



The Future of Democracy: Challenges & Prospects

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Abstract

Unprecedented speed, interconnectivity, complexity and uncertainty are impacting all spheres of global society today, presenting challenges that were not foreseen even a few years ago. The end of the Cold War was interpreted by many as the final victory for democracy and capitalism over authoritarian socialism. A quarter century after the sudden collapse of communism and the emergence of a new democratic consensus, liberal democracy itself is under threat. Former bastions of democracy are exhibiting a level of populism and polarization previously associated only with nascent, tenuous democracies in countries with low levels of education and economic development. The shared vision that constituted the foundation for the democratic consensus is breaking down. Doubts, fears and insecurity have shaken faith in the institutions of governance and the confidence of youth in a better future. Nations are closing their borders, retreating from global cooperation, and casting the blame on minorities and foreigners in a manner reminiscent of an earlier century. Participants in the WAAS Roundtable on the Future of Democracy at Dubrovnik on April 3-5, 2018 recognized that this shift in direction is the result of a complex nexus of forces that have been shaping the future for decades. The group shared valuable insights into our present dilemma while maintaining the diversity of perspective essential for understanding a complex, multidimensional global phenomenon still in the process of unfolding. The discussion identified numerous practical steps that can be taken to moderate extreme aberrations resulting from the misuse of social power. It also recognized that fundamental changes are needed to develop more effective systems of governance capable of fully supporting the aspirations of humanity, maximizing the equity and effectiveness of social institutions and the future evolution of global society.

1. The Context

Colossal political, economic and social changes followed the sudden end of the Cold War and the associated ideological competition. These include the collapse of the Soviet Empire and Warsaw Pact, the rapid expansion of NATO, the establishment of the European Union and Eurozone, the dramatic expansion of world trade after the founding of the WTO, the birth of

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the World Wide Web as the first truly global social institution, the rise of global civil society, the globalization of multinational corporations and financial markets, the financialization of economies, the resulting global impact of the 2008 financial crisis, the intensification of multicultural contacts in a shrinking world of intensified cross-border communication and immigration, rising expectations of an increasingly educated young population, accelerated technological development and application threatening existing job security and future job creation, rising levels of economic inequality and concentration of wealth, increasing influence of money and economy on national policy and international relations, the recent emergence of China and India as economic powerhouses, the recent proliferation of nuclear powers and reliance on nuclear weapons reversing the dramatic breakthrough in nuclear arms control in the early 1990s. These changes are themselves both the causes and results of rapid and radical change.

This remarkable confluence of diverse factors has shaken conventional theories and beliefs, generated widespread confusion, and raised fundamental questions about the future of humanity. Concerns about the future have not reached this intensity since the end of World War II led to the founding of the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions. In combination, they signal disillusionment with the prevailing intellectual paradigm that has dominated global thought for the past few decades, but without clearly signaling the characteristics of the new paradigm that is yet to emerge and replace it. As in the past, one result has been a reversion to earlier dogmas and discredited doctrines in search of greater certainty. Competitive and aggressive nationalism, isolationism, mutual suspicion and xenophobia are rearing their heads. Prevailing philosophies, institutions and policies have been discredited. But a new shared vision of pathways to a more peaceful, prosperous and sustainable human community has yet to emerge.

The end of the Cold War was viewed by many as the unilateral defeat of authoritarian communism and the final supremacy of liberal democratic capitalism. Few perceived that the victory was to be so short-lived. For in their extreme forms, these two ideologies were mutually reinforcing. The threat of global communism was a factor that kept advocates of western capitalist democracies aware of the need to maintain its legitimacy by ensuring that its citizens were wealthier and enjoyed greater liberty than those in competing communist countries. Each extolled values and social realities that the other ignored. In the aftermath of WWII, European thinkers concerned by the ominous threat of fascism and communism founded the Mont Pelerin Society to extol economic liberalism as the ultimate safeguard and antidote to authoritarianism. They acted on the premise that so long as the acquisition and possession of property are free and unrestrained, human freedom will be preserved. Ironically, today unbridled economic liberalism has become a principal threat to liberal democracy. Dismantling the constraints previously imposed by social democratic policies to shield Western Europe and North America from the lure of communism, a more aggressive form of neoliberalism emerged to tear down the fetters that protected the economic rights of the working class and freed corporations to wholeheartedly pursue shareholder value, unmindful of the essential responsibility of business to serve the wider interests of the whole society.

Globalization added fuel to the fire of market fundamentalism. Freed from the constraints imposed by nation-states, stateless multinational corporations took refuge in offshore tax havens and compelled nations to compete with one another for investment, jobs and foreign exchange earnings. The surplus profits accruing to the wealthy multiplied global financial assets from a mere \$12 trillion in 1980 to in excess of \$150 trillion by 2015. A small and declining percentage of this accumulated capital is being reinvested in the real economy to create jobs and meet human needs. The remainder is circling the globe in search of speculative returns giving rise to a Global Casino.

