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draft

THE DEMOCRATIC LINEAGE

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Democratization is a one of the fundamental forces shaping to-day's world. In the century now passing it has transformed the world's basic make up from one that was minority-democratic, to one that is now becoming majority-democratic. Not only has it registered startling and sudden gains in what used to be the Soviet Union, and the lands it dominated in East Europe and Asia but it has also made steady gains in South and East Asia. What is more, a set of common institutions is coming to harmonize activities among the democracies; the European Union; regular summit-level meetings of the Group of Seven (soon Eight), and a wide range of other inter-governmental arrangements in the political realm; wide acceptance of free markets and freer trade, in the economy; and considerable cultural convergence. A global democratic community may not be in place as yet but it no longer is utopian to think it achievable within a reasonable time span.

The democratic lineage is an answer to the question: where does democracy come from as a global phenomenon, and where might it be going. It puts that question not in terms of individual countries, as it is habitually done, but in relation to what is in fact a global process, that is a process whose potential if not actual reach is world-wide, and whose repercussions are world-wide even if its actual reach is not. Standard world histories, or accounts of the sources of democracy do not answer that question.

The democratic lineage asserts that present-day democracies that now number several dozen, descend, in a special sense, from the experience of a much more limited group of societies. The concept of democratic lineage (1) is a device for representing the line of societies that over the past millennium has shaped what has now come to be recognized as democratization. That line of democratic descent has deep roots that it is well to recognize, and over an extended period has served as the line of transmission for essential traits of cultural inheritance: literature, other written records, and works of art and architecture, through which a democratic heritage has come down to the present. It is not the property of any single country, but it is also limited to a set of societies. What follows is an account of the evolution of the democratic lineage, and highlights of some of its key characteristics, both with emphasis on linkages.

Conceptualizing the democratic lineage

Let us propose that the democratic lineage is the product of an evolutionary process: the process whereby the global community is formed. That is, we expect that at the global level, too, increases in interaction levels would be accompanied by the creation of forms of social solidarity and long-term cooperation, and that these forms would undergo change. For evolutionary processes are in the first place, processes of change over time, and secondly, changes that betray a certain logical-formal directionality, that of a learning process. We would not expect global community to be formed instantly but rather to pass along the lineage through a series of transitions, at each point of which incipient changes in this form of social organization would be subject to sustained selective pressures.

The motor of this evolutionary process is the search for what might be called a "nicer world": not the world of the dark ages that saw many parts of Eurasia, and China and Europe in particular, succumb to the rule of nomadic invaders and lose sight and even memory of its earlier heritage and its classics; nor even the world of the ancients that was marked by brutality and lack of cooperation. In that search for a "nicer world" a variety of cooperative innovations might be tried out and many would fail, but others would ultimately succeed and serve as the basis for cumulative change.

We would expect such search to find concrete expression in a major society or societal complex that we might call the model society of the age. It might be the society of the Italian Renaissance, centered on its major cities of Genoa, Venice, Florence and Milan. Or it might be British society of the Georgian age that served as model of social organization for such thinkers as Montesquieu or Voltaire. Such societies might be regarded as the meeting ground or nexus for a multitude of cooperative effort: economic, political, social and religious, as

well as cultural. From such a soil we would expect to spring innovations in cooperative arrangements: e.g. new forms of commercial organization and republican institutions in the Italian case; say effective parliamentary institutions in the British.

Each such model society might be thought as emerging in competition with another sets of societies, in a manner that bears ideological elaboration. In Italian practice, the role of republics was contrasted with the rule of princes, and was generally thought to be inimical to imperial and monarchical arrangements. British practice of constitutional government and division of powers contrasted sharply with the absolutist aspirations of its continental competitors. In a basic sense, and over time, such competing visions of the social order were subjected to repeated and strong competitive pressures. These pressures included economic competition, political conflict up to and including war, and ideological contests for the allegiance of social movements and sections of public and world opinion.

All in all, the democratic lineage extends over a prolonged period because the process of changing world-wide social organization is a huge one. We might conceive of it as consisting of two stages: the first one of laying out the necessary base of democratic development, and the second one of democratic diffusion or dissemination. In the first, the nucleus of future change is put together, and in the second the clustering around that nucleus occurs at a rate that is slow at first but then gathers increasing speed. Each of these could be millennial-scale projects.

