is that yes, it matters, because democratic institutions «enhance the realization of people's interests» –not because they guarantee people political agency.

Brock –as we shall see in more detail shortly– develops an account of democracy which she calls the "responsive Democracy" account, which she argues is best suited to conceptualizing democracy at the international level. It is an account which is considered appropriately democratic because it serves the interests of the people. The difficultly with her account is that it is not at all clear that "the people" would always agree with her about this. The people are –at one remove and then at another– gently sundered from their traditional role within democratic theory as active agents claiming the freedom to determine their political future, and are re-designated as the owners of sets of interests which are articulated for them, and which governance mechanisms are created to satisfy. This, at any rate, strikes me as being the danger at the heart of Brock's Responsive Democracy. At the theoretical level, too, it is difficult to square the individualism of Brock's cos-

mopolitanism (with all its agency and autonomy implications) with what looks surprisingly like an explicitly paternalistic theory of global governance. Let us look at some of the finer details.

Brock argues that there are two main desirable variables –sometimes in tension– for evaluating global governance arrangements: effectiveness and accountability. Accountability, Brock argues, drawing on Robert Keohane and Ruth Grant (Grant & Keohane 2005), «implies that some actors have the right to hold other actors to a set of standards, to judge whether they have fulfilled their responsibilities in light of those standards, and to impose sanctions if they determine that these responsibilities have not been met» (104-5). Here again, there are two models: participation and delegation. Brock is of the view that «so far, perhaps rather too much emphasis has been placed on the role of participation in legitimating governance» (105). Brock combine's Keohane and Grant's delegation model of accountability with Daniel Weinstock's interest model of democracy (Weinstock 2006) to make what she calls her Responsive Democracy account. Brock says that it is possible to construct global governance and accountability mechanisms that are adequately democratic, when evaluated according to Responsive Democracy. But there is a genuine question here as to whether Responsive Democracy is itself adequately democratic.

Perhaps the clearest way to express the danger I am concerned about is that Responsive Democracy sets out to respond to the interests of the people, not to the will of the people –the latter being traditional understanding of democracy. Both of these ideas have very long histories, and many caveats are needed here! It has long been understood that the will of the people can be perverse and ultimately undemocratic; that mature democracies have complex and varied mechanisms for articulating what the will of the people might be. These are extraordinarily more complex than the populist idea that democracy is like showing a majority of hands in a town hall meeting. Indeed, in her endorsement of Weinstock's interest account of democracy, Brock accepts his analysis of many of the shortcomings of the agency account of democracy, where participation in collective decision making is the sine qua non. The shortcomings Weinstock identifies are very real (such as collective action problems), and Weinstock is similarly correct to argue that in actually existing mature democracies there are a wide range of institutions which «complement democratic institutions'

ability to realize citizens' interests, but…are not themselves democratic» –adding, «many of them are overtly paternalistic in their rationale and their operation». This is undoubtedly true. For my purposes the crucial thing to note here is that *these* institutions *complement* participatory democratic institutions –such as electoral systems. *They do not replace them*; and at the end of the day, they are held accountable to them.

The danger, it seems to me, with Brock's Responsive Democracy – particularly given that it is intended to operate at the global level– is that by being articulated primarily in terms of interests, justice, results, delegation, and mandates of protection, the only real sense in which it is democratic is in its concern for the well being of all people (rather than, say, for the well being of the aristocratic classes or the interests of the capitalist class or the working class). This seems a long way from democracy understood as a form of self-determination where the terms of self rule are made by participants – citizens. (For debate over this point see in particular Lafont 2010 (and also other articles in the same journal issue) in response to Bohman 2007)

The big gap in this approach is the question of, shall we say, «who's justice? Which interests?». While it is true that many of us would agree with Brock's account of human needs and human flourishing in broad terms, the problem is that when it comes to global governance, there will always be great dispute about what the best way to approximate the meeting of those needs and interests will be. And it is at this point, I think, where it is crucial for the well being of democracies that people be participatorially engaged in the determining of their own political destiny. It is altogether too easy to envisage Responsive Democracy degenerating into yet another "peoples democracy" where the only vaguely democratic characteristic is the (usually vain) reference to "the people", who are not consulted and who's own ideas of their interest and welfare are disregarded.

