CHAPTER 3

Multilateral Democracy from a Republican Point of View

This chapter demonstrates that the idea of democracy as multilateral democracy is not dependent on a purely liberal conception of democracy; it is also rooted in republicanism.¹ The general thrust of the argument again follows a constructivist approach of political philosophy: the multilateral dimension of republicanism is explored theoretically from the perspective of states adhering to republican principles and willing to promote them in their institutional engagements with each other. Although constructivist, this implies important normative presuppositions, such as the universal standards that republics accept: namely, that all states ought to respect the human rights of all individuals, minority rights, and the jus cogens (peremptory norm) of international law in relation to all states, peoples, and individuals. This minimal condition, however, is very different from the cosmopolitan claim to bring all political communities under the roof of a world republic. The main reason for taking a constructivist approach, and a critical stance regarding certain abstract forms of cosmopolitanism, is the republican understanding of non-domination as the right to collective self-government within the limits of adequate procedural rules of self-determination. Republics may not be ends in themselves, but they are political entities that claim to be entitled to self-government on the basis that their citizens choose to form a separate realm of political justice, and that other republics recognize their status as a states-people.

The foundational idea of the United States was not non-domination as the absence of arbitrary interference by governors on the governed, but the claim of having the right to form a separate political entity, that is, the idea of collective political freedom. John Lind’s argument that British subjects in the American colonies are under the same regime as British subjects misses

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the point that Americans no longer wanted to be British subjects in the first place, independently of the question of whether government necessarily means interference with freedom. Freedom as collective non-domination is about the polity, not about the regime or merely non-domination of individuals.³

In this, I therefore conceive of multilateral democracy as the institutional form that individual republics can create together without compromising the fundamental principle of self-government, and as the institutional form that enables them to realize the goals of civic republicanism and republican government in a more coherent manner under conditions of interdependence. Again cosmopolitanism (also called cosmopolitan republicanism) is not directly refuted, but I propose a methodological alternative regarding the normative guidance for the integration of political and legal communities. On the basis of critical reasons given in Section 3.1 regarding republican cosmopolitanism,⁴ I propose a certain type of multilateral integration as the republican alternative to cosmopolitanism. I concentrate my analysis on three thematic clusters in which, I believe, republican thought makes a contribution to the idea of multilateral democracy.

First, I refute the argument that a republican theory of human rights implies the imperative to form a world republic (3.2). Second, I analyze the implications of the republican principles of self-government, nondomination, and sovereign consent for a theory of multilateral democracy (3.3). Third, I hope to show that, on the multilateral level, republicanism leads to a theory in which individual citizens and peoples are understood as constitutive “citizens” of a just multilateral order (3.4).

3.1 Common Difficulties of Liberal and Republican Cosmopolitanism

It is not clear to what extent republicanism, in its modern democratic form, offers a distinct and complete alternative to political liberalism. Both conceptions, at least in their most followed and non-radical versions, defend bounded forms of justice, the respect for collective self-government, and bounded forms of political membership in a specific political community. Both republicanism and political liberalism favor some understanding of popular sovereignty of the statespeople. This sovereignty is empowered and limited by institutional checks and the individual’s rights of voice through mechanisms of the rule of law and international law. Republicanism and political liberalism both accept equality of citizens regarding access to basic