Justice for All: The Promise of Democracy in the Global Age

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Interactive Democracy: The Social Roots of Global Justice, Carol C. Gould (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 303 pp., $80 cloth, $29.99 paper.

Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights, Carol C. Gould (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 290 pp., $104.99 cloth, $34.99 paper.

Two pronounced features of modern globalization are an emerging global human rights culture and the growing trend toward democratization. In her new book, Carol Gould integrates these two features to construct an interactive approach to the core democratic values of justice and political participation meant for an interconnected global world.

Gould claims that the democratic quest for justice and human dignity has failed to live up to its promise. Persistent and pervasive inequalities dominate contemporary economies. Poverty, deprivation, and conflicts are standard features all around the globe, even in the rich democracies. Though globalization offers the opportunity for the world to come closer together through various cross-border constellations of contact, communication, and participation, it has been a mixed blessing for human rights. Gould argues that to make democracy fulfill its potential, it has to be transformed from its static and formal state to a more engaged, participatory, and interactive mode of governance. It has to be embedded in social conditions and made more integrative in responding to the complexities of social justice. As democracy goes global, its focus moves from social justice to global justice, in which the emerging global human rights movement will play a key role.

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All this, Gould admits, is difficult to achieve in a world of pervasive conflict, cultural misunderstanding, and entrenched power, but she is optimistic. For her, the success of global democracy would depend on new social movements that are appreciative of human rights for all, the cultivation of solidarities via cross-border participation among dispersed communities bound by common interests, and democratic dialogue and deliberation across borders aided by online networking and new social media. Today's increasingly interconnected world needs an interactive approach to understanding democracy that goes deeper to the social roots of pressing political problems. This new understanding and practice of democracy would empower people's lives and lead to needed institutional reforms. This, in sum, is Gould's road map toward deepening global democracy and emboldening global justice.

Interestingly, we find a nod to Gould's message in a new documentary film set for release next year, "Freedom for the Wolf," featuring the 2014 Hong Kong pro-democracy protests as an essential part of a global struggle against the rise of "illiberal democracy"—which the film's director calls "voting without rights." Contra Isaiah Berlin, the noted Oxford philosopher, freedom for the wolf need not mean death to the sheep, yet we see democracies where the wealthy and the powerful increasingly hold sway over the majority of the population, who cast a vote but do not have a real choice. Can Gould's interactive democracy effectively respond to this undermining of democracy?

To appraise the relevance of Gould's ideas on democracy and global justice, it is necessary to place her thoughts in the broader debate on these issues.[1] Gould's book builds on her previous book, *Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights* (2004), so I draw here on this earlier publication as well.

Gould seeks to provide a high bar for human rights while leaving room for local variations consistent with alternative versions of democratic decision-making. This is a crafty move in navigating the challenges of liberalism in a pluralistic world. Gould is a committed cosmopolitan liberal, but she strives to redefine cosmopolitanism and liberalism so that the terms can be substantive yet negotiable. As I see it, Gould has nuanced ideas on each of the key notions of democracy—liberalism, cosmopolitanism, and human rights—but more important, she brings them together in an innovative configuration that responds well to the new international reality of shifting borders and boundaries.

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In view of the emerging identity politics in global affairs due to the evolving new democracies and a surge of pluralistic social and political movements clamoring for recognition, claims of justice and human rights have to be accommodated in a democratic setup that is open to a broader range of human needs and must display political and cultural flexibilities. Accordingly, any normative study of this fluid political reality would have to provide the needed conceptual tools to reframe the debate in order to do justice to the issues of diversity and accommodation.

The debate points to the dilemma of liberalism on the question of justice and human rights. Not only are the claims of universal liberal values resisted in a diverse world, they also pose a dilemma for the core liberal virtue of tolerance. Besides, whether justice claims should be extended universally regardless of national boundaries or whether co-national partiality should trump global impartiality is a topic of disagreement among the liberal theorists themselves.

