Review

Democracy to come: Politics as relational praxis

Fred Dallmayr
New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, x + 180pp.,
ISBN 978-0190670979

Contemporary Political Theory (2019) **18,** S251–S254. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-018-0234-3; published online 14 June 2018

Fred Dallmayr's *Democracy to Come* is a constructive work in which a theory of democracy is substantiated by, developed through, and reconsidered amid ongoing dialogue with a diverse cast of interlocutors. Dallmayr's knowledge of such a range of texts and traditions is impressive, and he approaches each judiciously and generously. Four central elements of his theory emerge as the book unfolds: the latent, potential power of a people as the engine of democracy; actualized or institutionalized power as necessary to the practice of politics; ethical relations of equality as the means and end of democracy; and a resistance to rigid dichotomies, especially between ethics (the private) and politics (the public) and between religious and secular traditions or modes of thought. Along with advancing a compelling case for a particular theory of democracy, this book helpfully contributes to broadening the scope of the democratic imaginary beyond the geographical and theoretical confines of the North Atlantic. *Democracy to Come* would be a great addition to any course or study on the topic, and it offers a model of truly global, constructive work in the field.

Dallmayr lays the groundwork for his project in the book's introduction. Here, he draws on Montesquieu's claim that the distinctiveness of democracy is found in its spirit or animating principle, the love of equality, which Dallmayr describes as the love of 'a qualitative, ethical relationship manifest in mutual respect, empathy, and solidarity on all levels of public life' (p. ix). According to Dallmayr, Montesquieu's thought marked important intellectual shifts that were conducive to thinking in terms of relationality and potentiality, which led to a key political insight later articulated by Claude Lefort: modern democracy is characterized by an 'ontological deficit' at its center (pp. 6–7). Rather than being embodied in an individual or a majority, Dallmayr references Lefort's argument that legitimate democratic power lies in the 'latent potentiality' of a people characterized by relations of equality (p. 7).

In each of the book's succeeding seven chapters, Dallmayr engages a different thinker or tradition. He begins in the first chapter with analytic and continental political theory and articulates an affinity for deliberative models of democracy. He then suggests fertile resonance between deliberative democracy and Jacques Derrida's notion of 'democracy to come' in their common rejection of domination and resistance to finality. Pushing beyond the traditional construal of deliberative democracy, Dallmayr advocates an 'apophatic humanism' that is more attentive to the hermeneutical dimension of deliberation and that strives to remain open to radically new possibilities (p. 40).

In the second and third chapters, Dallmayr further grounds his approach through engagement with the thought of Tzvetan Todorov and Enrique Dussel on the tensions internal to democracy. Dallmayr traces in Todorov's work the insight that democracy can 'grow sick with its own excesses' when its constellation of three fundamental features – a people, individual freedom, and a vision – are no longer held together (p. 58). According to Todorov, such an imbalance is dehumanizing, and the proper balance requires and flows from a renewed understanding of the relationship between the individual and society based on the equality of all.

With Dussel, Dallmayr develops this broad line of thinking from a different angle. According to Dussel, the colonized world is caught up in a dialectical relationship of domination that follows from the very (Cartesian) foundation of modernity. Dussel's philosophy of liberation aims to unsettle this by offering a novel conceptualization of 'the political' as a domain of interaction among equals that is conceptually distinct from the actual practice of politics. In Dussel's understanding of the political, Dallmayr emphasizes the concepts of *potentia* and *potestas*, where the former refers to the latent, not yet actualized power of a people and the latter to actualized power. Because *potentia* is prior and more fundamental, politics is always and necessarily incomplete – actual, institutionalized power can ever exhaust or claim to fully realize the will of a people. Thus democracy, on Dussel's account, entails invigorating the *potentia* of a people for emancipatory purposes and to keep institutionalized power in check.

Chapters four, five, and six address religious and cultural traditions in the development of democracy. Dallmayr first considers the work of Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, whose work on Islam and democracy, he suggests, was an important precursor to the 'Arab spring.' At the heart of his theory, al-Jabri claims that democracy rests on a conviction about the equality of citizens, which often means democratic transformation must be gradual and at least as much social and economic as it is strictly political. Dallmayr finds in al-Jabri a helpful introduction to thinking about the distinct elements of some Muslim societies, especially social stratification, to which a local democratic theory must attend. However, Dallmayr is critical that al-Jabri too easily settles for 'rigid antinomies' between (especially) religion and politics, which Dallmayr contends would ultimately threaten the stability of the democratic project (p. 100).