In the account that follows, we shall distinguish, in the modern period, first, the four stages of the base-laying process, lasting close to a millennium; these are the Chinese and the Italian Renaissance; the European Reformation; and Britain's Liberal Age. We shall then portray the contemporary experience as opening the stage of diffusion of the democratic experiment. But before outlining the modern record, we need to comment briefly on the pre-modern heritage.

Early experiments

We are, of course, aware of the classical Greek experience with democracy, but we need not suppose that it was the only relevant, or even earliest such case (in historical experience (from -3500 onward), that is roughly from the beginning of civilization, and in an urban context.

Students of the history of Sumer believe that there is evidence, principally written and literary (myths and epics), for arguing that something that they call "primitive democracy" may have operated in that early system of city-states say between -3500 and -2600. In "primitive democracy" ultimate political authority resided in a general assembly of citizens, and major decisions would be made with the consent of citizens (Jacobsen

1957:102). This political pattern might have extended to the entire area of Sumer (with its center at Nippur) but in time it developed into "primitive monarchies" based mainly on force, and ultimately led to the creation of "primitive empire". Jacobsen attributes the displacement of "primitive democracy" to the unsuitability of direct democracy to rule over large areas, and to the success of the monarchical forms based on the household of the ruler that, he argues, were extensible in space to a greater degree (ib:118-9).

The classic case of early democracy is, of course, Athens, ca. -460 - -340, in mainland Greece. Here too we have a system of city-states, some of which were democratic, and in those cities, ultimate power, including war and peace, resided in the general assembly of citizens. This, too, is direct democracy, and it did not survive the conquests of Alexander the Great, of his successors, and (by -146) those of Rome, then still a republic but armed with superior military power. In contrast with Sumer, the Greek experience is superbly documented, and does, of course, represent the formative experience of political science.

The classics of the era, from Herodotus, through Plato and Aristotle, to Plutarch and Livy, have remained the essential trove of knowledge about these developments, and still provide the basic concepts for the discussion of democracy. While mostly forgotten in social practice, as cultural artifacts they were preserved through the centuries, and became, after transmission and translation (after 1200), part of the cultural assets of the Renaissance in Italy and Europe more generally. While therefore we have reason to believe that the importance of early democracy to modern developments is easily shown, as a form of cultural inheritance, a direct linkage in the form of a continuous lineage of practices cannot be so demonstrated. (2)

Laying the base for democracy

It is a premise of this analysis that democracy emerges when conditions of society are ripe for it, that is when they favor long-term cooperation based on equality, and under law. When do such conditions prevail? We would expect them to prevail in urbanized society, one characterized by diversity and openness, susceptible to learning, one that exhibits trade, and offers basic security yet that keeps the military under control. In short, when society exhibits evolutionary potential.

As we have shown, such evolutionary democratic potential cannot be thought to be confined solely to "the west". The Sumerian experience of "primitive democracy" is suggestive, and even the Athenian heritage is mostly indirect. Buddhist organization seems to have some democratic elements to this day. Furthermore, at the onset of the modern age, the most promising conditions for the rise of democracy appear to have arisen in

Sung China, a period the historians describe as one of "Chinese Renaissance".

What we did have here were conditions indicative of evolutionary potential: they included a a civil society more populous (ca. 100m) than Sumer or Greece (1-10 m), significantly urbanized (up to 10 p.c.), rising in prosperity, in part through internal and external trade, linked to Buddhist networks, and having established, after a long period of disruption, a political framework of order. The military chiefs lost power and the army became a mercenary force; a bureaucracy well-schooled in the classics succeeded in lending a framework to what one author (Jacques Gernet) described as a "learning society". Two proto-parties evolved as ways of debating rival approaches to political problems and influencing the central government: Reformers, with an agenda designed to cope with society's most urgent problems, and Conservatives who espoused neo-Confucianism. They alternated in power but it was the latter who ultimately imposed their stamp upon the system.

The Sung experiment failed. The protracted conflict with the invaders from the North and ultimate conquest by the Mongols (3) destroyed the potential for change. While the Sung state was itself only one of several powerful states in East Asia (CHINA AMONG EQUALS is the title of a recent volume on this era) its foreign policy strategies were generally disastrous, and failed to establish lasting modes of cooperation i.a. with the sinicized powers of the North. Its knowledge about conditions outside its own realm were inadequate. The Mongols left China (and much of the Moslem world) devastated, a source of massive epidemics, and with its population in decline. The Sung provide no direct linkage to subsequent developments in the West, but their innovations (in particular printing, compass, and gunpowder) have been recognized as among the foundations of modernity.