This complex array of disparate facts is an expression of a nexus of powerful forces compelling us to rethink and reshape our conception of the future. The changes impacting the world today are impacting on every existing social institution. Democracy too is inevitably influenced and modified, both positively and negatively, by the advent and action of every further development of social force or power resulting from developments of technology and social organization, law and human rights, science and education, travel and transport, communication and media, entertainment and enjoyment.

2. Future Prospects

Answers to the current dilemma lie in the future, not in the past. The lines of future social development are being drawn by irresistible evolutionary forces working behind the confusion and disillusionment generated by recent events. The future is on a fractal trajectory to increasing affirmation of fundamental human rights for all—political, economic and social—that can be traced back for centuries, in spite of frequent detours and reversals. Current and emerging challenges present humanity with the inevitable necessity of developing more effective institutions for global governance. The democratic revolution launched in the late 18th century and aided by successive technological revolutions continues to press inexorably for devolution of greater freedom of choice and authority to communities and individuals.

The demands of rapid social evolution fuel global demand for universal access to more and better quality education. At the same time they make evident that education as practiced today is part of the problem. A different type education is needed that shifts the focus from traditional silo-based academic disciplines to multi and transdisciplinary perspectives and focus on development of independent thinking, values, character, social skills and life-long learning—essential prerequisites to prepare youth for the complexities of the future. The untold ravages caused by humanity's propensity to subordinate itself to the inventions and instruments it creates for its advancement compel us to consider impacts in advance and, to impose where appropriate rational constraints on the application of technology, use of money and power of economy. Self-mastery of these creative powers is essential for promoting human welfare and future well-being.

Underlying all these forces is the inexorable march toward universal human values. Values are not merely pious intentions, utopian ideals or political slogans. They represent the quintessence of the collective wisdom of humanity regarding the essential conditions for continuous and sustainable human accomplishment, welfare and well-being. Technologies,

institutions and life styles may change almost beyond recognition over centuries but the evolution of values stays on course, regardless of the duration and intensity of temporary reversals. It is true that the USA had to fight a catastrophic and nearly fatal Civil War in order to affirm the values of freedom and equality enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights. But it is also true that the movement toward the abolition of slavery and recognition of human rights began centuries earlier and was sweeping the world even at the time civil war was raging in America on the pretext of preserving a barbarous form of extreme inequality. Atavisms may die hard, but they die all the same. The battle for women's rights playing out today in the workplace and parliamentary elections had its origins two centuries ago and will persist until all relics of discrimination are abolished. So, both the historical record and developments in the 21st century strongly support the conclusion that the full gamut of political, social and economic rights embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the constitutions of nations, and by implication in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals recently affirmed by 200 nations of the world will continue to press for full legitimacy and realization.

The challenges confronting humanity compel us to accelerate progress along these and other lines of social evolution, rather than retreat to flawed ideas and failed strategies of the past. Practical solutions do exist to many of the deficiencies presently undermining democratic practices today. Proven remedies are available for curtailing or even eliminating the direct role of money in electoral politics, increasing transparency of campaign financing, closing the revolving door of influence connecting business and government, reducing electoral fraud, increasing transparency, devolving decision-making to the local level, raising people's participation, redirecting financial capital from speculation to meet real economic needs and create new jobs, making politicians more accountable to the electorate for truthfulness in word and faithful implementation of the policies for which they are elected.

Even if all these proven remedies could be fully implemented, fundamental flaws will persist due to the inherent inadequacies of the present system that we call 'democratic', but which has always favored some elites and special interests over the welfare of the majority. The stresses resulting from globalization, rapid technological development and rising levels of economic power will not be resolved until a new consensus arises concerning a new, more inclusive, human-centered paradigm better suited to promote the welfare and well-being of all humanity. It is the responsibility of thinking humanity to direct our attention beyond short-term incremental panaceas to frame the outlines and content of that new social consensus.

3. Social Power, Accomplishment and Evolution

At the root of all these complex interconnected evolutionary developments lie the algorithms of Social Power. All power is the result of a social process through which human beings develop ever more organized, complex and integrated relationships with one another. Power has always determined the course of human history. The military power of Alexander the Great and Napoleonic France, the economic power unleashed by the first agrarian revolution in the Levant 10,000 years ago and the First Industrial Revolution in Europe during the 19th century, the unparalleled organizational capacities of ancient Rome

and China or the modern British Empire, the power of rapidly accelerating communication and transportation technologies which characterize the Information Age and the nascent 4th Industrial Revolution, the power of knowledge and the scientific culture of critical thinking that have multiplied exponentially since the Reformation and the Enlightenment, the power of universal education and health care, and the unprecedented political power unleashed by democratic forms of governance over the last half century—all these represent interconnected and interdependent dimensions of social power. For we mean by this term the power that issues from constructive human relations. This capacity of the society for mutually beneficial cooperation exponentially enhances the power available to individuals and the social groups to which they belong to accomplish whatever goals they aspire for. For all power is power for accomplishment and all forms of power contribute to the overall capacity of individuals and social groups to accomplish the goals they set for themselves.

