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Democracy's Past Transformations, Present Challenges, and Future Prospects

Abstract: *The conceptual field for discussions of democracy has generally been territorially delimited. For ancient democracy, the territory was that of a city-state; for modern democracy, a nation-state. Although since the late eighteenth century modern democracy has been in many ways quite a different set of institutions and practices from ancient democracy and although modern democracy has continually undergone significant change, the notion of delimited territoriality has remained a central assumption. In the early twenty-first century, however, there are many reasons to anticipate a major conceptual shift. The web of transnational connection, the development of transnational structures of decision making (from the European Union to the International Monetary Fund), and the vast disparity of wealth and power among nation-states are calling into question the democracy in them. Although*

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the multicontinental wave of democratizations of the late twentieth century brought about the most geographically extensive implantation of democratic national governments in history, public opinion research in many countries shows significant dissatisfaction with democracy as currently practiced, not just in recently democratized countries but in the more established democracies as well. Some are suggesting that what is needed is the democratization of transnational structures. But can democracy meaningfully exist on a scale beyond the nation-state? On the conceptual level, there are many reasons to be skeptical. Issues include whether the weakness of cross-border solidarities and identities precludes cross-border democracy; whether administrative structures of vast geographic scope can be made genuinely accountable to citizenry; and whether wealthy and powerful states will accede to larger structures constraining their autonomy.

Democracy's history has never been steady or simple. Everyone knows that, starting with Portugal, Greece, and Spain in the 1970s, there was an enormous increase in the number of democratic countries in the world. By the early 1990s, some were proclaiming that history was essentially over, that the struggle for democracy had simply been won in much of the world, and the rest of the world sooner or later would catch up.[1] But also in the 1990s, political scientists began to notice a great deal of discontent with democratic institutions in practice, in country after country, discontent not only in countries where democracy was newly installed or reinstalled, or shaky, or dubious, but also in countries of long-standing democratic practice (Clarke et al. 1995; Norris 1999; Nye, Zelikow, and King 1997; Pharr and Putnam 2000).[2] Other social scientists began to point out that periods of democratic advance in the past have been followed by periods of democratic retreat and that democratic hopes in the past were often dashed.[3] Some noted that democracy did not always deliver what its adherents hoped for and did not reliably have the salutary consequences that its scholars expected,[4] leading to a literature exploring "the quality of democracy" (e.g., O'Donnell, Vargas

Cullell, and Iazzetta 2004). Still others noted that what people have meant by democracy differed from place to place over time and even from one person to another (e.g., Collier and Levitsky 1997; Hanson 1985). The occasional scholar began to wonder whether democracy meant much of anything at all. Discussions of definition are apt to rediscover philosopher W.B. Gallie's (1956) contention that democracy is a prime example of what he called "essentially contested concepts" about which debates are irresolvable but, because we care about them, unavoidable.

I present a few ideas about where democracy may be headed in the twenty-first century. But first I take a long historical look at what people have meant by democracy, beginning with the 1780s, jump to today, and then speculate about the future. Why the 1780s? Because that is when the word *democrat* became common, which tells us something important (Conze and Koselleck 1972–84: 821–99; Palmer 1953). *Democracy* is a very old word, but the common use of *democrat* is not nearly so old and dates from when some people sought to bring about democracy in the actual practice of nation-states and others sought to prevent this (Markoff 1996).[5]

What did those first modern democrats of the late eighteenth century mean by *democracy*?[6] They thought that they knew a few big things about what democracy was because of what they knew about ancient exemplars.[7] And when they thought about making democracy live in the modern world, they followed some of those big ideas, but completely rejected others. What was their idea of ancient democracy?

- First, it had something to do with the way a people governed itself. Democracy involved some notion of self-rule. Discussions about democracy therefore tended to invoke a second very complex term, *freedom*,[8] which in Athens had been used both in the sense of collective freedom from externally imposed constraints and individual freedom from subjection to another (Ostwald 1995). Democracy had something to do with collective empowerment as well as individual liberty.[9]

- Second, democracy had something to do with the way a particular geographic territory was governed. For Athenians, it was a city-state. In the eighteenth century, it was a nation-state. We have kept that. We could talk about what we might mean by a democratic family, or a democratic workplace, or a democratic university, but if I ask students to name the world's democracies, they name countries.

But not all people in the territory were the self-governing people. So this brings me to the third big thing learned from ancient examples.

- Third, democracy was a system that included some people with full rights that were denied to others. Those with full rights were:

  - adults, not children
  - men, not women
  - the free, not the slaves
  - citizens, not foreigners.

