


Book Review: Democracy to Come: Politics as Relational Praxis by Fred Dallmayr

Linda Quest

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr>

 Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Communication Commons](#), [Economics Commons](#), [Geography Commons](#), [International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Political Science Commons](#), and the [Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Quest, Linda () "Book Review: Democracy to Come: Politics as Relational Praxis by Fred Dallmayr," *International Social Science Review*: Vol. 94 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr/vol94/iss1/7>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Social Science Review by an authorized editor of Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository.

Dallmayr, Fred. *Democracy to Come: Politics as Relational Praxis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. x + 190 pages. Hardcover, \$32.95.

Fred Dallmayr, professor of philosophy and political science, gives us a systematic analytical comparison—worldwide and across time—of democracy in theory and practice. Democracy is paradoxical and thought-provoking. In theory, democracy is defined by equality. In practice, democracies have stumbled in every direction over *relational praxis*—namely, unity or estrangement embedded in mores and attitudes about ‘us-others’, ‘we-they’, ‘good people-bad people-non-people.’ Dallmayr looks backward into derailments and failures, all identifiable with habitual thoughts and feelings about ourselves and others, and looks to the future for open-ended, evolving democracy.

The book is homo anthropocene in scope, scientific in methodology, and trans-temporal and cross-national in bibliography. Dallmayr references 84 Western and non-Western distinguished theorists by name (including navigators and explorers who encountered others and wrote about it), plus unnamed Aztecs and associates of the Austrian School. The theorists are preponderantly from philosophy, political science, and law, with sociology, economics, history, and psychology also conspicuous.

Six categorical perspectives are extracted by Dallmayr from canonical studies of democracy:

1. apophatic, rationalist—participatory, nondenominational, open to others
2. utopian—aspirational, fictive
3. deliberative—inspirational, justifying claims, focusing on morality and discussion
4. empirical—useful
5. descriptive—individual voter as foundational unit
6. institutional—quantitative calculation, analytical precision.

The United States President Lincoln’s ‘rule of the people, by the people, and for the people’ expresses apophatic democracy. Dallmayr does it homage in Chapter 6, as one of the most popular definitions of democracy, having inspired and continuing to inspire large numbers of people. Whatever the perspective on democracy taken by any analyst, artist, or humorist, *the people* seem nevertheless to be the issue. They abide at the core of democracy *à venir*. *À venir*, to come, is taken from Jacques Derrida whose fundamental point is that it is all imaginary anyhow.

What does the term *à venir* or *to come* mean? It means that it comes from ahead, that anything is possible, but not everything possible is necessary. Albeit all of the attitudes and behaviors we think, say, and do, make a difference, especially the habituated ones. With respect to a democracy, enablers for emancipatory results would have to be at least 51 percent of all, whereas enablers for vile and destructive outcomes could be relatively few, particularly if the

masses are passive or fatalistic. Dallmayr recommends committing sincerely to: (a) not harming others; (b) peace and justice-seeking; and (c) eliminating oppression, corruption, and exploitation. He suggests compatibility between the apophatic and deliberative visions of democracy. Participants in those versions have, over the years, impressed him as more mature and more willing to take responsibility for their actions than their counterparts in either *laissez-faire* or power-seeking systems. Picking among his assorted theorists, Dallmayr chooses for his amalgam: Richard Falk's 'Citizen pilgrims,' John Dewey's 'Ideal of the coming future government', Mahātmā Gandhi's humanizing principles of *ahimsa* (harmlessness) and *satyagraha* (truth and justice), Montesquieu's 'love of equality' or demophily (generous openness to others and otherness), as well as Friedrich Holderlin's *Freundlichkeit* or 'Friendliness' (a disposition befitting friends).

In addition, Dallmayr exposes two potentially devastating problems of democracy. One is retrospective, Epimethean, and glaring. The other is prospective, Promethean, and subtle. The glaring problem involves democracies that now have or have had colonies. Domestic democracy invites contradictions if dictatorial rule is practiced on the 'others' in the colonies or if authoritarian rulers are supported as allies. Neither demonstrates sincerity about 'love of equality,' consequently sabotaging self-esteem and equality among the 'others.' The subtle problem requires holding space now and into the indeterminate future for the evolution of humankind. Anthropologists, along with paleontologists such as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and political scientists such as Francis Fukuyama, have indicated that the issue is genuine, and they see implications for democracy and for human rights. Dallmayr's perspective on this is expressed in the book's Dedication where he writes: "Against bullies—local, national, global" (p. v).

Where does *Democracy to Come: Politics as Relational Praxis* fit into the social sciences? Metaphorically, it is at the locus where *Battle Hymn of the Republic* and Beethoven's *Symphony 9, Movement 4* intersect. Fusion would yet require a shift by Dallmayr from "The Myth of Sisyphus" by Albert Camus (1942) to Camus' (1951) *The Rebel*, and the inclusion of Björn Wittrock's (2000) "Modernity: One, None, or Many?". *The Rebel* and Wittrock's six promissory notes have already earned space in the undergraduate comparative political theory course that I teach. The original texts for the course were Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey's (1987) edited version of *History of Political Philosophy* and Dallmayr's (2010) *Comparative Political Theory*, the latter now replaced with *Democracy to Come: Politics as Relational Praxis*, which would also fit into history, philosophy, and interdisciplinary courses. Dallmayr has contributed mightily toward the future of panoramic, analytical, comparative political philosophy, and his work would also greatly benefit scholars of literature and theology.

This book addresses the previously unanswered hints and clues proposed by Dallmayr in *Comparative Political Theory* (2010) and *Being in the World: Dialogue and Cosmopolis* (2013).

Moreover it exemplifies the innovative genius and mature wisdom of a transformational political scientist.

Linda Quest, Ph.D.
Professor of Political Science
Pace University
New York, New York