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Democracy is a political system designed to more widely distribute all forms of social power through increasing individual freedom of thought and action, greater equality of access and opportunity, greater knowledge and choice. Diffusion of power reduces or prevents the concentration of power in the hands of a few. Active participation of the population in its own self-government by exercise of the popular will, either directly or through representatives, is the means adopted to broaden the distribution of power. Peace, the right of self-determination, physical security and economic welfare are its fundamental pillars. Political power is inseparable from economic power, since the survival and development of any society depends on its capacity to continuously enhance its capacity for production, distribution and individual welfare. Therefore, the right to property, access to education and right to enjoyment are fundamental. Laws protecting private property, the invention of double-entry bookkeeping, the printing press, newspaper, education, steam engine, railways, telegraph, telephone, automobile, radio, television, antibiotics, airplane, modern science, tourism, access to information, mobile phone and internet have simultaneously enhanced the overall power of society and the wider distribution of power to its individual members.

Never before has human society possessed so much power for good or for evil. Never before has power been so widely distributed among the people and nations of the world. At the same time never before have so few possessed such a vastly unequal proportion of humanity’s total capacity for accomplishment. The history of humanity traces the continuous discovery and development of new and greater forms of social power. So too, it traces the irresistible and inevitable tendency of individuals and groups to seek to garner and direct that power for their own personal benefit and domination over the rest, resulting in an endless series of power struggles, mutually destructive wars, violent revolutions and peaceful evolutionary transitions.

But history also clearly reveals behind all the struggles, victories and retreats one irrefutable fact. The greater the distribution of all forms of social power to the population at large, the greater the overall power of the society for accomplishment, development and sustainability. The power of any language for communication is limited by the size of the population that knows it. The power of education is limited by the number of people who possess it. The utility of telephone and internet are a function of the number of people who have access to them—the greater the number, the greater their value. So too, the power of money is a function of the extent to which it is distributed to all. A nation of super rich elites is still impoverished in the measure it has citizens who lack basic necessities and economic security. None can be fully secure until all are. A world of nuclear superpowers spurs the rise of acts of terrorism by individuals who have nothing to lose because they possess nothing. War between nations only ceased in Europe when nations could no longer afford the catastrophic destruction wrought by warfare. Napoleon discovered that a nation of free citizens willing to fight to preserve their freedom was infinitely more powerful than an army of mercenaries. Hitler vastly underestimated the power of England to resist invasion because he failed to realize the measure of its citizens' determination to preserve their freedom.

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For the first time in history, humanity now possesses more than sufficient power to meet the basic needs and fulfill the higher aspirations of all human beings. Yet today we confront a paradox of unprecedented capacity for accomplishment coexisting side by side with persistent hunger, poverty, insecurity, unmet needs and existential threats. For all our remarkable achievements, something fundamental seems to be lacking. For all our power, humanity finds itself powerless to manage, regulate and master the multitude of powers it has created and developed.

In our quest to understand, explain and address this flawed equation between the potential capacities humanity has collectively developed and the actual achievements it collectively enjoys, we find ourselves continuously brought back to the issue of governance. Though all forms of social power are fundamental to human life and interconvertible, the power for self-governance stands out as absolutely critical to the effectiveness of human society—local, national and global. Political power guided by universal human values is the leaven for effectively combining and kneading together all the others into a vibrant living organism.

Just two decades ago it appeared that we were nearing mastery of this most elusive and intractable form of social power—the power of governance. After centuries of experimentation with military rule, feudalism, theocracy, aristocracy, monarchy, colonialism, imperialism, communism, fascism and other varieties of authoritarianism,

consensus seemed to be emerging that democracy represents the best solution, however imperfect, to the challenges of self-governance and world-governance and to the full development and harnessing of the power of human society to promote individual and collective security, welfare, and well-being.