So democracy was a system of self-government of a territory by some people who had full rights. Over the past several centuries, a great deal of conflict has broken out over exactly who would have full rights and who would not. After long, multinational struggles, we no longer accept that for men would have full rights, but not women, and the free but not the slaves. Women have political rights in all countries that make democratic claims, and slavery is not accepted at all.[10] But no one doubts today that democracy is for adults, not children. Every state that makes democratic claims in the early twenty-first century has an age threshold for full rights.[11] And today there are some questions about the rights of foreigners in contrast to citizens. In short, two of the four big exclusions have disappeared during the past two centuries, one is as firm as ever, and one, as I contend, is beginning to raise some interesting questions.

- The fourth big thing that the founders of modern democracy knew a bit about was totally rejected: the organization of ancient government.[12] For educated Europeans in the

eighteenth century, Athenian democracy had a number of striking features.

1. They knew that democracy meant selection by lot for most offices with limited term appointments.
2. They knew that there were elections for some offices but that this was a relatively minor feature of Athenian government.
3. They knew that some decisions were made at assemblies of all the citizens, including extremely consequential decisions like going to war.
4. They knew that anyone, no matter how powerful, could be exiled by citizen vote.

Since most important offices were chosen by lot, and other decisions made by citizen assembly, elections were far less important in Athens than in democracy as we currently conceive it—one of the reasons that the first generation of modern democrats did not think that election-contesting political parties were essential to democracy and in fact tended to hold them in extremely low regard. It would be unimaginable to those democrats of the eighteenth century that most political scientists of our day think of electoral contestation among parties as one of democracy's defining features.[13] However, it was not at all unimaginable for them to think of democracy without political rights for women. It was so easy to imagine, in fact, that it is a striking feature of the European states that democratized in the age of revolution and the new states in the Americas, many with very significant democratic features, that they universally left out the women. And it was not unimaginable to have democratic citizenship for some coexist with the enslavement of others. Ancient models not only highlighted slavery, but in the view of some, slavery provided a vital foundation on which ancient democracy depended and therefore a rationale for slavery in the context of modern democracy, too.[14]

- The fifth big thing the eighteenth century knew about the distant past was that the ancient world had a political culture worthy of emulation (Parker [1937]1965). At its

good moments,[15] public-spirited citizens trained in the art of rhetoric for use in reasoned debate that preceded collective decisions. A democratic culture would center politics on persuasion exercised among equal citizens for the collective good rather than being based on the subjugation of subordinates by violence for the self-regarding purposes of the powerful. Ancient history was scoured for anecdotes in which self-interest took second place to public service and personal sacrifice. Not only were such virtues seen as admirable, but ancient political cultures seemed to model the very idea of emulation of worthy models, as younger citizens aimed to acquire honor by following the examples of renowned predecessors. Significant rights for citizens were joined by significant responsibilities for public purposes.[16]

Democracy Is Dynamic

What does this little bit of history suggest? That a great deal about the way we think about democracy, whether about who is or is not included and excluded or the way those with power are selected has changed enormously since the 1780s. We sometimes talk as though we know what democracy is, but what it is changes as people develop different conceptions of what it means to be a self-governing people or of which inhabitants of some territory should be full participants.

It has not been unusual, for example, for people to claim that they are governing themselves democratically, yet to radically exclude others from rights of participation. Nor has it been unusual for that exclusion to be challenged, sometimes successfully and sometimes in the name of democracy. Here are two nineteenth-century examples, the first from Africa and the second from India. When Dutch speakers in southern Africa moved northward to evade British rule, they founded small republics that a great student of democracy, James Bryce, regarded in the late nineteenth century as among the most democratic places on the planet.[17] It is interesting

today to read Bryce on those Boer republics in which newcomers were accorded rights easily and in which adult men participated as equals. White men, that is. The Africans who were there first had no rights in these particular democratic republics.

As a second example, we turn to John Stuart Mill, well-known as a great champion of self-government, individual freedoms, and women's rights. He was indignant at the denial of self-government to some of Britain's colonies. But Mill also held self-government totally inappropriate for large numbers of dark-skinned human beings under British rule, for Indians in particular, whom he thought incapable of governing themselves properly. As he puts it in "On Liberty": "Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end" (Mill [1859]2003: 81).

Obviously many in the twenty-first century would hold that the struggle of Africans to be included with democratic rights in South Africa or of Indians to govern themselves were major advances in democracy, which is to say that we tend to agree with considerably more inclusive notions of what democracy should be. This reminds us that what we mean by democracy has changed enormously.

Democracy seems inherently dynamic because it nurtures social movements energized by disappointment with the inadequately democratic character of actual institutions, including the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion; because its diverse claims are often contradictory, allowing very diverse movements to claim the democratic label; because powerholders find it helps them to claim that political arrangements that secure their power are "democratic," however inegalitarian and oppressive they may be; and because antidemocratic movements are nurtured along with movements for alternative democratic visions (Markoff 2011). There is no reason to think that what people will mean by democracy 225 years from now will be what we mean today, any more than what we mean today is what was meant when social revolutions created new institutions 225 years ago. But for all the change over those centuries, the equation of democracy as a compound of a self-governing people

with a demarcated territory still seems basic. Democracy is about the governance of our basic bounded unit, the nation-state. We see today the beginning of a very serious questioning of whether this is what democracy can continue to mean.