Brock is alert to the dangers of delegated responsibility, particularly with respect to the abuse of power. Her argument –drawing on Andrew Kuper's similar account of responsive democracy (Kuper 2006)– is that this can be managed by ensuring appropriate institutional design –maintaining the separation of powers, and designing other «adequate mechanisms of institutional and role accountability» (108).

This is all crucial; but it seems to me that it is not the main issue. The abuse of power within the functioning of governance institutions

is a real issue and must be addressed; but the real abuse of power that lies at the heart of democracy is when there is a large gap between people's perception of their interests, well being and needs, and the account of these which is given by the political system. Arguably part of the crisis in many of our existing mature democracies is that people feel disenfranchised from the democratic system; they feel that "the people" in whose name it operates is not them. And they see no way to become effectively involved in changing this situation. And this leads us back to the question of participation. The real danger in Responsive Democracy is not the abuse of power, articulated as the managerial concern about corruption within the system. Rather, it is that the people are disenfranchised from a politics and a governance which responds *to* them but with which they have no meaningful connection – rather than being a politics and a governance in which they can participate.

This possibility is one that strikes at the heart of the concern with equality which is usually taken to be a defining feature of cosmopolitanism. Brock's second chapter on democracy (chapter 12) engages with the question of equality directly, and to this we now turn.

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Brock rightly comments that all forms of Cosmopolitanism include a commitment to equality, but that exactly how this is understood varies widely. For her account of global justice, she draws on the "democratic equality" theory developed by Elizabeth Anderson (Anderson 1999). According to Anderson, theorists of egalitarianism should be trying «to create a community in which people stand in relations of equality to others» (301). As Brock articulates Anderson's position, «Real egalitarians focus on abolishing oppression and trying to bring about the kind of social order that recognizes each person's equality –namely, a democratic community» (302). Brock then goes on to quote Anderson on the nature of democracy. This is a key quotation for my purposes, because it clearly points to the issues I have been discussing above. Moreover, Brock's endorsement of Anderson's account has the effect of heightening the tension I have been discussing between interest and agent models of democracy; as we shall see, Anderson stresses the need for participation, whereas Brock argued that this has been over-

emphasized. Interestingly, the tension here between Brock's and Anderson's position is elided in Brock's use of Anderson's democratic equality theory. Here, then, is the key quotation:

> Democracy is here understood as collective self-determination by means of open discussion among equals, in accordance with rules acceptable to all. To stand as an equal before others in discussion means that one is entitled to participate, that others recognize an obligation to listen respectfully and respond to one's arguments, that no one need bow and scrape before others or represent themselves as inferior to others as a condition of having their claim heard (302; Anderson 1999, 313).

Participation in democratic self government as an equal member of society is central to Anderson's account. I think Brock would want to say that it is also central to her account, and yet I am not sure that there is a clear sameness of meaning between what the two theorists intend.

Anderson's emphasis on the entitlement to participate that each individual should have sits somewhat awkwardly with Brock's focus on delegation and interests. Anderson's claim that others must «recognise an obligation to listen respectfully and respond to one's arguments» very much suggests the classical agency model of democracy away from which Brock seems keen to move.

On the classical account of democracy it is the making and engaging with arguments of self determining individuals about what their interests might be thought to be which is the central business of democratic politics. In the model that Brock presents, these interests are all substantially known already (or so it would seem) and all that is left to democracy is the provision of these interests, capabilities and functionings in harmonious and hopefully parsimonious ways. This, perhaps, is why (as noted above) the biggest danger in Brock's account of delegated authority is the abuse of power –rather than the use of power for the wrong ends, ends which self-governing individuals need to be able to discuss in a participatory forum in order to determine.