By about 1200 Italy and areas surrounding it became the part of the world where conditions were most hospitable for institutional development (as they were also improving in much of the rest of Europe, through town-building, and rights gained by cities). There was variety and openness: cities such as Pisa, Genoa, and Venice become prosperous centers of trade and western termini for the traffic of the Silk Roads; Florence and Milan were strong in banking and manufactures. In contrast with China, they were anti-imperial; they asserted their independence against external encroachments of all kinds: and organized their social life on a republican basis. But they were also small, and provided only a slender basis for social experiments. As in China somewhat earlier, we find here a Renaissance of learning and the rediscovery of classics.

The foremost and most enduring example of democratic potential in Renaissance Italy was probably Venice. Claiming descent from Rome rather than Athens (though affiliated for a time with Greek Byzantium) it was a spectacularly successful republic with a constitution that mixed monarchical, aristocrat-

ic, and democratic elements. What was not evident at this point was the formation of a nucleus of cooperation among at least some of the free cities of the Italian Renaissance. Most of the republics were short-lived, and came to be ruled by tyrannical princes and enmeshed in short-term schemes of intrigue and conquest. Genoa carried on a persistent feud with Venice, fighting several far-flung wars with it, changed regimes frequently, and had trouble maintaining its independence. The humanists did not make it as a social movement. Venice failed to work with republican Florence, and ultimately found herself isolated in the north-east corner of Italy, even as, being widely admired, its constitution came to be closely studied, and imitated elsewhere in Europe. After 1494, France and Spain alone came to contend over the dominion of Italy.

At that time, the active zone of the world system was shifting from the Mediterranean to Atlantic Europe. It was the Netherlands that, after Italy, became the other area of urban concentration; the focal point of major conflicts, the world market for a new system of global trade, and also the locus of new potential for social evolution. Portugal and Spain also prospered, as well as England, and their representative institutions were making headway (4).

The forces that reorganized Europe north of the Alps came together in the struggles of the Reformation. These involved at first, Germany, and then France but, from 1572 onward, in confronting the King of Spain, the Dutch Republic came to be seen as the focus of that struggle in defense of established rights against the centralizing power of state and church, and a testing ground for ideas and practices of reform. Its republicanism was somewhat ambiguous, but it did provide for a clear division of powers between the now traditional representative bodies (of the cities, and the States-General), and the executive powers of the commanders-in-chief; it evolved in the direction of tolerance, and it showed the beginnings of a party system (of Republicans and Orangists). It was not a democracy but rather mostly an urban oligarchy, but offered greater democratic potential, freedom, prosperity and civic order than its alternatives.

The Dutch Republic had both similarities, and affinities, with Venice. Amsterdam was often referred to as the Venice of the North, and the republican experience was closely studied by Dutch humanists. Both had strong urban and commercial interests, and their close links, overland, via the Rhine, and by sea, were of long standing; as Dutch shipping entered the Mediterranean, after 1590, the links became even closer. As an embryonic reforming (and anti-Spanish) party of the "Young" emerged ca. 1580, Venice developed an alliance with the Dutch, and in 1617, (hired) Dutch and English ships and soldiers helped to defeat the forces of the Spanish viceroy in Naples, Ossuna. But the influence of the "Young" faded after 1630, and "the abortion of Venice's embryonic party system signified stagnation" (Lane 1972:405).

Whereas a Venice-Netherlands linkage definitely existed, its strength was limited as compared with the bonds that developed between England and the nascent Dutch Republic. That bond grew in the face of Spanish power that sought not only to suppress the revolt in the Netherlands but also to restore a Catholic monarchy in England. It came to be embodied in the mutual defense agreements of 1584-5 and those served for more than a generation as the nucleus of a system of alliances that confronted the Spanish threat, and ultimately brought a settlement to wars of religion. The infrastructure of those alliances was provided by members of Reformed churches.