Twenty-First Century Challenges to National Democracy

Two features of the early twenty-first century global order raise important questions about whether we can continue to think of democracy primarily as an attribute of separate nation-states. The first of these is the ongoing creation and strengthening of institutions of transnational governance, something that already has given us structures such as the United Nations, the European Union, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. To the extent that these institutions are effective, they impose important constraints on nation-states. But the seriousness of some of the problems of the global order makes it rather likely that these institutions, or new ones, will be strengthened and along with that strengthening will come challenges to the democracy of nation-states.

The second important feature of nation-states is their enormous disparities in wealth and power, with some being far more effective than others in realizing their projects, including differences in their ability to have their projects supported by the institutions of transnational governance. Taken together, it seems highly likely that there will be increasing questioning of whether the meanings of democracy are exhausted by modes of governance of the separate states, whether, in other words, we will continue to be able to assess the state of democracy without inquiring about what we might mean by a more democratic world, not just about advances in the democracy of nation-states.

The two issues are interconnected because the wealthy and powerful states are especially powerful in the established transnational organizations,[18] but even in the absence of this fact, the very existence of effective transnational bodies poses challenges for how we

can imagine democracy. These challenges will grow in importance because so many serious issues on a truly global scale seem likely to compel the creation of new transnational institutions.

I focus here on a group of questions posed by today's interconnected world in which many things flow across national borders— goods, investments, TV images, ideas about managing economies, migrant workers, refugees, weapons, terrorists, narcotics, infectious diseases, greenhouse gases, and social movement activists. Let us explore whether some of the core notions that the eighteenth century borrowed from Athens still make sense, especially the core notion that a people in a national territory can be self-governing.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, nation-states are profoundly challenged by a variety of serious problems, some of which present threats to a decent human existence. Solutions to these problems will present major challenges to democratic politics, partly because they will be highly contentious within nation-states, including the more democratic among them, and partly because any solution is going to involve the creation of effective transnational agencies that will challenge the democracy achieved thus far in those states. Here is a short list of big problems:

1. The *likelihood of deadly global epidemics* spread as easily as cheap plane fare permits. A few years back, the world was terrified of the possibility of bird flu developing the capacity to migrate from human to human. Others worry that the next illness that, like AIDS, migrates from animals to humans may be far easier to contract and far more speedily lethal. We readily recall the good fortune that the H1N1 flu virus of 2009 was not far more deadly than it proved to be.

2. *Transnationalized criminality,* trafficking in narcotics and weapons and even human beings, corrupting the civic life of entire countries.[19]

3. *Nuclear proliferation,* likely to mean, sooner or later, weapons of mass destruction in the hands of criminals, terrorists, vengeful states, or the deranged with money.

4. *Threat of economic disruption with rapid flow of investments from place to place.* For all the attention paid to this

issue since the ongoing financial crisis that began in 2008, the world's wealthy democracies hardly seem in a rush to put in place effective barriers to the otherwise certain next one.

5. *Global climate change* requires concerted transnational action if anything ever did. There is no sign that such action is coming in the near future and much reason to doubt that it will be.

6. Some of these issues are exacerbated by *the propensity for globalized capitalism to develop and deploy new technologies with potentially far-reaching destructive consequences in the remorseless pursuit of profits,* examples of which we see in the destruction of agrarian traditions through industrialized monocultures or the reckless hunt for petroleum on the floor of the ocean. Both of these examples raise serious questions about the capacity of the currently most powerful democracy to address global problems since the first has been actively promoted by U.S. support for agroindustrial firms and the second has involved the collusion of the state's regulatory apparatus and the oil companies.[20]

7. Finally, let me note the transnational *flows of people,* which have been posing some very contentious issues within the wealthy democracies and in other places as well. With poorer and richer countries side by side, with more peaceful places accessible from places where lives are threatened by incredible violence, and with richer countries confronting low birthrates and aging and ailing populations, nothing is going to stop people escaping from poverty and violence into western Europe, the United States, or Japan, posing many troubling ethnic, cultural, and other issues that all by themselves challenge the meanings of democracy and raise anew questions of inclusion and exclusion. People all over western Europe are debating whether preserving European democracies means excluding those believed to be different and sometimes deficient in democratic values or including them by virtue of adhesion to universalistic

conceptions of citizenship. The interplay of exclusion and inclusion is once again a central theme of debate in the wealthy democracies.[21]

In conjunction with fears of violence, the simultaneity of these various issues has made concerns with security omnipresent in some mélange of fears of terrorists, criminals, immigrants, and job loss.[22] As the wealthy democracies strengthen their own security apparatuses, a variety of threats to their own national democracies emerges. The United States, for example, is now involved with torture and judicial procedures that only a few years ago would have been denounced as antidemocratic throughout the country (Cole and Lobel 2007).

