**Review**

# Interactive democracy: The social roots of global justice

Carol C. Gould
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*Interactive Democracy*'s central vision is for maximally local, democratic communities, which are linked by transnational institutions, to build up interactive democratic representation and participation in decisions that affect them. To realize this vision, Gould engages with a broad sweep of topics and approaches, including social ontology of human rights and democracy, Habermasian discourse ethics, care ethics, the importance of gender equality, recognition justice, cosmopolitanism, solidarity, emergent technology, humor as cross-cultural understanding and more. Gould reviews and expands many ideas from other books and articles for the purpose, making the text useful both for newcomers and those familiar with her earlier work. A theme running through these diverse topics is the idea of communities – what they are, and what ethical relations between and within them look like. This aspect of the book is not as highlighted as some others, but it is necessary for all stages of Gould's argument, and her work on it is a valuable contribution to social and political philosophy. Therefore, it is worth focusing on for this review.

The book argues that communities are necessary for human agency. Full agency involves 'not only the capacity for choice, but also a process of the development of capacities and the realization of long-term projects over time, as well as the cultivation of relationships' (p. 16). Developing capacities and realizing complex, temporally distant projects (and of course developing relationships) make this version of agency pre-suppose interdependency among individuals. These relations form a community character for those agential projects the book describes as 'common activities' or 'joint activities' (p. 16). As Gould says, 'In these cases, the activity is oriented to shared ends or goals, and the social group is understood as constituted by individuals in the relations rather than as existing holistically above or beyond them' (p. 16). These communities of shared projects and goals develop 'power-with,' which Gould quotes Amy Allen to define as a capacity of a group 'to act together for the attainment of a common or shared end or series of ends' (cited on p. 185). Voluntary formation of these communities is 'probably a normative desideratum' (p. 233), but not necessary. People can belong to multiple such communities through choice or accident, and they

 

need not be within a single nation, nor even geographically contiguous if they are an 'epistemic community' (pp. 199–200). Indeed, transnational communities existing across and beyond political borders are an important part of the development of globalization Gould responds to in this book (for example, p. 234).

With a concept of community in place, it is possible to look at norms for relations within those communities. The framework for these norms on Gould's account is human rights. Gould's concept of human rights is grounded by our necessary interdependence for agency, combined with a recognition of our equality as persons. Human rights are seen as demands for aid made on all others, but which are typically realized via 'social, economic, and political institutions' (p. 19). One important right for community members is democratic participation. Gould takes an expansive view of democracy as 'a form of decision-making involving equal rights of participation among the members of a community or institution' (p. 88). Because we are equal and require each other for the realization of our joint projects, no one should (*prima facie*) have more say over those joint projects, and so they must be decided democratically. Though democratic participation is a human right, *mere* democratic participation is not sufficient for the human rights demands by members of a community on one another. Rather, the book argues for Gould's concept of Equal Positive Freedom (EPF), which further calls for 'prima facie equal rights of access to the conditions for self-development or self-transformation' (pp. 26–27). This requires 'relational equality' (p. 27) within communities, and also further grounds the right of individuals to form communities to achieve joint projects and to support their individual development.

There are stakeholders who might not best be viewed as members of the community, but nevertheless are affected by the decisions made by the community. Gould argues that this affectedness should also be a criterion for having some input on the community's decisions. As she says, 'it is possible to demarcate those who are *importantly affected* in terms of a notion of the *fulfilment of basic human rights,* and to propose that when people are thus affected in their ability to realize these basic rights, they should have significant input into the decision or policy in question, though not necessarily the fully equal rights of participation' (p. 89) which community members have. It is also worth noting that the above description of communities and how they work internally have some striking implications for our economic and political institutions. To pick just one example, Gould explicitly states that corporations count within her concept of community (p. 90). Therefore, they ought to be democratically decided by its members, with strong participation from affected stakeholders. Realizing the book's goal of interactive democracy would require profound changes in our economic and social institutions in order to support as well as connect these representative communities, and to the book's credit, it does not shy away from these implications.

With this idea of democratically functioning communities aiding the development of individuals, we can now look at how the book conceives of these communities interacting with each other. The central concept of this interaction is solidarity.

Solidarity is, like rights or democracy, a problematically vague concept, so the book goes into some detail as to how the term should be understood in this context. For Gould, 'Solidarity specifies the more general category of mutual aid to cases where there is some degree of fellow feeling and a positive moral obligation to act, presumably along with an altruistic motivation to provide such aid' (p. 107). This solidarity is focused around ensuring human rights, both fundamental rights necessary for survival and the 'secondary' rights of development and agency implied in EFP. Because rights are achieved at the institutional level, this solidarity is necessary for achieving the kinds of justice-based reforms to international institutions required on this model (p. 124). It is also necessary for sustaining the new system. The book argues that solidarity can exist not only between individuals or individuals and groups, but 'can extend also to relations among groups or associations, where these are increasingly cross-border or transnational. The entities standing in this sort of solidarity with each other are thus conceived of as networks of interrelations with other individuals or associations' (p. 110). This network of overlapping critical solidarities, as communities offer critical support to one-another with an eye toward the EFP of all the individuals-in-relations, is the framework concretized by and mutually reinforcing new transnational institutions.

Here I have suggested that the concept of communities, and the norms for their endogenous and exogenous relations, are a central theme running throughout the book's many ideas and seeming digressions, which build up the vision of a democracy that is interactive between multiple levels – between individuals, between individuals and their communities, between communities, and between communities and larger institutions. If this is right, then the book could have benefited from a deeper discussion of the nature of communities. The existence of joint projects is surely an important element of a community, but it cannot be the only one, because as Gould says when distinguishing networks of solidarity from communities: 'These sorts of networks – whether of institutions or individuals – do not understand themselves to form a unified community, although they share some overlapping aims and can agree, often consensually, to work together on a certain project' (p. 186). Thus there is at least some requirement for individuals to consider themselves to be in a community, though this is not fleshed out (must all members see themselves this way? What about very young children and other marginal cases?). Further, the book speaks of community capacities, to support individual development as well as to act effectively on joint projects, but a deeper examination of this concept would be useful. The book suggests that mutual aid between privileged individuals or groups and marginalized ones is reciprocal in principle but usually unidirectional in practice (pp. 111–112). However it is presumably the case that many marginalized communities have more developed 'capacities' for supporting individual flourishing and development than weakly constructed, new communities of privileged individuals. In such a case, perhaps there are ways that those communities could aid the more 'privileged' ones to develop. Overall however, the book makes a very useful

contribution to the understanding of the ways in which people structure their lives socially, and the ways in which this structuring can be better supported by transnational, interactive, democratic institutions.

Ian Werkheiser
Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1032, USA