

SPEECH: ONE MAN ONE VOTE OR ONE MAN ONE GOAT:
REFLECTIONS ON DEMOCRACY IN THE GLOBAL ARENA

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We have been asked to discuss what amounts to the prospects of creating a global democratic political space. There are enormous difficulties in that project, which is what makes it interesting and important. Two of them come immediately to mind. The first is that we evidently live in an era of rising tribal nationalism. I don't have to develop that point, you know about it by reading front pages of the newspapers. The second one is a bit more subtle. It is the enormous widening of economic disparity between different parts of the globe organized into different political spaces. Those difficulties are ones that are pretty daunting, but they also create a call to radical action. Nothing we've been able to devise so far, or that the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund has come up with, has done much to address the problem of this widening economic disparity.

Let's look at the two problems as challenges to the project that Professor Strauss has asked us to address.

First: tribal nationalism. Of course we are in an era of rampant tribal nationalism, and so it can be argued that in that kind of ethos, where, seemingly, everybody wants to be with their own kind and takes an increasingly malevolent attitude towards all others, the idea of an instrument of global democratic governance seems a remote prospect.

It may be that ethos dictates institutions; what people feel and how they identify themselves inevitably drives the configuration, the architecture, of the institutions of government. But it could also be the other way around, and

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Europe has been mentioned as an example of the opposite theory: that institutions develop socio-political and cultural ethos rather than being simply a mirror of an existing ethos. By changing the architecture of institutions, this theory argues, you can change socio-political behavior and cultural identity.

Creating a global polis, which is at the heart of the Straussian architecture-transforming enterprise, has two important advantages. One of them is that it would involve people directly in the process of global governance. At the moment nobody in this country knows much, hears much, or is much interested in the international institutions of global governance because these loci of power are diplomatic institutions. They are institutions run by specialists, and career people who are seconded from national bureaucracies such as our State Department, Commerce Department, or Defense Department to work in organizations such as the United Nations together with their equivalents from other countries. There, they negotiate and administer certain kinds of functional regimes.

Now, if you made that institution subject to some kind of electoral process, that, itself, would generate a kind of popular involvement. Direct electoral politics develop that kind of sense of popular stake holding, in the process and in its outcomes.

The second great advantage of the Straussian vision is that it denationalizes interest groups, or transnationalizes them. If you had a globally elected parliament, national interest groups would tend to disaggregate and reform in new, transnational configurations. An old French saying has it that there is more in common between two senators, one of whom is a socialist, than between two socialists one of whom is a senator. In an elected global assembly, people who are elected from the various member countries will find that in order to advance their agenda—say for example to get a transnational level of engine emission pollution standards—would need to combine forces, not solely with other people from their own states, but also with like minded persons from other nations who are pursuing the same ends.

And, perhaps, in order to get transnational emission standards, the political representatives of one nation will have to negotiate with other transnational interest groups with different agendas, trading off reciprocal support for others' priorities. That kind of aggregation of transnational interest groups does not tend to occur in the present international system, but would surely emerge in democratic political institutions.

Now, you may need to aim low, here. You don't want to suggest that what the world needs is a powerful global parliament. It is not going to happen and it is too easily dismissed. It involves too much sacrifice of national sovereignty to be a sensible approach to the issue. But the actual amount of power exercised by an institution is almost irrelevant. What you want is to create the institution. The architecture is the thing. Once you have created the institution, the institution will begin to attract power in accordance with its perceived legitimacy. Once you create the framework of democratic

governance, that framework will gradually expand. This will be particularly true if, in its operations, the institution with a legitimate democratic provenance interacts with institutions that are not representative and thus not perceived as equally legitimate. The House of Commons always tends, eventually, to trump the House of Lords, no matter what the initial allocations of power.

It is strategically sensible, then, to let power remain, initially, with those who represent the world's governments. The institution that represents the world's people, once it comes into being, will gradually arrogate more power to itself as it confronts other institutions representative of bureaucrats, diplomats and governments. Confrontation by confrontation, the directly elected representatives will expand the ambit of their jurisdiction. So, start small. For example, start by advocating a directly elected second body of the General Assembly. Start with the understanding that, for the United Nations General Assembly to enact a resolution or the budget, a double majority of both chambers would be required. Avoid, too, the impression that the reconstituted General Assembly might challenge the supremacy of the Security Council, where the representatives of the Big Powers are entrenched.

The second problem is economic disparity. Democracy, it is said, does not work well in a polis of great inequalities. When I was a student, working in central Africa on a dissertation on the racial laws of Rhodesia, the people were redesigning their political system in the expectation of becoming independent. And I remember a newspaper headline asking "one man-one vote, or one man one goat?" The obvious implication of that juxtaposition of one vote or one goat—the goat being the rural indicator of affluence—was that, if you distributed the franchise widely enough, that might trigger some seismic economic consequences, that a democratic franchise would exert pressure to achieve radical economic redistribution. It implied that such radical redistribution would hinder economic development.

It is probably true that political democracy at any level, including global, tends to empower the disadvantaged, especially if they outnumber the affluent. So, it is said, there is a conflict between creating a political institution with a democratic franchise and economic development, because development is always driven by the concentration of capital in the few.

I think the argument is fallacious, because it confuses the connection between democracy and development. It is true that democracy has a redistributive effect, but the redistributive effect is to increase the purchasing power of large numbers of people, and mass purchasing power, rather than capital concentration, then becomes the engine of economic growth: a development which, in time, will narrow the economic disparities that pit classes against one another.

What we need, then, is a shift in development theory from capital aggregation in the hands of the elite, to income redistribution intended to create mass consumer markets. Democratic institutions are ideally suited to bring about such a shift in development strategy.

It seems to me that we've tried capital concentration in this country. Indeed, we are still trying it. It has failed to perform as an efficient engine for the kind of economic development that narrows inequalities and, thus, facilitates democratic governance. At both national and international levels of governance, it is surely time to shift to a strategy of economic redistribution, one that increases purchasing power so as to create a mass market for necessities, rather than elite markets for luxury goods or the export of capital.

The politics of power, the politics of development—this is heady stuff. Surely it is high time we began to think globally about these matters and develop a global strategy.