We can see that some of these issues are already challenging democratic government. For example, the transnational trade in psychoactive substances has had an exceedingly malign impact within the context of Mexico's recent democratic opening. The weakening of Mexico's president in relation to its congress and of the central government in relation to the states, however desirable such changes seemed to some democratic theorists, also made it far easier for drug lords to assert themselves with violence on an extraordinary scale.[23] This issue also illustrates the challenge to notions of democracy that are bounded by individual national states. Mexican citizens have no input into U.S. drug policies or U.S. firearms laws, yet U.S. demand for narcotics, the U.S. government's "War on Drugs," and U.S.-origin firearms have had major consequences for Mexicans.

But looking ahead I have a larger point. It may be that the threat of epidemics, or nukes, or the seas rising will sooner or later summon forth transnational decision-making bodies with enforcement powers. These are threats to wealthy countries as well as poor ones, and wealthy people as well as poor ones. Some of these problems, from loose nukes to climate change, are major threats to a decent human existence and effective migration policies are eluding governments everywhere. Continued failure of democratic government to effectively address these problems might, as in the

1930s, energize antidemocratic movements. If democracies are inadequate, people may turn elsewhere.[24] But the deeper concern is that even a more optimistic prognosis suggests that there will be challenges to democracy as currently practiced nonetheless. If sooner or later there will be effective action to manage these global problems, the ongoing creation of effective transnational institutions will raise questions about the meaning of national democracy. Failure to manage these problems may bring discredit upon democratic governments, but success may challenge them, too. Will democracy continue to be thought of primarily as a form of government of separate national states?

It is generally rather hazardous to speculate about major shifts in thinking. But we know that democracy has been subject to considerable rethinking since the late eighteenth century, seriously challenging the ways in which those with the full rights have been defined. The growing structure of transnational loci of decision making with little accountability to those affected by those decisions seems likely to call into question the adequacy of the core notion of a self-governing people on a delimited territory. People in many places may ask what does democracy mean if the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has in some ways more effect on the conditions of daily life than, let us say, the government of the national state in which they reside. Even in the European Union (EU), whose institutions have a far more democratic character than the IMF or World Trade Organization, it is common to speak of the double democratic deficit, double because the EU is a less democratic affair than the member states that compose it but also because, to the degree that the new laws of member states are merely national specifications of EU rules, the degree of democratic accountability within the member states declines.[25]

During its 2011 national election campaign, many people in Spain, one of the places from which the great wave of democratization was launched in the 1970s, experienced with dismay the likelihood that choosing between the major parties of the left and right would not make any fundamental difference in government policy for handling their part of Europe's ongoing economic crisis. Shortly before the voting, tens of thousands of people began what

became weeks of occupation of public squares in dozens of Spanish cities as the May 15 Movement, challenging the electoral process as it existed on behalf of "real democracy." All over Spain one could read placards stating "They don't represent us" (Artal 2011). A few months later, the travails of the eurozone led to the appointment of economists to head the governments of Greece and Italy in the hope of placating European financial institutions and its most powerful state, Germany. Italians and Greeks found themselves questioning the meaningfulness of their country's democracy.[26]

Transnational institutions already challenge the fundamental conception that democracy is about the self-government of a distinct people on a distinct territory; strengthening transnational institutions will only increase the challenge. It has been a fundamental notion since the eighteenth century that a self-governing people on a delimited territory could exist. Democratic national institutions would be a way to bring that about. Democratic movements would have the creation of those institutions as their goal. So people struggled for things such as the accountability of governments to parliaments; broader suffrage so that those with full rights better approximated the full people; individual rights that states could not infringe, including the freedoms to advocate policies and form parties; honest vote counts so that the collective decision reflected the actual individual decisions of citizens; and more besides.

For much of the two and a quarter centuries since the revolutionary late eighteenth century's big bang launched the modern history of national democracy, European imperial hegemony meant that for a significant portion of the world's people, the fundamental notion of a self-governing people on a national territory was not realizable.[27] But with the termination of European empire in the generation after World War II, democracy now seemed at least imaginable for all, and the central question seemed to be about the construction of the right institutions to realize it, state by state. The democratization of the world could be imagined as consisting of the democratization of the separate states. But this pair of achievements—first decolonization and then the geographically most extensive democratic wave in history—has brought the limits of national democracy into relief, because the national states

lack the capacity to resolve the increasingly evident transnational problems confronting humanity and because the separate states are so dramatically unequal in wealth and power.

For it is not only the emergence of potentially catastrophic global problems and the likely strengthening of transnational institutions that will lead to a rethinking of democracy but also those great disparities in wealth and power. When people in Mediterranean Europe, for example, asked themselves in 2011 and beyond if it remains fully meaningful to speak of national democracy today, it is not simply because of the importance of transnational institutions like the EU, but also because of the weight within the EU of its economic powerhouse, Germany.