In retrospect, this might have been the decisive event of the base-laying process for it created a cooperative cluster around which all subsequent democratic developments revolved. It soon led into another era of common action: that which achieved the Glorious Revolution in 1689 and inaugurated Parliamentary government in England. The common front, this time, was against Louis XIV of France who claimed absolute power and had defeated the last vestiges of French representative institutions (the "parlements"), had expelled the Huguenots, and was set on supporting James II in a similar role in Britain. The response to that threat was another Anglo-Dutch alliance, that of the "maritime powers" that dominated much of the world politics of the 18th century.

William of Orange, the Dutch Stadholder, assumed the English throne but fully respected the "sovereignty" of Parliament and, after his death, a Cabinet government developed on the basis of an increasingly more reliable party system, activated by regular elections. This was, broadly, a "liberal" system that with the extension of the franchise, (and other developments later in the 19th century) ultimately assumed a democratic character. In the meantime, in areas of English settlement (but not in Spanish or French colonies) seeds were being planted for more democratic potential as colonial legislatures were set up, beginning with Virginia in 1619, and Massachusetts from 1630 onward. By 1700, every English colony in America had an elective assembly, and most were self-governing. The American Revolution may have been the decisive test of the age of absolutism in that it affirmed the independence of a new republic, and added a new component to the "liberal" nucleus.

The French Revolution of 1789 achieved no more than the Glorious Revolution of 1689, that is the rejection of absolute power and the confirmation of fundamental human rights, though at greater cost, and with less immediate success. The struggle for democracy in France would continue through the 19th century, if not into the 20th. But for those who (wrongly, and from a Eurocentric perspective) would regard Britain as sui generis in European affairs, the dramatic events in France were a dramatic signal that the age of absolutism was drawing to a close.

Democratization

To summarize the argument thus far: the laying of a base for democratic potential was a protracted and uneven process extending over the best part of the past millennium. It included an unsuccessful though not unimportant experiment in China; the Renaissance experience with republicanism and representation; the turmoil of the wars of religion, and the success of liberal institutions in Britain. It is our argument that only in the third of these phases, with the coalescence of a Dutch-English nucleus, and its expansion in the Liberal phase to North America was the base laid for the world-wide growth of democracy.

We would therefore propose that, by mid-nineteenth century, the base-laying was complete, and that the "base" was now constituted of the United States and Britain. The United States was already overtaking Britain in population, and together they constituted in 1840 just under four percent of a world population of over 1.1 billion. The Polity II survey (5) rates them, for that year, both democratic, but only quite recently so (Britain since the Reform Act of 1832). France was now, after 1830, turning into a liberal direction, and Alexis de Tocqueville introduced DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA to the world in 1835.

In the more than century and a half since then, democracy has become significantly more widespread. In 1914, just before the outbreak of World War I, seventeen countries could be classified as institutionally-democratic. Their inhabitants now added up to 13 per cent of a nearly doubled world population of 1.8 billion. At the end of the 20th century, the fraction of world population that lived in democracies exceeded 50 per cent (for close to 6 billion).

How do we explain this remarkable phenomenon? The parsimonious explanation proposes that since about 1850, a process of diffusion from the British-American base has been in progress. The diffusion is that of a technology for social organization that is in time displacing its alternatives, and it obeys well-understood regularities of a process of technological substitution (Modelski & Perry 1991). A test of that hypothesis on Polity II data (1837-1986) yielded a high R-square, of 0.91, and allows the prediction that world democracy would reach a level of 90 per cent by about 2100.

In other words, the data on world democratization is consistent with the idea that over the past nearly two centuries democracy has diffused, in a logistic-type process, from an initial base of innovators, to a substantial proportion of world population (the early adopters), and might predictably continue diffusing for a prolonged period.

This general proposition is also supported if we look at individual country data. In 1914, in addition to the United States and Britain, a dozen or so other countries were rated democratic (Polity II data). Of these, several would be regard-

ed as direct products of diffusion of British practices, and in particular Australia and New Zealand, and Canada to a large degree. Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland would be susceptible to British examples though infused with some strong local material. France responded to British and American trends, against the background of its own heritage. Spain, Portugal and Greece had been subject to liberal influences throughout the 19th century. In both Costa Rica and Chile, too, British models weighed heavily.