Liberalism's commitment to moral equality for all seems to be at odds with the demand for special obligations to those with whom we have special ties by virtue of being in the same political communities. In response, some liberals try to justify partiality on impartial grounds, whereas others attempt to show that what we take to be partiality is not really partiality but rather a variation of the same global equality principle, thus making the principle compatible with distinct norms of equality with regard to fellow citizens.[2] The latter position is a version of liberal nationalism, which aims to show that the seeming exception on the home front is not really a deviation from the global equality principle.

Theorists of liberal nationalism rely on the distinction between absolute deprivation and relative deprivation, arguing that though the rich countries have an obligation to ameliorate absolute deprivation in the world, their obligation does not extend beyond a certain threshold, whereas relative deprivation at home creates a more urgent obligation to respond to citizens' needs. This point is usually based on the idea of shared citizenship and its related implications. The claim is that distinct principles of justice are applicable within the national context because they are grounded in the direct relation between government and citizens in a democratic framework—a framework that is lacking in the international order.

Cosmopolitan liberals respond to this position by blending the normative ideal of global equality with the political realities of global interdependence.[3] If co-nationals deserve special recognition because they do not have a realistic exit option from the hold of their shared national laws then likewise countries and

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their citizens in the world do not have an exit option from the coercive international legal order that holds nations together. If the reciprocal social contract between fellow citizens creates special obligations, then the reciprocity evident in all spheres in today's interdependent global order should likewise create strong obligations of justice toward citizens of other countries.

This is a promising approach because it moves away from the moral rigorism of abstract cosmopolitanism by emphasizing the need to embed theories of international human rights and justice in international politics and practices. The noticeable feature in this shift is that though the focus of the liberal globalists is still on the individual as the center of justice, they do acknowledge the moral relevance of national sovereignty but downplay its importance. While insisting on a justice-based human rights paradigm as the normative foundation for international relations, they also pay attention to the *modus vivendi* in the world. Along with that, they also try to offer impartial justifications for limited partiality, like some liberal nationalists, noting that not all our obligations can be derived from our general duty to humanity.

Calling themselves modified universalists of various stripes, today's cosmopolitan liberals seek out institutional implementation of a more well-rounded notion of human rights than the international standards governing justification and conduct of war and those that stand for the basic negative rights. A robust notion of rights for them includes the rights of subsistence and welfare that would positively affect the lives of the citizens of poor countries and contribute to their human dignity. They argue that the fluid dynamics of collaboration and interdependence in today's global world has made the cosmopolitan ideal more viable than ever before.

Given this broad picture of "situated" cosmopolitanism in recent literature, how does Gould's book contribute to the debate? What are some of Gould's insights into the challenges of transnational democracy and universal human rights in a diverse and pluralistic world? After all, like most other cosmopolitan liberals, Gould also talks about the so-called global democracy deficit and the deficit of justice in the global order and shows how the two deficits are related. She also espouses a well-rounded notion of human rights that calls for appropriate political and economic arrangements. So, in what ways does her situated cosmopolitanism enrich the debate on global justice and global democracy?

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Gould recognizes that the concepts of democracy and human rights need to be wrested out of their ideological coloration so that they would be acceptable in diverse cultural and sociopolitical contexts. Her project rightly focuses on real-world justice by going beyond the narrow dichotomies of liberalism and illiberalism and seeing the issues in strategic, political, and practical terms. She calls for a new vision of liberalism that is appropriate for a globalized "post-liberal" world, where emphasis on human rights would be cast in the context of human values that all cultures can understand and appreciate.

The generic idea of democracy as a system of self-governance without outside interference is open to adaptation and contextualization in a variety of ways. Thus, true to the democratic spirit, people should be left to decide on their own how they would like to live and be governed. Autonomy and self-determination cannot be imposed from without, though they can be endorsed and promoted in noncoercive ways in formats appropriate to the context. For Gould, interactive democracy goes a long way toward mitigation of transnational forms of violence. Shunning traditional liberal approaches that often lead to interventionist polices of liberal internationalism, Gould's focus is to unlock the collaborative potential of interactive democracy in more social terms of "power-with" than the usual "power-over" politics (pp. 8, 179–94). To Gould's credit, this insightful shift has far-reaching implications for the debate on the ethics of war and peace.[4]