By the 1970s, colonial rule was pretty much gone. This not only opened the way for the great world wave of democratization, but it also opened the way for what we may call the great disillusion, the discovery that national democracy was not the same thing as true self-rule. For African countries trying to negotiate agricultural trade with a protectionist western Europe and for Latin American countries trying to negotiate agricultural trade with a protectionist United States it may not appear all that obvious that the fundamental conditions of life are under the control of democratically accountable governments, even in times and places when their governments met conventional democratic criteria. So the great disparities in wealth and power among the separate states are looming as yet another challenge to the continued meaningfulness of national democracy. Greeks have recently sometimes referred to the president of the United States as the planetarch,[28] perhaps another useful political term from a place that a long time ago gave us many. We may take this as symptomatic of a sense of citizens that their government is not fully sovereign.

Immanuel Wallerstein's work (e.g., 2004) would seem to very strongly suggest that on one level there is nothing new here, that the notion of a self-governing people on a delimited territory has been fallacious for half a millennium, because the web of significant economic interconnection has been on a geographically much larger scale than the geography of political control. Indeed, one of the powerful mechanisms for the capitalist world-system's reproduc-

tion has been that political struggles have raged around influence within the framework of the national states, something that has limited the degree to which even effective social movements have managed to gain control of the circumstances that shape people's lives since some of these circumstances, very importantly the division of labor in a transnational economy, are structured on a very much larger scale.[29] But what does seem to be new about our moment in history is the widespread realization that the national states are inadequate instruments for managing the critical problems of humanity in our time, which, to return to our central theme here, is beginning to cast doubt on the continued meaningfulness of the presupposition that there can be a self-governing people on a delimited territory.[30] This set of issues will only grow in the event that there are effective transnational mechanisms for managing some of these transnational problems, because the very effectiveness of those mechanisms will call the effectiveness of the separate states even further into question.

Since the eighteenth century could imagine democracy with slaves and without women, but had more trouble imagining it without the poor, to again point to the hold of their idea of Athens, it was common to refer to places as democratic to the extent that their political institutions incorporated the poor and paid no attention to other forms of exclusion. We find no less a student, and prophet, of democracy than Alexis de Tocqueville marveling at what he repeatedly called the "universal suffrage" achieved by the Americans ([1835] 1994: vol. 1, 57, 197, 199, 200), at a moment when no women and only limited numbers of free blacks could vote. "Universal suffrage" turns out in fact to be an intriguingly misleading concept, striking evidence of the degree to which the claim of universal inclusion that is so powerful a part of democratic legitimation is always a fiction. Not only was that term in use by the keenest of democracy's students at a moment when twenty-first-century notions of who belonged in the universe were not yet realized, but it is always a fiction, since no democratic state so far has broken with the Athenian principle of denying full active rights to children and all democratic states distinguish the rights of noncitizens from those of full members. But in our time the question

of current analogues of the Athenian exclusion of non-Athenians is beginning to be raised.[31] Citizenship in the separate states not only is not sufficient to promote universal rights, but the very division of people into separate citizenships is one of the principal mechanisms for social inequality considered on the planetary scale we are beginning to have in view.[32] Citizenship in the separate states is a principle mechanism undergirding global inequality and even if it were to be democratic citizenship everywhere, something that is very far from the case, this characteristic of citizenship rights thus far would not be altered. Citizenship and democracy continue to be a compound of inclusion and exclusion.

The important conceptual point is that the notion that we have had with us from the late eighteenth century to now that democracy, whatever else it means, refers to a system of self-rule of a distinct people on a distinct territory may undergo a rethinking, partly because of an increasing presence of transnational institutions that are likely to develop further, and partly because the great disparity in wealth and power makes the claim of self-rule in some particular place seem limited or even false. The two challenges to thinking exclusively in terms of national democracy often work together because those transnational institutions are one of the important places where the unequal power of the separate states is on display.

Democracy Beyond the States?

But is democracy on a scale beyond the national state even possible? This is a big question, with no terribly obvious answer.

- Some would say no because the scale is just too big to imagine a government on a vast, transnational scale really accountable to some body of citizens. Already by the early twentieth century, Max Weber was of the view that the bureaucratic apparatus of the modern state was extremely resistant to effective oversight by elected parliaments and he was therefore extremely skeptical that there could be very much reality to popular engagement in government. A more hopeful view is expressed by John Keane (2009:

xxvi–xxvii) who argues that for several decades we have been experiencing the growth of "new ways of publicly monitoring and controlling the exercise of power," something he dubs "monitory democracy." Closely akin is Erik Olin Wright's (2010: 145) discussion of "the capacity of people to form associations to advance their collective goals" and his argument for the feasibility of developing mechanisms rooted in civil society for shaping state action toward democratic ends. We might add that despite the efforts of eighteenth-century writers of constitutions to limit the political role of most citizens to their being electors, from its eighteenth-century revolutionary launching, modern national democracy has been fertile soil for social movements (Markoff 2011).