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Recent developments already referred to cast a shadow on that elusive or illusory goal. Today we view democracy—even in the liberal bastions in which it seemed so deeply entrenched and invincible—as not only incomplete and imperfect, but even at risk and in peril. Nations which whole-heartedly embraced the principles of liberal democracy as panacea for all social ills are now retreating from that conviction and commitment. Nations which preached the virtues of democracy to the world and spread its seeds far and wide seem to be losing faith and commitment to their own political heritage. Populism and polarization are replacing a unifying identity and shared values. Respect for democratic values, culture and institutions is being tarnished and slandered by vulgar speech, blatant disregard for truth, gross manipulation of the powers of law and government to serve the interests of elites, subordination of political power to money, plutocracy and state capture, rampant assertion of tyranny by minorities and majorities proclaiming electoral victory as a license to pursue narrow parochial agendas rather than the will of the collective.¹

Does all this herald the decline of a once perfect but now deteriorating system? Or does it signal that we are approaching the point where democracy itself must evolve, as economy and every other aspect of society has evolved, to reflect the emerging values and harness the emerging powers of society in the 21st century? Like the crisis that overwhelmed authoritarianism a quarter century ago and colonial imperialism a half century earlier, is the crisis of democracy a sign of decline or an invitation and call for further advance? Is democracy an imperfect work in progress or an aging and soon to be obsolete stage in the evolution of something else?

4. Institutions and Culture

In retrospect, it is clear that our use and abuse of the term democracy are nothing new. Only now we are more sensitive and conscious of the hypocrisy that has always cloaked the rule by privileged elites and special interest groups by terms such as government by and for the people, peoples’ democracy, and what not. After all, the very proclamation of freedom and equality embodied in the Declaration of Independence two centuries ago was for a long time

thereafter applied in practice only to white males with landed property. So, to speak of the demise of democracy is as inadequate as it is to speak of its perfection. It was never more than an elusive ideal to aspire for and seek to approach ever more closely, never a realized fact.

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The very notion that the maximum welfare of all could be achieved by a system in which each individual seeks to maximize their own individual self-interest regardless of its impact on others is about as rational as the assumption of efficient market theory that each individual makes rational decisions in pursuit of their own economic self-interest. The constitutional constraints imposed on individual freedom by protection for the rights of other individuals and for the rights of the collective are distorted by polarizing populism into a competitive battle to see whose claim to rights will gain a temporary upper hand. But the selfishness of all may be no more rational or virtuous than the selfishness of a single monarch or autocrat, especially when that all is merely the all of a single class, community, race, religious group, nation or group of nations. It is simply more balanced and constrained in its expression by countervailing forces. Is this really the best we can do?

Many of the problems associated with the practice of democracy have arisen from a misconception of what it actually is. As Francis Fukuyama reminds us, modern democracy evolved in combination with two other social institutions—the nation state and rule of law, the capacity to preserve secure national boundaries and the capacity to regulate activities within those boundaries according to impersonal principles and administrative processes.² Democracy flourished in the past only under conditions where populations were able to exercise the freedom for self-determinism and the effective power for self-governance. Efforts to introduce or impose democratic forms of government on populations which had not yet developed the capacity for self-defense, self-governance and rule of law have always been doomed to failure or a very long period of gestation until these two other conditions could be met.

Moreover, the very notion of democracy as a particular variety of political institutions and political processes which include a constitution, popular election of leaders, checks and balances on legislative and executive power, an independent judiciary and a free press is flawed because it is incomplete. These represent only the hardware or objective aspect of democracy. As Fareed Zakaria pointed out, these institutions are themselves the product and external trappings of an underlying subjective dimension—a liberal democratic culture founded on commitment to the inalienable rights and value of the individual and a unifying national identity founded on those rights and values—regardless of how diverse and heterogeneous that population may be. A culture of liberalism has always been the software of tolerance and inclusiveness, the spring of energy and the foundation of strength on which

the institutions of democratic governance developed and depended for their effectiveness. Only in the measure that the population accepts these values can democracy take root and thrive. No mechanism can take their place. Efforts to transfer or impose democracy on populations which had not previously developed or accepted its cultural basis have always been doomed to failure.

The inseparability of political institutions and social culture is increasingly apparent, not only in the reversion of nascent democracies to authoritarianism but also in the degeneration of democratic practices in the former bastions of freedom. For both the hardware and the software, the institutions and culture, are vulnerable to attack and deterioration. Like all forms of organization, institutions tend to become rigid and ossified over time. The very act of organizing any activity imposes constraints on its plasticity and its future development. Like any other structure, a rule once made tends to ignore exceptions and resist modification. Authority once given seeks to preserve its power. Organizational efficiency inevitably degenerates into habitual repetition and inflexibility. But what is true of the hardware of democracy can also be true of its software. Culture too is a form of organization—subtle and psychological—which tends to become attached to forms appropriate to the age in which it develops. The spontaneity of spiritual experience becomes ossified as religious doctrine and orthodox ritualistic practices, the insight of inspiring new ideas becomes codified and entrenched as dogma, and the idealistic values enshrined in word and symbol are negated by literal interpretation and rigid application. The right to bear arms enshrined in the US Bill of Rights was intended to protect a nascent population of American colonists against foreign or domestic oppression by military forces, at a time when arms referred to flintlock muskets with an effective range of 100 meters capable of firing one round per minute. Today it is being applied to justify the possession of automatic weapons that can fire 600 to 1000 rounds per minute with an effective range that is 5 to 10 times greater. Thus, a symbol of individual freedom has been transformed into an ominous threat to public safety. In a similar manner, the doctrine of nuclear deterrence has been transformed into a doctrine of mutually assured destruction, giving new life to the nuclear arms race 30 years after the end of the Cold War.