Next, Dallmayr turns to some recent constitutional debates about Confucianism and democracy. Following concerns about their incongruity, Dallmayr charts three broad modes of Confucianism, 'a minimalist, a maximalist, and … a moderate or hybrid,' in reference to its influence on public life (p. 104). Dallmayr contends that democracy is only in conflict with Confucianism in its maximalist mode, wherein it becomes an 'all-embracing…ideology governing politics and society' (p. 105). In contrast, potential cooperation seems entirely possible with the other two modes, and the moderate or hybrid mode best fits his dialectical project and proves most promising because it does not threaten the relevance of Confucianism to public life.

Finally, Dallmayr briefly considers democratic elements of Mahatma Gandhi's thought that emerged during the struggle for Indian independence, a topic on which he has written a considerable amount elsewhere. Here, Dallmayr focuses on three core concepts from Gandhi: '*swaraj* tells us what democratic government is; *ahimsa* tells us how to achieve and practice it; and *satyagraha* tells us about the goal of politics.' (pp. 121–122). Dallmayr defines each in turn. *Swaraj*, or self-rule, extends beyond resisting domination to genuine collective self-government. *Ahimsa* refers to a concept of relational equality and grounds a commitment to nonviolence. *Satyagraha* means 'the active pursuit of truth and justice' (126). Dallmayr stresses the relation of *ahimsa* to *satyagraha* in Gandhi's thought as that of means and end and suggests that these three concepts animate Gandhian democratic theory.

In the seventh chapter, Dallmayr rounds out his project and further develops his criticism of strong dichotomies by turning to political theology. Augmenting Carl Schmitt's famous dictum, Dallmayr agrees that there is 'always a correlation between worldly and transworldly … dimensions of life' (p. 131). Because of this, Dallmayr expresses concern about a strict dualism between a metaphysics of stasis and a democratic politics of becoming. After finding resources in Paul Tillich's theology of correlation and Raimon Panikkar's nondualist thought, Dallmayr argues for seeing democracy as analogous to the doctrine of *creatio continua*. Dallmayr wraps up the volume with a brief conclusion that restates the constellation of three constitutive elements of democracy he has developed throughout the book that now enjoy something of universal or trans-cultural status: 'the people as constituent power (*potentia*), the political rulers and agents competing for power (*potestas*), and the goal or basic orientation of the political community (*telos*)' (p. 150).

Dallmayr's book admirably succeeds at encouraging a 'paradigm shift from Eurocentric modernity to global transmodernity' in democratic theory (p. 19). However, several questions remain. First, while chapters four, five, and six make the argument that different cultural and religious contexts both present distinct barriers to and offer particular resources for democratic thinking, and while he has argued for certain universal features of democracy, I wonder whether Dallmayr would offer any straightforwardly universal *reasons* for democracy. Relatedly,

Dallmayr's reference to a renewed humanism seems to suggest that democracy might be experienced as intrinsically and not merely instrumentally valuable, yet the argument for such a claim is not made. As I have worded them, these two points raise the issue of a conception of human nature, which I am not convinced can be avoided. Also, while I celebrate Dallmayr's insistence on the relatedness of ethics and politics, it seems more must be said to articulate the distinct contours of each domain in order to assuage concerns over their conflation. Lastly, insofar as democracy is at least in part an ethical project, dependent on the virtue of its citizens (as Montesquieu himself said), I was hoping Dallmayr would attend more than he does to the matter of civic formation.

In this book, Dallmayr effectively argues that democracy is not merely a matter of who and how many people are in power, but rather that it entails a paradigm shift with cultural, intellectual, ethical, and political dimensions. What is more, in form and content Dallmayr reveals this to be a truly global project. My concerns aside, for all its virtues, one can only hope that this text is a sign of democratic theory to come.

Nicholas Buck
University of Chicago, Chicago, IL 60637, USA
nbuck@uchicago.edu