- Some would say no because the vast differences in national cultures mean democratic coexistence is not possible. As counterargument, one might consider the enormous differences among the cultures present at the founding of the United States (Fischer 1989), although we also have to note that the development of national democratic institutions in that country passed through many struggles, including civil war.
- Some would say no because of the weakness of transnational identities, making it unlikely that there could be widespread support for sharing of risk and obligation with those regarded as other. Solidarities tied to imagined national peculiarities, in this view, seem more potent than those rooted in common humanity. A variant of this argument takes a sense of nation as an essential bedrock on which a democratic order can build (Calhoun 2007: esp. 147–67). The counterargument proposes that common identity can emerge as the result of common subjection to the same political authority. This would seem to suggest that the construction of an effective authoritarian transnational order may make the later development of a democratic one more possible, rather analogous to the national histories of Western Europe in which states generally got much stronger before they got more democratic (Tilly 2004).

- Some would say no because the current wealthy democracies will never accept a radical diminution and dilution of their power, with the most powerful of them all the most unlikely. It is not only tyrannical regimes that resist the authority of transnational judicial organs—consider the ferocious opposition of the United States to the International Criminal Court.[33] The United States, while playing an important role at moments in forging rules to govern other states, resists being bound itself.[34] At the same time, the wealthy European democracies have built the European Union and have accepted some dilution of their sovereignty.

- Some would say no because the large number of political systems whose own democracy is very limited or nonexistent would simply never accept incorporation within a larger democratic structure . . . or would wreck it if it were attempted. This not only means that authoritarian regimes would be likely to resist incorporation within a democratic structure that may encourage democratic movements among their own citizens; it also implies that citizens of democratic states will be unlikely to be happy with an arrangement that gives some power over them to the agents of undemocratic states. Even in the member states of the European Union, which are democracies by the standards of the early twenty-first century,[35] there is significant opposition to expanding the EU's authority, one reason for which is the sense that to do so will vitiate the meaningfulness of the achieved democracy of the states. How much more so for a hypothetical union of states that would include significantly authoritarian cases.

It seems likely that the near future will see serious questions raised about the continued meaningfulness of national democracy in an undemocratic world. It may also see serious questions raised as to whether democracy can possibly mean anything on a still larger scale. Differently put, the rise of effective transnational institutions and the continuing disparities of wealth and power among the national states are calling into question the fundamental notion that

democracy can exist at the level of those national states alone. On the other hand, it is far from obvious that democracy can be constructed beyond the states. But recall that in imagining what a more democratic national state might be, the early modern democrats, faithful as they were to the Athenian model, in one important arena broke with it completely. They forged wholly new institutions of government. And over two centuries of subsequent struggle, their citizens went on to greatly enlarge the boundaries of inclusion in national political life. Now we need to look beyond that national state with equal creativity.

In other words, we are entering an era in which the meaningfulness of democracy as it might apply in a changing world is likely to be questioned, and with no obvious answer. Some parts of what people think democracy means may still seem valuable, but other parts do not seem to fit—just as in the eighteenth century. The outcome the last time was what we today call democracy. In fact, the rethinking has already begun.

New ideas abound. Some propose a more or less radical rethinking of how to achieve more effective democracy at the level of the national states, for example, in the proposals for "deliberative democracy" (e.g., Fishkin and Laslett 2003). Others point to exciting developments in local arenas (e.g., Baiocchi 2005; Fung and Wright 2003). Some scholars are asking what democracy might mean beyond the state (e.g., Archibugi and Held 1995; Held 1995; Morrison 2004) and some call our attention to the varied ways human beings have organized their affairs independently of states (Bamyeh 2009). Political scientists are beginning to examine how the presumption that the state was the relevant arena has shaped centuries of discussion of democracy thus far (Goodhart 2005). Students of social movements are taking a close look at movements for a more democratic world (e.g., Evans 2005; Smith 2008; Smith et al. 2008). Large numbers have participated in movements questioning democracy as it exists and advanced alternative democratic visions and larger numbers watched in admiration or entered into debate in Spain, the United States, and elsewhere. An eminent sociologist has asked us to think about not just what forms of social existence are desirable, but what kinds of desirable change

are feasible, to develop what he calls "a theory of emancipatory social transformation" (Wright 2010: 273–365). We will need to ask as well what sorts of institutions will encourage a renewal of democratic political imagination. Can the institutions that reshaped national democracy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the schools, the press, the parties, the labor organizations—exercise this role in the twenty-first century, or do we need to create new kinds of spaces?