Life evolves and every living thing must either evolve with it, die and disappear, or become an anachronism and roadblock to further evolutionary advance. Much of what we revere as democracy today is an ossified relic that has lost its utility. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the field of economics, where money and property command the inalienable freedom and protection originally intended to protect human beings. Today corporations in America have the legal right to influence elections, regardless of whether they are owned by American citizens or foreign states, regardless of whether they seek to promote the welfare of their employees and society or to maximize the gains of their shareholders at the expense of all others. Today the freedom of speech intended to promote protection of the individual from oppression by a foreign or tyrannical government has degenerated into the freedom of political leaders to lie and slander, insinuate and obfuscate, incite to anger and hatred the very people it was intended to protect. Political and social culture is as essential to the operations of democracy as the institutions designed to protect universal human values. That culture too must evolve with the times or risk degenerating into cancer.

5. Populism and Pluralism

One of the greatest threats to democracy today issues from the resurgence of populism. Populism is a social-psychological phenomenon that undermines the pluralism on which democracy depends. The right of the people to struggle against entrenched powers and privileged elites was once regarded as a sign of democratic vibrancy. Today populist appeals are being applied as a divisive force to generate confusion, prevent intelligent debate, fuel disharmony, polarize heterogeneous populations, weaken social cohesion, obscure a shared vision and undermine the sense of unity and common identity on which nation-states are founded.

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A culture of free inquiry, questioning and critical thinking is central to democracy and the wider distribution of social power. Trust in democratic leadership and institutions is founded on that freedom. Effective human relationships are associated with the promotion of the human and professional, scientific, artistic and spiritual potentialities. Populism undermines the trust generated by constructive human relations and tends to replace these qualities with simplistic slogans, cloistered virtues, empty platitudes, suspicion and incriminations.^{3,4} These divisive trends are further aggravated and intensified by the conscious falsification of electoral promises by populist candidates and the misrepresentation of facts by biased mainstream media outlets and surrogate purveyors of fake news. They constitute as much a violation of the principles of free speech as efforts of central authorities to suppress public expression.

Rising expectations are a powerful instrument for social development. They release the energy of the population for new endeavors and higher forms of accomplishment. But in times when social expectations rise far faster and higher than the opportunities to fulfill them, they can result in increasing levels of frustration, discontent and disillusionment that readily respond to populist appeals. So too, rising levels of uncertainty and insecurity regarding the future increase the appeal and susceptibility of populist slogans and remedies. Resentment toward the privileges of entrenched elites, hostility toward identifiable groups as scapegoats, groundless accusations and conspiracy theories find a receptive and responsive audience. Assigning blame to others for the people’s failures or sufferings has been the path to leadership followed by many a demagogue.

The accelerating speed of change, increasing complexity and growing uncertainty regarding the future in recent times present fertile soil for populism to seed and sprout

luxuriant but pernicious weeds of discontent. The dramatic changes since 1990 referred to earlier have added fuel to populist tendencies. The anticipated impact of the 4th industrial revolution on employment and job security has aggravated fears of unemployment and a future without sufficient work opportunities for the next generation of youth everywhere. The shift of entire industries overseas, the change to new energy sources, the suffering generated by the 2008 financial crisis, the shift of economic power to Asia, concern regarding a military resurgent Russia and more assertive China, reports of rising inequality and the increasingly global competition and the flood of immigrants entering Europe from the Levant have all become additional fuel for a pernicious form of populism.

Populism exists in every democracy in the form of fringe movements led by those who are excluded, disillusioned or opposed to the established order. But so long as mainstream society remains wedded to a central vision, its impact will remain minimal or can prepare the ground for constructive future developments, as the anti-establishment youth protests of the 1960s in support of the environmental movement, women's liberation and equal rights for African-Americans paved the way for mainstream evolutionary changes in subsequent decades. But populism can also become a tool wielded by seasoned politicians to undermine pluralism. Here the objective is not social progress but rather opposition to it by entrenched interests. Like the Fascist appeal of anti-Semitism in pre-war Germany, the gun lobby in the USA and anti-immigrant fervor in Europe are efforts intended to divide the population in order to carve out a section of adherents for political support, based on spurious or self-interested motives opposed to the welfare of the nation and the well-being of the entire population. The turmoil and confusion resulting from such movements dissolve the bonds of inclusiveness, tolerance, cooperation and shared vision on which societies depend for their integrity and future development.

