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## Boekbespreking van: *Democracy's Values Democracy's Edges*

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## Book Reviews

Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordon (eds.), *Democracy's Values*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, ISBN 0-521-643899, £ 12.95

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In 1997 the Ethics, Politics and Economics Program at Yale University sponsored a conference on 'Rethinking Democracy for a New Century'. Starting off with the idea that democracy today constitutes a 'flawed hegemon', providing a widely accepted but imperfect institutional framework for political decision-making, the aim of the conference was to analyse two issues dominating the debate in contemporary democratic theory and practice. The first volume, *Democracy's Values*, discusses in some detail the purpose of democracy. What are the primary values that (should) inform our conception of democracy? And, how do democratic theories deal with the competition between different democratic values? A second set of questions, related to the proper boundaries (internal as well as external) that define a democratic polity, form the subject matter of *Democracy's Edges*.

*Democracy's Values* is in many ways the more interesting of the two volumes. Pitching scholars who are primarily concerned with a minimal conception of democracy against those for whom democracy captures a broader set of values, it is both more academically engaging and internally coherent than its counterpart. Adam Przeworski provides the ideal opener with a fairly sweeping review of the reasons for endorsing minimal democracy. Building on Schumpeter's classical definition, which equates democracy with a procedure to choose rulers by means of fair elections, Przeworski argues that minimal democracy fails to ensure rational decision-making, political representation or any form of substantial equality. For Przeworski the rationale of democratic politics lies elsewhere: democracy's chief goal is to further the peaceful regulation of conflict. The paper first shows how the systematic possibility of changing government itself avoids outbursts of violent protest, and then argues that it also matters that this happens through a fair voting procedure. Compared with randomized elections, a voting procedure induces a further element of political compliance by providing information about the willingness of factions to engage in potentially costly protest. While this latter claim needs further elaboration,

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Przeworski's chapter is refreshing in that it provides a constructive argument why a minimally democratic political system is worth defending and at the same time delineates the conditions under which such a system is most likely to flourish. It is fair to say that Przeworski's analysis of the purpose of democracy remains somewhat single-minded in that it is oblivious to many relevant alternative considerations. The contentious relation between democracy and economic development is only one, if prominent, example (exemplified by the attention it receives in the chapters by Dasgupta and Maskin, Bardhan or Dunn). Apart from economic growth, concerns with the efficient organization of crucial political functions too provide a plausible reason for upholding democratic institutions, as is argued by Margaret Levi. Levi places great emphasis on the role of norms of fairness within democratic institutions. Key democratic principles like tolerance of minorities, acceptance of electoral defeat and political obligation are likely to arise in polities where citizens (and government) are mutually seen as constrained by norms of reciprocal fairness. Because these norms are a prerequisite for efficiently organizing the extraction of taxes or conscription, ruling elites often support institutions that secure democratic rights, even if this constrains their future actions. Thus, Levi's analysis of the instrumental role played by norms of fairness complements Przeworski's story nicely. But her argument also mirrors a problem in Przeworski's defence of minimal democracy. It leaves unanswered the two questions that exert most contemporary democratic theorists. Can we improve democracy by moving beyond strict Schumpeterian minimalism? And, if so, what is the most appropriate set of institutions to guide this process?

This issue is taken up independently by Iris Marion Young, Philip Pettit and Philippe Van Parijs. These scholars are united in their goal of bringing democracy in line with the demands of justice. Young's concern with self-determination (the absence of domination) and self-development (the absence of oppression) leads her to argue that a wide variety of associations often collected under the heading of 'civil society' play a key role in securing social justice. We must of course remain acutely aware of the limitations of civil society – certain types of injustice demand explicit state mediation – but the complementary use of different democratic institutions is crucial for securing social justice. For Pettit the foundational value that is meant to shape our democratic institutions is 'republican freedom' or the absence of arbitrary interference. Pettit's main concern is to complement (minimal) electoral democracy with what he calls 'contestatory democracy': a set of procedures that allows people to call decisions made by legitimately elected governments into question. Van Parijs disagrees with Pettit (and Young) about the foundation of social justice – in his opinion it is 'real freedom' that matters – but not in the fact that democratic institutions should be designed, and if necessary altered, to promote justice thus conceived. Leaving aside the many differences, Young, Pettit and Van Parijs clearly believe that democracy should be constrained by justice or freedom, or whatever represents our primary moral concern.