Gould adds that democracy should be understood and endorsed at various levels of generality and specificity. The democratic ideal as well as its specific implementation allows latitude of interpretation depending on a country's history, culture, and specific needs. Accordingly, the idea of democratic legitimacy need not embody a static and formal liberal theory of justice and human rights. She underscores this idea by pointing out the traditional tension between liberal justice and democracy. Indeed, this is a problem area for liberalism, since the liberal ideal of legitimizing political institutions is understood as democratic self-governance that promotes the liberal virtues of egalitarian justice. But the democratic ideal of autonomy and self-rule need not yield to such justice, and often it does not.

This conflict between liberalism and democracy often manifests itself in the tension between individual rights and group rights, posing a dilemma of conflicting equalities for liberalism. The liberal notion of justice is individualistic, though liberalism values group autonomy and accepts cultural rights and differences, provided that this acceptance does not override the dictates of certain core rights for individuals. Citing recent studies that suggest that the claim that there are

incommensurable differences across cultures and groups on rights and other human issues is overblown, today's liberals are optimistic about the prospects for global human rights. Indeed, a globalized world with fewer cultural barriers providing more traction for universal liberal norms is a promising trend for liberalism. Still, the specter of vastly diverse constellations of competing claims in the global arena continues to raise questions about the ability of the liberal project to be extended globally.

To Gould's credit, she steers clear of an a priori normative framing at the foundational level so that her approach does not tilt the discourse in favor of liberalism at the outset. Indeed, given the fluidity and contestability of culture and identity, Gould emphasizes the need for multicultural and cross-border dialogue and deliberation at the grassroots level in mediating conflicting cultural claims and promoting democratic solidarity. The concept of self-empowerment operative in this procedure gives solidarity a new dimension through the modalities of cross-border interactions among members. Gould points to the online networking and various social media that have fueled much of the recent social movements across the globe.

Gould's approach to the culture and human rights debate is to trace the social roots of justice and democracy by situating the arguments of liberalism in the real world of diversity, need, vulnerabilities, and interdependence. This is a dynamic and integrative approach that bears much promise for the revitalization of democracy. Cultural disputes are often motivated by need-based and interest-based disagreements, and require democratic deliberation on vital issues of justice and equity.

Nonetheless, Gould's expectation of online networking and various social media coming to the rescue of democracy seems to be based on unwarranted optimism. Internet solidarity cannot replace real-world democratic camaraderie just as robot ethics of weaponized drones cannot solve the real-life moral conundrum of killing in warfare. In fact, David Runciman has observed in a recent essay that there is a growing awareness that the greatest threat to democracy may no longer derive from human agency, but from new forms of technology.[5] In another study, Ira Katznelson notes that "there is a sense that constitutional democratic forms, procedures, and practices are softening in the face of allegedly more authentic and more efficacious types of political participation—those that take place outside representative institutions and seem closer to the people." The resulting "brittleness of democratic institutions across the globe" is greatly undermining global

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democracy.[6] The great hope generated by the rise of the Arab Spring, for instance, was not accompanied by needed institutional reforms and was quickly dashed by brutal suppression, death, destruction, and unprecedented mayhem, including the rise of ISIS.

Gould would admit that construing deliberation as an egalitarian forum for representation has a limited potential if it is based on an idealized view of reality that fails to take note of the asymmetry of power and knowledge. Indeed, Gould's idea of interactive democracy has several redeeming features. Her strategy is to find a middle ground between abstract universalism and cultural specificity to validate the contextuality of the egalitarian human-rights ideal within a democratic setting. Calling her approach "concrete universality," she notes that such a setting would cater to both democratic self-governance and basic human rights by giving voice to affected parties in the collective discourse of a community, providing a shared decision procedure in the formation of its own institutions and norms (pp. 152–533, 179–85, 189–94).