There are no sure short-term remedies to the threat of populism. The control of the media by authoritarian governments, the take-over of the press by oligarchs, infiltration of social networks by disruptive foreign influences, and conscious misuse of media as an instrument for falsification by political parties cannot be easily remedied, as long as the public is willing to be misled. Imposition of stricter regulation of electoral campaigns can moderate the tendency toward extremism. It is ironic that American law strictly prohibits and punishes perjury under oath in the courtroom, while permitting candidates for the highest political offices in the country to make wild accusations and false promises without any accountability under law. Laws regarding election conduct exist, but are rarely enforced. The right to free speech becomes a shield that undermines the very power of free speech by obfuscating truth with an impenetrable barrier of conscious falsehood and confusion. Rising levels of general education can shield the more educated from susceptibility to its more extreme forms. But recent events in Europe and North America show that education alone or in its present form may not offer sufficient protection.

The only assured protection against populism is neither unlimited free speech, rigorous enforcement of electoral conduct nor universal education. Resistance and immunity to populism in democracy can only be achieved by building truly inclusive and equitable societies in which rights and social power are extended universally. Without addressing the

underlying causes of populism—economic insecurity and social inequality—populist calls will always find both powerful sponsors and willing audience.

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6. Towards Integration

Those who seek simple institutional solutions are bound to be disappointed and bewildered by the complexity of the issues. But viewing recent developments in an evolutionary perspective we realize that the current confusion and turmoil signify the possibility and opportunity for transformation of the still imperfect algorithms of governance. Much of the difficulty we confront in understanding and remedying current problems arises from the fragmented conceptual system imposed on our perception of social reality due in part to the fragmentation of the social sciences. The arbitrary division of society into separate, independent fields of activity and theories of knowledge at a time of unprecedented interconnectivity, convergence and complexity is deeply flawed, as is the artificial division of the human organism into separate and distinct physiological systems. However theoretically convenient for study and practically useful for treatment of some types of disorders, the reductionist view of the organic unity of the human body and society represents a gross distortion of reality. There is no such thing as a metabolic system separate and distinct from the respiratory, circulatory, nervous, muscular, lymphatic and skeletal systems on which it depends for its functioning and with which it is inseparably integrated. It may be useful for treating some specialized diseases, so long as the practitioner never loses sight of the distortion it imposes on our view of reality. But it does not present us with an integrated organic understanding of human health as a positive property of the organism, any more than knowledge of warfare offers a knowledge of the full conditions and best strategies for promotion of lasting peace in society. And when we add to physiology the impact of conscious and subconscious psychological factors, external social conditions, and environmental factors on health, the limitations of disciplinary reductionism become even more apparent.

Disciplinary fragmentation and reductionism have their limits. This is even more blatantly apparent in the social sciences than in the natural where conceptual and disciplinary integration is far more advanced. Today it seems difficult to comprehend how prevailing mainstream economic theories could have for so long excluded the interaction and interdependence between environmental and economic factors on human welfare and well-being, until the consequences of that intellectual exclusiveness threaten to wreak havoc on the entire economic, social and ecological system of the planet. The separation of the social sciences into specialized disciplines is a convenient and effective means of exploring the intricacies and infinitesimal details of human behavior, just as the microscope enables us to

zoom in to discover hidden structures and processes imperceptible to the human eye. But to mistake the microscopic view as ultimate reality is no more truer than to ignore it—for the behavior of a subatomic particle, atom, molecule, cell, organ and physiological system only becomes fully intelligible when viewed in the wider context and fully integrated with the macrolevel functioning of the whole organism, social collectives and the environments in which these microlevel functions exist. True knowledge must be an integral knowledge of the infinite whole, not merely a piecemeal, patchwork glimpse of many of its fascinating infinitesimal component parts. Microscopy is incomplete without telescropy. A geocentric view of the universe which sees the sun circling the earth may serve a practical and even a religious utility, but it will always be subject to limitations and error as Copernicus realized nearly 500 years ago. Nor are the two sufficient when regarded as separate and independent dimensions. A century after their discovery, Relativity Theory and Quantum Mechanics are still searching for an integrating principle that may necessitate a complete reformulation of our fundamental view of reality.

We need not wait until then to realize the limitations and errors arising from a disciplinary approach to social sciences. It generates errors that are much more catastrophic than the 0.002% inaccuracy in the length of an earth day corrected by migration from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar. In the social sciences partial, fragmented theories that view political, economic, social, psychological and cultural factors in isolation can lead to absurd and even monstrous consequences—the divine right of kings, feudalism, slavery, national sovereignty, imperialism, colonialism, fascism, dictatorship of the proletariat, the Great Crash and the Great Depression, the two World Wars, the veto power, ethnic cleansing, the nuclear arms race, the Cold War, the 2008 Financial Crisis, the myth of shareholder value, two Nobel prizes in economics for the algorithms that underpin computerized trading, to name but a few.

