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## Book Reviews

# Democracy: Problems and perspectives

Roland Axtmann

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This book is a valuable resource for teachers and students alike. Broadly, Axtmann's thesis is that Kant's international outlook is a good deal different from the liberal internationalism that has been recently presented in his name. This liberal internationalism has led to an intolerance of diversity in world politics and 'denies the principle of the sovereign equality of states' (p. v). Axtmann attempts to give a more accurate picture of what Kantianism requires for today and suggests its most notable feature for IR is its combination of local and global patriotism. This emphasis is welcome, as Kant's cosmopolitanism has wrongly been taken as an outright hostility to national sentiment and sovereign independence.

In the first of the book's five chapters, Axtmann gives a useful summary of Kant's political theory and examines its implications for international relations. He is supportive of Kant's republicanism and presents an accurate picture of Kantian cosmopolitan right. He raises the intriguing issue of the possible participation of non-republican regimes in Kant's federation of free states and opts for an inclusive formula that is more UN than 'League of Nations' (p. 15). The chapter also notes the affinities of Kant's standpoint with the classical republicanism of Cicero and the cosmopolitanism of the stoics. Kant thinks he differs from Cicero by embracing the modern concept of representation and distinguishes himself from the stoics in giving moral priority to autonomy over individual well-being. At the end of the chapter Axtmann picks out Rawls and Habermas as contemporary representatives of Kantian cosmopolitanism, warming more to the latter than the former.

One of the expressed aims of the book is to show and, to an extent, to celebrate the diversity of world politics. In Chapter 2, this is done by looking at the discourse of human rights and by suggesting that it has 'many voices'. There are indeed many universal themes in the adoption of human rights perspectives but the author wishes to stress how these themes should be, and are being, interpreted in culturally sensitive ways. Here Axtmann appears to favour a Habermasian modification of the Kantian model of republicanism (p. 71), replacing Kant's *a priori* test of the rightness of policy with the processes of deliberative democracy. Whether Kant is as monological as



claimed in his practical philosophy is open to dispute, but there is no doubt that Habermas's view presents one way of bringing Kant up to date. Chapter 3 is perhaps the central chapter of the book looking at the 'globalization of democracy'. In a wide-ranging manner, Axtmann trawls through the many UN and UN-inspired documents that record the growth of democracy in world politics both as an ideology and as a political structure. He shows convincingly that the predominant normative position among states is now one that favours the acceptance of democratic institutions as the goal.

Chapter 5 interestingly explores the tension between the increased localization of politics that has occurred through the adoption of democratic practices and the ever-present pressure to internationalize politics that occurs through the growth of an integrated global economy. The adoption of popular sovereignty as a preferred mode of political identification and affiliation within states has not been without its difficulties. Modern politics has now to establish what the relevant population for embracing sovereignty is and this is often not straightforward. Different cultural and ethnic groups want their lines of loyalty recognized. This leads to a highly fluid situation where, as Axtmann puts it, 'the politics of recognition' is 'a continuous activity' (p. 199) that creates and thrives on ethnic, cultural and religious tensions. There is no fixed formula that can in advance determine the appropriate boundaries and lines of loyalty of a society. These boundaries have to be negotiated by each generation through the democratic process itself.

Axtmann's book bears eloquent testimony to the conflict that now exists between the official Western version of the spread of democracy and the Kantian doctrine upon which it is ostensibly based. The official version is a net of excessive paternalism and interventionism. The application of democratic theory from the top-down is being resisted at all levels, both within and outside states. Instead of the appropriate enthusiasm being generated for the implementation of representative democracy what is being created are a myriad of ethnic, religious and cultural radical movements whose commitments to democracy are at best vague and at worst non-existent. Western states need to carefully step back from this democracy promotion and pay more attention to their own internal political structures. What happens at home is the key to a better future. Axtmann has more faith in pursuing the democratic route at an intrastate level than an interstate one. Axtmann's plea for a more pluralist, tolerant and ultimately a more gradual process of change to democratic institutions is well founded. Although he is terse in putting across his position on the question of democracy, he is a valuable guide through the continuously expanding literature (as Chapter 5 on 'Sovereignty and democracy' testifies) on the topic.

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