This conception is meant to downplay the primacy of the statist model of entrenched hierarchy; instead, this is a collaborative and self-forming bottom-up procedure whereby all voices are valued in the deliberative process. Though local communities may have the best potential for autonomy and self-determination, in reality local governance may not exemplify the best of democratic participation. But the transnational dimension of the cross-border localities helps in the formation of a democratic decision procedure with diverse input. Cross-cultural human rights norms are also expected to have an influence on the shaping of the procedure and its policies. This, Gould claims, would be the beginning of a context-sensitive and culture-specific democratic procedure that would be guided by certain universal standards, providing wide latitude in democratic decision-making and broad recognition of equality of certain basic rights. In fact, as Gould sees it, the self-formative process of bottom-up deliberative democracy paves the way for the individual and collective flourishing that makes possible the actualization of human capabilities.

Such procedure demands political noninterference and certain socioeconomic measures, thus adding substance to the empty rhetoric of rights while avoiding the limitations of the Rawlsian proceduralism in global affairs. In calling for more latitude in culture-specific applicability of democratic norms than of human rights, Gould endorses the multicultural idea of a flexible, context-sensitive democratic legitimacy while leaving the door open for a more uniform global

enforcement of universal rights. Thus, Gould's approach aims to combine the best of several disparate philosophical strategies in an innovative configuration to construe a viable notion of democratic legitimacy and a substantive yet negotiable idea of universal human rights.

Though Gould's ideas have potential for charting a new direction for democracy in a global world, they sound unduly ambitious and vague. For one thing, it is not clear how her claim of democratic accountability and input may work out in practice, given the tilted nature of multilateral institutions, with powerful nonstate actors such as multinational corporations seemingly writing their own rules and dominant nations vying for geopolitical hegemony. In such a world, how does Gould's interactive democracy build and retain its institutional sustainability, especially in view of the potential drawbacks of the idea of Internet solidarity facilitating the formation of transnational democracy noted above?

On the justice front, Gould's account suffers from the lack of a well-rounded idea of global justice. This is a serious drawback for a project that claims to provide an innovative sketch of justice meant for an interconnected global world. Her emphasis on equality as the normative end of both rights and justice overlooks the fact that the pursuit of justice is a nuanced and complex procedure where the focus on equality cannot trump the demand for procedural equity. Rights claims cannot by themselves account for the fairness or equity of the process involved in justice. Equality has multiple dimensions, both economic and political, as Gould herself notes. So equality is a concern in distributional equations, and enhancement of equality is an important consideration in promoting justice. But Gould does not adequately explain how this expanded idea of freedom fares in relation to other competing ideas of equality, and how the idea of equality measures in the matrix of justice where equity of the process is the other important consideration.

Gould's work on interactive democracy aims at an integrative approach toward remedying the crisis in democracy in transnational communities, but it remains incomplete in one important area, that of an effective democratic response to the climate crisis and other natural disasters. Gould herself admits the significant lack of attention to this important matter that affects the wellbeing of people in all societies, but she notes that there is "ample room for developing such an account within the theory proposed" in the book (p. 5). Accordingly, I conclude this

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review with my brief response to this important global justice crisis. Following Gould, I take it as a crisis in democracy that requires an interactive response.

It has become increasingly evident that most natural disasters posing dire threats to the security and survival of large numbers of people evolve over time, with political, social, and economic dimensions. In that sense, they are not purely "natural" events. Though they are unpredictable, they are not entirely unpreventable. They can threaten regional peace and stability and can have global repercussions. Thus, they are like those complex emergencies that are human-made, such as wars and famines, causing population displacement, mass starvation, and widespread death and destruction. As such, both natural and human-made disasters have complex causes and effects that span several social, political, and global domains.

Consequently, as noted by Susan Murphy, though "the international institutional framework traditionally gave separate treatment to issues of peacekeeping, human rights, humanitarian affairs, and development . . . the complex nature of emergencies experienced over the last two decades has required interaction and coordination across all of these areas."[7] In that case, following Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, where duly-constrained multilateral measures of preventive intervention are allowed with the Security Council's authorization, one can raise the interesting question of whether the mandate of the Responsibility to Protect can be enacted for the prevention of unrest and for an enhanced obligation to intervene and assist in cases of ecological and environmental disasters.