Brock's endorsement of Anderson's account, indeed her clear enthusiasm with respect to it, leads her to understate the conflict between the two accounts. Let us consider the section where Brock

shows the various ways in which Anderson's account can be applied to global justice. Brock commences the section by saying that her account is «certainly consistent with the central demands of democratic equality» (304). But the first substantive example she uses in fact shows up the inconsistencies. Anderson's principle is rehearsed («collective self-determination by means of open discussion among equals»). Anderson here requires actual institutions and mechanisms. These can be argued to exist in certain modern democracies, but they do not at the global level, and will not in the foreseeable future. Brock acknowledges this absence, and uses it as the cue for a further elaboration of her earlier normative thought experiments which model the conditions required for inclusive conversation (discussed elsewhere in the book). These lead to the promotion of dialog about the nature of the egalitarian guarantees which are needed for justice in modern economies.

This is very important work, but the one thing it singularly is not, is «collective self-determination by means of open discussion among equals» in political institutions which have binding force. What we may well end up with is a set of highly developed, conscientiously modeled and researched egalitarian principles and procedures which can be adopted by such institutions of global governance as do exist. And, of course, on Brock's model of Responsive Democracy, the development and institutionalisation of these principles and procedures – the construction of bodies and institutions which provide for capacities and functionings– all of these can be seen as evidence of the spread of Responsive Democracy, as Brock defined and articulated it. But precisely because, as Brock herself accepts, there is no mechanism for global collective self determination, it would seem that this responsive democracy is not really the same thing as the democracy articulated in Anderson's Democratic Equality Model. And the fundamental reasons why are these: that not everyone has equal political agency, the rules are not acceptable to all, not everyone is entitled to participate, and others will not listen respectfully and respond accordingly (Anderson's desiderata).

Brock directly relates Anderson's democratic equality back to her earlier discussion of responsive democracy, and argues that the two work together because both seek to promote our standing in relations of equality one towards another –as indeed they do. The difference between them however, it seems to me, is that for Anderson this hap-

pens within a "democratic community", by which is meant a community which is articulated through democratic institutions to which all have equal access. In the global environment, this is not the case –and is unlikely to be for a long time, and so the best one can hope for is something like Brock's Responsive Democracy, where "the good people" (i.e., liberal cosmopolitans) manage to gain influence in global institutions which do paternalistically look out for the interests of the people under their jurisdiction. There is no doubt that a great deal of good will emerge out of such an arrangement. But what is missing is the voice and (more crucially) the *agency* of the people –the real people, the ones who's lives and destinies are being altered by the decision makers in these institutions.

It is one of the great ironies of some liberal cosmopolitan thought that the philosophical commitment to egalitarianism can very easily lead to the acceptance of an inegalitarian paternalism. The cure for this problem in the case of the work at hand is for Anderson's democratic equality to be more rigorously worked into the fabric of Brock's responsive democracy. Brock cannot be faulted (she will be pleased to know!) for the unlikelihood of mechanisms of global democratic self determination (particularly, for example, within the UN system). And there is no doubt that her excellent examples of institutions which can be constructed which will aid in the task of elevating people into relations of equality with one another should be pursued. Many of these (like similar suggestions by Thomas Pogge (see Pogge 2008, Pogge 2009) and Darrel Moellendorf (Moellendorf 2009)) are well worth pursuing, and encouraging enthusiasm for them among students of global politics is an important task of the first order. (One notes in passing a recent success on this score, the creation in Asia for the first time of a regional human rights authority. There are many reasons to be cautious about this institution, but there is no doubt that it raises the profile of human rights and by doing this alone aids in the political task of aiding relations of democratic equality (see Langlois 2011)).

The difficulty that I find with Brock's excellent and engaging book is her case that Responsive Democracy can legitimately downplay the role of agency based arguments for democratic equality. I acknowledge the limitations which she sees in the agency account. I don't accept though that the interest account by itself trumps the agency account. I think it is clear from Anderson's democratic equality theory

that political agency is *the* defining tenant of any meaningful account of democracy (where the terms of self rule are made by those so ruled). In its current form, Brock's Responsive Democracy will be a significant aid to the establishing of relations of equality between human persons. But as I have argued elsewhere (Langlois 2003), those relations of equality remain desirable norms or standards only, rather than genuinely *democratic* relations of equality, for as long as they exclude the principle of political agency.

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