

Cosmopolitan Democracy With Purpose, But Without Trust

The Global Commonwealth of Citizens: Toward Cosmopolitan Democracy by Daniele Archibugi. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, pp. 298, ISBN: 978-0-691-13490-1, £20.95.

By Jan Pieter Beetz

In *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens*, Daniele Archibugi “explores the chances of increasing the legitimacy of world politics by introducing the germs of democracy and subjecting world politics to the citizens’ scrutiny” (p. 2). To achieve this aim, he argues for the introduction of a system of global governance called cosmopolitan democracy.

In part one of the book, Archibugi delineates the theoretical foundations for cosmopolitan democracy. Democratization is an evolving process, he argues, and one which adapts to specific circumstances. The exact form of democracy can therefore differ, but it has three central principles: non-violence, popular control and political equality. If these requirements are met, democratic regimes are preferable to authoritarian ones. Archibugi debunks the myth that democratic regimes are peaceful by nature. At times they can be more violent than authoritarian ones, but they increasingly have to take heed of an emerging global public opinion and global actors other than nation-states. Archibugi takes this final point to indicate the need for a more democratic world politics – hence ‘cosmopolitan democracy’ (p. 84).

This brings us to the actual design of cosmopolitan democracy. Archibugi envisions a democratic system “more cohesive and demanding than a confederation but less rigid than a federation” (p. 11). This seems to suggest a global system of multi-level governance – a structure well known to scholars of the European Union (EU). The EU is arguably emerging as a democratic regime in its own right, but it is constantly struggling to be perceived as legitimate by its member-state populations rather than those of the wider world. This parallel raises questions about the attainability of a more *legitimate* world politics,

In part two of *The Global Commonwealth*, Archibugi moves from theory to ‘applied case studies’. Cosmopolitan democracy is applied to five current issues: the United Nations; military humanitarian intervention, the exportability of democracy;

national sovereignty; and multi-lingual democracy. The cases explore the different ways in which the democratisation of world politics might give global public opinion voice; and also how the introduction of global citizenship and other mechanisms in line with a cosmopolitan rule of law might help protect individual human rights. The reforms proposed range from the realistic and practical to the unlikely (the image of a world parliament is discussed).

Chapter 7 offers an especially persuasive argument for the reform of decision-making procedures with regards to humanitarian military intervention. The chapter starts by discussing the painful memories of Srebrenica and Kosovo, but rather than dismissing the possibility of change on the basis of past failures, Archibugi derives lessons for the future. Cosmopolitan principles are 'translated' into a consistent framework for assessing arguments about whether or not to intervene. This framework could provide future missions with the authoritative dimension of proper procedure and help avoid false pretences as well as the dangers associated with excessively fast or slow decision-making.

The Global Commonwealth concludes with a somewhat curious reinterpretation of the division between realism and utopianism. The aim is to convince the reader that cosmopolitan democracy is a realistic aim. Admittedly, many chapters start with empirical observations, but the author typically moves on quite rapidly to an idealistic perspective. This is not to be held against him *per se*, but it becomes noteworthy with regard to his claim to realism. In this vein, the actual motivation for the book is enlightening and quite revealing. Archibugi sees as 'the drama of our times' that

... the West has so far failed to attain [the] role of political leader that befits it. If the West has failed to attain the role of political leader, it is because of the wicked course of action it has pursued, aimed more at dominating than at persuading and involving. (p. 276)

In this motivation, the normative dimension of *The Global Commonwealth* becomes explicit. The emphasis on realism, then, is meant to acknowledge actual circumstances within and of a globalising world. This globalisation should have led, so argues Archibugi, to democratisation and the spread of human rights, but the West – or rather its states – only pay(s) lip service to these aims. Global public opinion and NGOs, on the other hand, are actually choosing the 'democratic' side of global issues and this is why the book argues for them to fulfil a structural role in world politics.

Overall, cosmopolitan democracy appears to be a global system of multi-level governance with an emphasis on the rule of law and democracy. But would this system of governance increase the legitimacy of world politics and enable 'scrutiny', as is maintained by Archibugi? It seems that according to the expectations of 'pure' democratic theory, that might indeed be the case. At the start of the book, Archibugi

observes with regard to Michael Mann's *The Dark Side of Democracy* (2005): "This impressive and often disturbing research [has] not yet been properly digested by democratic theory" (p. 9). However, unfortunately, *The Global Commonwealth* seems to be no exception to this rule.

This is problematic because the dark side of democracy might very well be related to the goal of a more *legitimate* world politics. The central issue is trust as part of the legitimacy of political regimes. Andreas Føllesdal (2006), among others, argues that legitimacy rests on two 'pillars': first, there is the normative legitimacy of a political regime; and then second, there is trust in institutions *and* fellow citizens. While the former is addressed throughout *The Global Commonwealth*, the latter remains largely unaddressed. Archibugi dismisses the nation as an imaginary community, but the problem is that this notion fulfils a legitimising function.

Here I return to the EU as a real-life attempt to develop a democratic system of multi-level governance, and as a possible frontrunner of cosmopolitan democracy. What we find there is an emerging democratic regime incapable of addressing its legitimacy deficit through democratic improvements. 'Brussels' is often perceived as a 'foreign' level of government superseding peoples' own and trusted national institutions. The EU shows that if the trust-dimension of legitimacy stays unaddressed, more democratisation may paradoxically lead to less legitimate governance. The point here is not that Archibugi should have included a 'global national identity', but that an account of a legitimate democratic system of governance – global, European or otherwise – will have to do justice to this dimension of legitimacy.

Overall, *The Global Commonwealth's* main aim seems not to outline the structure of a new and more legitimate regime of global governance, but rather to convince politicians, policymakers, scholars and others in the West that their current foreign policies will not do. Archibugi's engaged defence of a normative political theory – cosmopolitan democracy – can thus be read as an indication of how one might seek to champion the cause of a new transnational regime rather than simply as a blueprint of how that future should look. Archibugi tries to show the way towards what might be a more humane system of global governance, but perhaps more importantly, he also indicates some of the problems of the current path.

Bibliography

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