In addition, because these disasters lead to deprivation and misery that can count as serious infringements on basic human rights on a mass scale, the global mandate of promoting and restoring human rights can elevate international aid efforts from selective charity to a more demanding international obligation to assist those who are most vulnerable. Thus, a clear account of the problem is a necessary step in moving toward a critical unpacking of the moral and practical challenges of environmental justice, which is an important element of global justice.

Indeed, there is a growing realization that standard ethical and political issues related to international assistance and collaboration in response to complex challenges of climate change need reframing.[8] This is a significant area for interactive democracy. Environmental and ecological disasters heed no boundaries and all nations are at potential risk. Accordingly, there has been a resurgence of the debate on the nature of international relief work and a shift in perspective on the moral significance of national boundaries.

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Also, the debate on so-called "moral luck" has reemerged with a new twist, reframing the old idea that bad, brute luck does not necessarily lead to obligations on the part of outsiders beyond a certain point. There are no outsiders in the climate crisis. If compatriot partiality is a matter of reciprocity, then it is not clear what would generate strong obligations of justice and human rights for those with whom we do not have such reciprocity but who could be victims of bad, brute luck. In that case, the idea of relational justice embedded in interactive democracy needs to be expanded to make room not only for reciprocity but solidarity as well. Solidarity turns vulnerability into empowerment in a way that reciprocity cannot. It would be interesting to speculate on Gould's ideas on this issue based on her work on interactive democracy.[9]

NOTES

[1] For a broader debate on this issues, see my "Reciprocity, Closed-Impartiality and National Borders: Framing (and Extending) the Debate on Global Justice," *Social Philosophy Today* 27 (2011), pp. 199–216.

[2] Michael Blake, *Justice and Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Michael Blake, "Distributive Justice, State Coercion, and Autonomy," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 30, no. 3 (2001), pp. 257–96; Richard Miller, *Globalizing Justice: The Ethics of Poverty and Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Thomas Nagel, "The Problem of Global Justice," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2005), pp. 113–47; and Christopher Wellman, "Relational Facts in Liberal Political Theory: Is there Magic in the Pronoun 'My'?" *Ethics* 110, no. 3 (2000), pp. 537–62. Though a liberal nationalist, Miller sees hope for global solidarity in global social movements clamoring for a more just and equitable world. See Miller, *Globalizing Justice*, chapter 9.

[3] Charles Beitz, *The Idea of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Allen Buchanan, *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination: Moral Foundations of International Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Andrew Kuper, *Democracy Beyond Borders: Justice and Representation in Global Institutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

[4] For more on this, see my forthcoming "Beyond Preventive Force: Just Peace as Preventive Non-Intervention," in Kerstin Fisk and Jennifer Ramos, eds., *Preventive Force: Targeted Killing and Technology* (New York: NYU Press, 2016).

[5] David Runciman, "Rescuing Democracy in the Age of the Internet," *Ethics & International Affairs* 29, no. 3 (2015).

[6] Ira Katznelson, "Forum: Anxieties of Democracy," *Boston Review*, September 8, 2015.

[7] See the entry on "Complex Emergency" by Susan P. Murphy, *Encyclopedia of Global Justice*, ed. Deen K. Chatterjee (Dodrecht, Neth.: Springer, 2011), pp. 174-76.

[8] For and excellent study of how the standard concepts such as "sustainability" need radical reframing in view of the complex challenges of climate change in global environmental governance, see Melinda Harm Benson and Robin Kundis Craig, *The End of Sustainability: Resilience, Narrative, and Climate Change in Environmental Governance* (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, forthcoming).

[9] For a strong articulation of how a global solidarity movement can empower relational justice embedded in interactive democracy, see Amartya Sen's response to my article cited in Note 1 above. Sen, "The Idea of Justice: A Reply," *Social Philosophy Today* 27 (2011), pp. 233–39. Portions of the essay draw on my "Human Rights and Democratic Legitimacy: Navigating the Challenges in a Pluralistic World," *Good Society* 16, no. 2 (2007), pp. 41–44.