The division of the original discipline of Political Economy into two separate and increasingly independent fields of study is one instance of mental illusionism and reductionism run amuck. Economy and economics only exist within a framework of human rights, values, institutions for governance, laws and mechanisms for their enforcement, social culture and human relationships which constitute the foundation and framework for all economic activity. Outside this context, we have only the economy of warfare, conquest, piracy and the mafia.

Politics is as inseparable from economy as it is from technology, social organization, science, human psychology, cultural values and ecology. Thus, a theoretical and practical understanding of democracy requires a holistic perception of all the interactions and interdependencies that influence and determine the functioning of democratic institutions in specific periods, places and under particular circumstances. As democracy was transformed by the newspaper, railroad, telephone, automobile, radio, and television, it is now being shaped by the internet, the globalization of society and economy, financialization, the corporatization of the media, immigration, multiculturalism, the mobile phone, Facebook, Twitter, Fox News, the National Enquirer, and religious fundamentalism. With equal surety it will be further reshaped in future by the rapidly approaching 4th Industrial Revolution, blockchain and cryptocurrencies.

These observations are obvious and self-evident, but they are often lost sight of in our efforts to comprehend the bewildering nature of recent events. Those who emerged with high expectations from the terrors of the Cold War or were raised on the doctrinal superiority of a particular political, economic or religious dogma may be deeply disillusioned and disappointed by a shattering loss of confidence and faith. But for those conscious of the imperfections and injustices inherent in all past experience, no matter how glorified and romanticized by false comparisons and wishful thinking, the arrival of humanity at a cross roads of consciousness in which it recognizes the deficiencies of all existing systems and the urgent need to realize more fully in practice the highest values enshrined in our most sublime literature, both sacred and secular, this moment presents an unprecedented opportunity—an Hour of God—to transcend the limitations of the past and evolve a new and better world for all to live in.

“Mind thrives in freedom—freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom to aspire and choose, and free access to knowledge.”

As the immense destruction and suffering wrought by two world wars and the Great Depression gave birth to the United Nations and emergence of modern democratic institutions and the modern welfare state, a new vision and a new paradigm are needed to address the blatant injustices and insufficiencies of the present dispensation. A reversion to economic imperialism, whether by nations, corporates or wealthy elites, is no remedy for the current ills of the world. A retreat into aggressive nationalism or isolationism is no path to the future. A revitalization of the nuclear arms race is no solution to the challenges of global security. A denial of fact or responsibility is no answer to existential ecological threats. These responses are merely the feeble helpless reactions of those who are blind to the painful lessons of the past and the extraordinary opportunities staring humanity in the face. It is time to move on, to move forward, to a new vision and a new paradigm.

7. Lines of Future Evolution

To state that we must move forward would be an empty platitude void of utility parading as sage advice were we able to say nothing more about the direction, complexion and essential dimensions of the future toward which we must move and are moving. But there is more we can say with considerable certainty, greater in both its wisdom and practical utility than most of the prevailing diagnosis and prognosis for present ills.

7.1. Evolution of Mentality

The dimensions and lines of humanity’s future evolution are known, even if the method, process, timing and stages of its progression remain to be discovered or fully understood. First, is the progressive evolution of humanity from physicality to mentality, from action defined by past experience to that guided by emerging mental knowledge, from the power of force to the power of ideas, from the battlefield to the negotiation table, from physical compulsion to human rights, from divine right to the ballot box. Our ancient past was a period in which physical prowess, subordination to established authority, tradition and

seniority ruled. Physical causality is determined by what has occurred in the past. The stone rolls because it is pushed or thrown. The force precedes the event.

Our emerging future is governed by the growing influence and domination of mind over matter and of the future over the past and present. The development of reason and logic in ancient India and Greece, creativity and imagination in Renaissance Italy, mechanical invention during the Industrial Revolution, scientific discovery and technological innovation during the 20th century, and the accompanying social and organizational resourcefulness that accompanied each of these phases are hallmarks of the ever growing and accelerating shift from reliance on the powers of the physical to the powers of mind. The application of mind to matter has transformed sand into silicon chips and created an endless plethora of ever more powerful technologies. The application of mind to production took us from the stage of simple tool-making hunter gatherers in the forest to sedentary rural agriculturalists, urban-dwelling craftsmen and merchants, national manufacturers and global service providers. The application of mind to society and human relationships has taken us from the family and feudal community to the modern nation state, from the workshop to the multinational corporation, from the moneylender to the global financial network.