People may begin rethinking democracy fundamentally because of the increasing weight of the world outside the national boundaries. Once upon a time, Dutch speakers in southern Africa thought they were making their own democracy by getting away from the British, and saw no need to include dark-skinned Africans. Democracy for us but not necessarily for them has been central to the idea of democracy since Athens. But the global reality of the twenty-first century is making democracy for us but not for them harder to imagine. It is also forcing us to ask what we might mean by a more democratic world.

Notes

1. In an essay titled "The End of History?" Francis Fukuyama (1989) asked if what he saw as a long struggle between democracy and noxious alternatives had been essentially won. But three years later, he dropped the question mark in the book title (Fukuyama 1992).

2. The United States was early to generate scholarly attention on this point (Lipset and Schneider 1983). Researchers soon noted something similar in Canada (Adams and Lennon 1992) and then in Europe (Norris 1999). Dalton summarizes this research: "By almost any measure, public confidence and trust in, and support, for politicians, political parties, and political institutions has eroded over the past generation" (2004: 191). But see Norris (2011) for significant qualifications.

3. Taking note of past reverses, Huntington (1991: 290–94) raised this question early on. Diamond (2008: 56–87) characterizes the early twenty-first century as a moment of "democratic recession." Tilly (2007) stresses the frequency of episodes of "de-democratization" from the nineteenth century on. Przeworski's (2010: 56–59) analysis of data on electoral participation in all countries with parliamentary elections since the early nineteenth century shows that after a century and a half of rising turnout—understood as the proportion of those eligible who actually show up and vote—from 1978 on, the world trend has been toward lower turnout. As democracy spread in the late twentieth century, participation in what many see as its central institution declined.

4. "So, to the question, 'What should we expect democratic governments to generate?' I respond: development no, rationality no, accountability little, equality perhaps" (Przeworski 2007: 475).

5. Beginning with the words "democrat" and "democracy" focuses us on eighteenth-century understandings of Antiquity, the source of the latter term. So it should be pointed out that the making of collective decisions in ways that belong to the history of democracy preceded Athenian experience and these practices are geographically far more diverse than many conventional accounts have it. For a valuable corrective, see Isakhan and Stockwell (2011).

6. Since "democracy" commonly carried a negative charge as a source of sedition and legalized plunder of the better off by the worse off, "democrat" was at least as likely to be an accusation as an affirmation and many whom later generations would see as the founders of modern democracy denied that label. A full account of the nearly global embrace of the term since the 1780s awaits its historians, but there are very suggestive treatments by Dunn (2005) and Hanson (1985).

7. Detailed knowledge of Athenian political institutions has deepened since the late eighteenth century, at first gradually from exhaustive combing through available sources by nineteenth-century scholars, and then suddenly through the fortuitous discovery of the detailed study by Aristotle and his students, the *Constitution of Athens,* found "in the 1880s in the sands of Egypt" (Hansen 1991: 9) . The corresponding empirical materials he and his students put together on 157 other city-states have never turned up. Still more recently, important public records were uncovered by archaeological excavation in the twentieth century (Ober 2008: 73). Hansen (1992) has therefore argued that early modern notions of ancient democracy were based more on a generic notion of ancient practices rather than Athenian specificities. Nonetheless, some early modern writers plainly thought of Athens as a particularly significant example, as when Furetière ([1690] 1970: vol. 1, A–E) claimed that "democracy only flourished in the republics of Rome and Athens." Because Athens is today both the best understood and most commonly evoked ancient exemplar, I will sometimes just use "Athens" in referring to ancient models rather than to try to sort out in what context eighteenth-century writers had Athens specifically in mind, as opposed to other instances or generic models.

8. "Freedom" has a complex history with multiple, shifting meanings (Fischer 2005; Foner 1998; Patterson 1991; Przeworski 2003)

9. Reviewing debate among classical scholars, Ober (2008: 70) tells us that "the original meaning of democracy was 'the capacity of a public, consisting of all adult males, to accomplish things of value in the public realm'—thus 'the empowered people' rather than simply 'the power of the people.'"

10. On the ending of legal recognition for slavery in several countries where it still existed after World War II, see Miers (2003). Human rights activists are well aware of slavery that continues, despite being illegalized, by one estimate amounting to 27 million people (Bales 2004: 4).

11. Discussions of democracy have paid very much less attention to the exclusion of children than to issues surrounding gender, freedom/slavery, and nationality. But see Earls (2011).

12. Ancient models of government could seem more to the point later on than they did at the inception of modern democracy. The intensity of the participation of Athenians in political life came to look good to late twentieth-century Americans disappointed in low levels of engagement (Hansen 2005: 2–24).

13. For some, that power can change hands as the result of elections is *the* defining feature of modern democracy, a view influentially asserted by Schumpeter (1943: 269), who defined it as "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote." For a recent defense of such a "minimal" electoral definition of democracy, see Przeworski et al. (2000).