A more sceptical view is presented in a stimulating chapter by John Roemer. Roemer, too, draws our attention to the differences between democracy and justice

but suggests that, under certain plausible conditions, democracy may not even engender justice. It is true, he argues, that democracies put important constraints on the arguments political agents advance in public discourse, fostering what Roemer calls a 'universalistic appeal in politics'. And such an appeal to the universal standpoint of political agents bears a close resemblance to the universal standpoint adopted in many theories of justice, notably those of egalitarian flavour. But universalistically-driven political argument does not always generate egalitarian policies (a point conceded earlier by Przeworski). For Roemer the multi-dimensional nature of politics, in combination with the absence of information on key economic parameters, means that in equilibrium significant redistribution will be offset by heterogeneous preferences over non-redistributive issues. Whether one finds this a troubling result depends of course crucially on one's conception of justice, but it seems to prove the general point that one should not try to turn democracy into justice (or vice versa). It is clear that the relation between justice and democracy needs further work, and anyone looking for conclusive answers is unlikely to find them in *Democracy's Values*. But the papers in this volume do a good job in stimulating the debate.

Unfortunately, this cannot be said of the papers in the second volume, *Democracy's Edges*; a disappointing book overall. One of the core issues that informs the 'debate' in this book is how democrats should respond to challenges to the prevailing model of national governments grounded in majority rule. And these challenges arise from two different sides, from the 'outer' and the 'inner' edges of the democratic polity. The first part of the book discusses democracy's outer edges, referring to the many problems posed by the increasing internationalization of political power and the hollowing-out of the nation-state. The second part concentrates on the internal group dynamics within democratic communities, a problem made familiar by a decade of research into multiculturalism and minority rights. Papers in this volume deal with a wide range of topics: the democratic capacity of international organizations (Dahl, Tobin), the problem of dealing with environmental issues (Altvater, Hardin), an interesting paper on the international women's movement (Ackerly and Okin), and various aspects of group politics (Kiss, Shapiro, etc.). The problem with *Democracy's Edges* is that the chapters are too disparate to produce a coherent collection and that many of them in fact only offer an introduction to the topic in question, barely hinting at the most interesting or difficult questions. While there are interesting insights abound, most papers fail to cut right to the core of the 'boundary question'. Consider, for instance, David Held's argument for a cosmopolitan community, which is supposed to represent democracy's answer to globalization. Held's chapter offers much by way of information on globalization but little by way of substantial argument about democracy, and leaves his proposal vulnerable to many empirical and normative challenges – as can be witnessed in the excellent comments by Will Kymlicka and Alexander Wendt. At the other end of the spectrum lies Susan Hurley's piece on modularity and democracy as an emerging property of a political system. Hurley advances a number of interesting propositions but buries them in a technical discussion of cognitive science, which fails to excite this reader as much as it perhaps should. In

the end neither paper provides a clear answer to the sorts of questions that most readers of a volume on the boundaries of democracy would like to see addressed.

The covers of *Democracy's Edges* and *Democracy's Values*, as well as the excellent introductions by the editors, certainly managed to wet this reader's appetite. It is of course hard to withstand a book that offers: "some of the world's most prominent political theorists and social scientists present original discussions of urgently vexing subjects." There is little doubt that the twin-problems of the values and boundaries of democracy merit a continuing academic effort, and the vast number of eminent scholars that populate both books should ensure that these problems are dealt with at the highest level of analysis. Unfortunately, there actually appears to be little original research in the book. A few exceptions notwithstanding the vast majority of pieces are either reprints or rehashed from previously published material. Also, too many chapters introduce their respective topics only in broad brushstrokes, leaving much of the really intricate issues open. Moreover, the combination of normative arguments and empirically based material – often a recipe for exciting research – actually fails to bring out the best of both worlds and often leads to speculative analysis. Variety is often to be commended, but in this case the mixture of approaches and diversity of topics demands a bit too much from the reader. It is simply too hard to keep track of the overall theme binding the various bits and pieces. While most readers are likely to find four or five pieces of interest in this collection, labouring over the 500 pages may prove a great deal less enticing than the editors suggest in their introduction.

Jurgen De Wispelaere

Robert H. Lieshout, *The Struggle for the Organization of Europe: The Foundations of the European Union*. Cheltenham/Northampton: Edward Elgar, 1999, 224 p., ISBN 1-85898-975-2, £ 45.00.

In this book, Robert Lieshout makes an important contribution to the growing historical and theoretical literature on the development of European institutionalized cooperation since World War II. Lieshout's main thesis is that the Western European diplomacy between 1947 and 1957, which resulted in the construction of the main institutional foundations of the modern European Union, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) of 1952, and the European Economic Community (EEC) and European Community for Atomic Energy (Euratom) of 1957, was principally motivated by the traditional political-military preferences, policies and interactions of three countries: the United States, Germany and, in particular, France. Lieshout's main method to pursue this line of inquiry is a careful, thoughtful and engaging historical reconstruction of the political concerns, motives and efforts of the top foreign policy officials of these countries, as well as other important figures from Belgium, the Netherlands and Great Britain.