More recently, important instances of democratization followed the close of World War I, World War II, and of the Cold War. In 1919 and after, Wilsonian democracy was prominent, in Eastern Europe in particular. After 1945, American military government in Germany and Japan was of considerable impact. In the case of India, on other hand, British practices have taken hold. Russia of the 1990s has experimented with American-type approaches.

In a more general sense, it was the politico-strategic victory of the two World Wars, product of the special relationship between the United States and Britain, as well as the outcome of the Cold War that in a most basic sense was a victory of democracy and created the political preconditions without which the democratic lineage could not have unfolded as did in the 20th century.

Some general characteristics

We might sum up this account of the evolution of the democratic lineage as follows:

1. Considerable experimentation world-wide, and localization where conditions are the most suitable. Though the contribution of Western Europe is palpable, no particular locale or region has an exclusive claim on this lineage.

2. This is not a process of expansion from a single base but rather one of experimentation followed by clustering around a steadily changing nucleus of at least two units. The first cases that we noted, and in particular that of Athenian democracy, the Sung reforms, and the Venetian republic were all those that failed to build a nucleus around which clustering could occur. On the other hand, the Dutch-English collaborative cluster that did congeal by about 1600 might be termed the decisive stage in the evolution of this lineage precisely for that reason. This allowed for a cumulation of the gains of cooperation, and prepared the ground for additional achievements on the basis of an expanding core, especially at times of transition, as afforded in the 20th century by the Anglo-American "special relationship". The European Community, itself a fine example of community building by nucleation, is now becoming another part of the nucleus of the world democratic community to come.

3. The evolution of the democratic lineage is a process of social construction that is closely and reciprocally linked to, and in fact coevolves with, those of global politics and economics. The following general relationships might be briefly postulated at this point: (a) democratic community supports global leadership: that is, in its rise to global leadership, a world power receives the support of democrats (earlier liberals, or reformers) system-wide, and the challengers do not; within the community leadership succession is likely to be less costly (Modelski 1996); (b) global leadership eases the way for democratic community, in that the world power tends to support democratic parties and human rights; in respect of economics, (c) the democratic community facilitates cooperation, hence also trade, and eases the diffusion of innovations; and (d) economic growth fostered by innovation and leading sector activity brings prosperity to the democratic community.

4. In modern world affairs the democratic lineage has occupied a privileged position. Its members and antecedents won all the right wars, prospered in the world economy, and led in the definition of world problems. If it is to remain in the forefront of evolutionary change it cannot remain an exclusive "western" group to which these privileges accrue and must be open to inclusion. That is why continued diffusion of the democratic lineage is to be promoted, as indeed it is also to be expected.

5. In the long run of world system evolution, the consolidation of the democratic community supplies the foundation of world organization. We might expect the future descendants of the democratic lineage to be the constituents of the world civil society that holds up the vision of a peaceful, no-war, society that is also equitable under law. It is a vision preferable to that of a multipolar world now proffered by the world's non-democratic forces.

Notes

1. The concept of lineage may also be applied in respect of other evolutionary processes, including political and economic, as e.g. in Thompson 1997.

2. Contemporaneously with Greece, pre-Mauryan India, in the urban setting of the Ganges valley, ca. -500, had both monarchies and republics. The republics, based on a single tribe or a confederation of tribes, had elected chiefs, and a general assembly (prasad) in which supreme authority resided. Gautama Buddha was active there at that time. After Buddha's death, three major Buddhist councils reviewed the tenets of the faith at intervals of about a century, the last convoked ca. -250 by Asoka whose centralized rule extended to most of India. The organization of the monastic orders that became a major feature of Bud-

dhism had democratic features. While losing ground in India, over the next millennium Mahayana Buddhism spread, in a variety of schools, through much of Asia, including China and Japan.

3. The Mongol world empire, founded by Genghiz Khan in 1206, completed the conquest of Sung China in 1279. It was a system of absolute rule legitimated by an assembly of the chiefs of all Mongol tribes (kuriltai) that continued to meet until 1260 when due to divisions in the ruling clan the empire effectively split into four parts, and then vanished almost completely 100 years later.

4. Portugal's initial "discoveries" were based upon an alliance of the Crown with urban and commercial elements, the defeat of the landed interest, and a leading role for the Cortes; these factors declined after 1500 (Modelski 1996).

5. Cf. Modelski and Perry 1991; a revised data set, Polity III, has recently become available.

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