14. On the invocation of "freedom" and "democracy" by both pro- and anti-slavery forces before the U.S. Civil War, see Fischer (2005: 274–354).

15. Democracy was seen as having many bad moments as a seedbed of sedition, conflict, and mob rule, and in the eighteenth century was highly likely to be viewed negatively when considered in itself, although valuable when small doses were combined with monarchy and aristocracy into a much-praised "mixed" government.

16. In other ways, too, eighteenth-century authors (at least in French and English) were more inclined to look for models to Rome than Greece, to Sparta than Athens, to semimythical claims about the origins of Athenian democracy than the actual institutions at the time of Pericles. Scholarly advances shifted nineteenth- and twentieth-century attention to Athens (Hansen 1992).

17. For Bryce (1901: vol. 1, 380) they are "highly democratic" and one is even "an ideal commonwealth" (1899: 314).

18. This makes the question of whether these organizations can be democratized important. For a subtle analysis of the United Nations, see Smith (2008). Contrasting the domination of the World Bank by rich and powerful states (George 1994) with the greater independence of the World Health Organization, Chorev (2012) shows that we need to understand the particularities of transnational organizations in assessing the prospects for—and developing strategies for—a more democratic world.

19. For doubts about the extent of transnationally coordinated criminality, see Collins (2009). But coordinated or not, illicit transnational flows have enormous consequences.

20. Erik Olin Wright succinctly explains that "nonrenewable natural resources are systematically under-priced in the market since their value to people in the future is not registered in the dynamics of supply and demand in the present. The result is that actors in capitalist markets over-consume these resources. Capitalist markets are inherently organized around relatively short time-horizons, and thus the only way that the value to future generations of these resources can be taken into account in decisions about present uses is through the imposition of constraints on capitalism, again, by the state or by organized social forces" (Wright 2010: 69).

21. In the first round of France's presidential elections in April 2012, amid European economic crisis, the National Front campaign centered on restricting immigration to protect jobs and earned 18 percent of the vote. Hoping to gain the support of these same voters in the second round, candidate and incumbent

President Nicolas Sarkozy said that "preserving our way of life is central to this election" (Boxell and Daneshkhu 2012).

22. Discussions of restrictive legislation in the United States at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century included the frequent fears that illegal border crossers were delivering drugs for narcotraffickers and would compete for jobs at a moment of high unemployment. One member of the U.S. Congress expressed the fear that babies born to illegals, and therefore U.S. citizens, would be raised in the home country by terrorists and reenter as adults with valid passports to carry out nefarious missions (Kleefeld 2010); another claimed that Hezbollah was allying with Mexican drug cartels to plan terrorist actions in the United States (Elliot 2010).

23. For a survey of the issues, see Bergman and Whitehead (2009).

24. As of this writing, some of the wealthy democracies have been more notable for generating movements for democratic renewal than for antidemocratic ones in response to the failure of powerholders to come to grips with the economic crisis that began in 2008. The political consequences of the Great Recession have been very different from those of the Great Depression, a very important subject that needs extended discussion.

25. For a sampling from the extremely large literature on the EU and democracy, see Smith and Wright (1999).

26. Although the claim of the Occupy movements of the United States had important commonalities with the European protests in its claim that "we are the 99%" whose voices go unheard, it was uncommon for the U.S. protestors to draw connections to transnational processes (Smith 2012). If the arguments of this article are correct, we will see more of these connections being made in the future, perhaps along the lines of the U.S. Social Forum, the U.S. offshoot of the World Social Forum process (Smith et al. 2011).

27. The intertwining of the democratization of some of the wealthy states with the expansion of their imperial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a big theme deserving extensive treatment. The majority of people under British, French, Dutch, or Belgian rule as those countries democratized had no possibility of inclusion (Clark 1936: 23).

28. The use of this term will be the subject of a forthcoming essay by Mike-Frank Epitropoulos and me.

29. Other important circumstances unfold on a much smaller scale. I do not address here some very important issues about the role of local arenas in reimagining democracy.

30. I leave to one side here the very important question of how the even more fundamental notion of "the people" as a unitary collective actor has shaped thinking about democracy. Pierre Rosanvallon (1998) titles his compelling history of democratic representation in France from the nineteenth century *The Unfindable People*.

31. But notice some blurring of this boundary: in the EU, citizens of any EU state may vote in EU elections and in municipal elections where they reside whether or not they are citizens of that state.

32. For important evidence and analysis, see Korzeniewicz and Moran (2009).

33. Moravcsik (2000) explores the issues in a very general way.

34. Ignatieff puts it this way: "From Nuremberg onward, no country has invested more in the development of international jurisdiction for atrocity crimes and no country has worked harder to make sure that the law it seeks for others does not apply to itself" (2012: 6–8).

35. Hungary's new constitution that came into force in 2012 may be making that country an exception (Dupré 2012).

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