IS DEMOCRACY READY FOR GLOBALISATION? PHILOSOPHICAL PATHWAYS TO A GLOBALISED *DEMOS*

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■ Abstract

The discourse on democracy is among the most controversial debates in contemporary political philosophy. One main problem is that democracies are part of complex, global processes, but democratic theories often still operate with concepts of politics and the political that are grounded in the idea of nation states. This paper argues that pragmatist and radical democratic theory offers a fruitful perspective to reflect and discuss these limits of theorising. Both mobilise alternative philosophical perspectives on the social and normative foundations of democracy under the condition of globalisation. In addition, they also develop new concepts of the political in order to deal with the heterogeneous and dynamic challenges posed by the diffuse processes of globalisation.

Keywords: Democracy, social theory, Pragmatism, radical democracy, relationality, experiences

■ Introduction

Democracy is a political system of ruling that till today often corresponds with a more or less homogenous social structure resp. a defined group of people. Its main idea was (and still is) to develop fair and transparent procedures and institutions of political decision-making for those people who are mainly affected by its decisions. In this perspective, it always seemed to be clear who belongs to the democratic *demos* in the past.

In a globalised world, the *demos* changes and, thus, also the borders of the *demos* become porous[1] – mainly because of two reasons. Firstly, democracies no longer refer to one homogenous group as they maybe did in earlier times. Modern societies have become more differentiated and heterogeneous in very different perspectives, for example, socially, culturally or religiously. Secondly,

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[1] Cf. C. Colliot-Thelene, *La démocratie sans démos*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2011.

in reacting to global developments many democratic decisions are inevitable also affecting people in other regions who could not participate in these decisions. This argument is currently reflected in the debate about the *all-affected principle*. Philosophers like Goodin ask whether democracy means that people should always be involved in political decisions that affect them. The democratic ideal would then "mean giving virtually everyone everywhere a vote on virtually everything decided anywhere."[2] Against this background, democracies have to discuss what *demos* means considering circumstances in which democracies experience themselves as heterogeneous and in which their political decisions imply many global consequences.

In practice, democracies have many problems dealing with those new social and political constellations.[3] Furthermore, democracies sometimes even seem to be in favour of an un-globalised world. But looking back at recent European history, the most important political developments were caused by global phenomena, for example the financial crisis, violent conflicts, terrorism or migration. An analysis of these developments shows a close connection between foreign and domestic policy. Today, the pressing issues are therefore no longer purely national issues, but always imply a global dimension – and this dimension may even constitute their most important aspect.

But facing these challenges, many European democracies often seem to neglect this interconnection between national and global issues.[4] Nevertheless, they still often operate with political concepts that originally were founded at the national level. This might be one reason why many of the political solutions developed by democracies today continue to fail.

This observation leads me to the basic question of my paper: Is democracy ready for globalisation, or do we need alternative democratic practices in order to deal with global dynamics sufficiently? My argument is that democracies in practice are often overstrained to deal with global developments because they imply concepts of society, normativity and politics that are still bound to distinct social and political entities and therefore neglect the current dynamics of globalisation.

Against this background, political philosophy could help to reflect and thus to widen the perspective. The aim of the following philosophical reflection is to criticise narrow concepts of society, normativity and the political that in practice fail to deal with the current globalised situation. As part of the development of an alternative blueprint, political philosophy can provide assistance by helping to develop an understanding of the underlying global dynamics and alternative model of democracy in

[2] R.E. Goodin, "Enfranchising all Affected Interests, and Its Alternatives", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 35 (2007), p. 68.

[3] Cf. W. Merkel, "Democracies and Their Crises Reconsidered", *Democratic Theory* 3 (2016), pp. 91-108.

[4] One practical example are the last two German federal elections that took place in 2013 and 2018. Although German politics are fundamentally influenced by global developments, and of course, also German politics influence many people all around the world, global issues did not play a major role during both election campaigns and also in the coalition negotiations at all.