This progression gave birth to language, money and the Internet. It has extended our conception of resources from land, labor and trade to social organization, law, technology, science, money, information and the value of the human being as the ultimate resource that lends value to all other resources. By this progression, humanity is in the process of emerging from an age of scarcity into an age of material abundance, where all real human needs can be met and there is no longer any excuse for deprivation and denial, if only we are willing to forego extravagant wastefulness and mindless greed. Mind transforms causality from a force of the past exerting inexorable, predetermined consequences on the present and future into a force of the future presenting countless choices, creating alternative pathways and transforming even the most threatening challenges into opportunities for evolutionary advancement.

Mind thrives in freedom—freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom to aspire and choose, and free access to knowledge. These are the psychological endowments by which democracy grows. Mind liberates humanity from helpless dependency and subservience to the compulsions of past habit and tradition. It harnesses the powers of imagination, aspiration, expectation and anticipation to transform the visible, tangible, status quo into something quite different. From fatalistic, finite predetermination mind transforms life into a field for unlimited freedom for creative self-determination.

7.2. Emerging Individuality

The second inevitable line of evolution is from the collective to individual identity. Man is a gregarious social animal that survives and develops through association and cooperation with other human beings. The first necessity of that survival was always loyalty, subordination and obedience of each individual member to the group. Early attempts to develop larger social units could brook no deviation or dissent from the ideas, beliefs and hierarchy of authority necessary to ensure the strength and coherence of the collective. History traces the

gradual individualization of consciousness from conformity, subordination and subjection to the group. Ancient Greece cherished the power of independent thinking and freedom of moral choice, provided they did not transgress certain limits as in the case of Socrates. Renaissance Italy extolled the creativity and virtuosity of the artist. The Reformation freed the individual to read and interpret scriptures. The Enlightenment liberated the philosophical thinker, bold explorer, investigative scientist and social idealist from blind adherence to established doctrine and practice. The free-thinking individual became the political, social and economic revolutionary. Subordination to the collective very gradually and reluctantly gave way to respect for and even nurturing of individual distinctness. The 20th century has been called the century of the common man. The talented individual could rise politically, socially and economically. Society elevated the status of the explorer, entrepreneur, and genius. It extended the right to vote to the commoner. It sought to universalize education. It broke down barriers of social, religious and ethnic discrimination to abolish discrimination and promote the development of every citizen.

Yet, individuation remains the exception more than the rule. We may all be increasingly free to have our own favorite color and form of dress, to marry outside our class or nationality or not to marry at all, to vote according to our own political persuasions and worship according to our own personal faith. But still, the bonds and boundaries of collective authority impose strict limits on the development of the consciousness and autonomy of the individual. Tolerance of individual differences and dissent vary from one place to another, but still the preference and pressure for conformity persist. Even in the august halls of academia, respect and tolerance for differing views can be extremely limited or be replaced by virulent hostility. True mental individuality will only emerge when the principal objective of education becomes the development of independent thinking rather than rote memorization and acceptance of established academic perspectives. Electoral politics and parliamentary debate too often degenerate into a demand for mindless political correctness, so that the variety of candidates disguise the absence of real choice for voters. Yet the evolution of the individual is as inevitable and inexorable as the irrepressible urge of the awakened mind to think and question. Once awakened, individuality cannot be repressed. Once tasted, the freedom to decide for oneself cannot be suppressed for long.

The individual has always played an essential role in the evolution of the collective. Every new idea, innovation, and creative initiative finds expression first in the mind and actions of an individual and only later becomes a possession of the collective.⁵ The individual is the catalyst for the development of the group, the creative mutant gene that spurs the creativity of society. But the evolution of individuality is not synonymous with the aggrandizement of individualism. Freedom to develop one's own uniqueness does not imply unlimited freedom for the pursuit of self-interest in neglect or opposition to the legitimate interests and aspirations of others. The relationship between individual and collective is always reciprocal but not always balanced. Many societies in the past have restricted freedom and privilege to a small number of individuals to think, decide, exercise power and enjoy on behalf of the collective. But all individual achievement ultimately belongs to the collective. All that the individual possesses and utilizes for advancement—language, concepts, ideas, knowledge, skills, imaginations, tools, organizational capacities, technological innovations and physical

infrastructure—are a legacy of the cumulative accomplishments of countless individuals and groups in the past. The individual cannot think a thought without borrowing heavily from the legacy of the group. The accomplishments of the individual are the accomplishments of society. All that the individual achieves is accomplished on the strength of that inheritance and therefore belongs rightfully to all, if not in whole, then most certainly in part.

The evolutionary direction is from subordination of the individual to the will of the group to a balanced relationship and partnership of the individual and collective, based on their mutual interdependence. At different times and places, all manner of relationship has been attempted. Recent history testifies to the enormous power unleashed by the liberation of the individual from subordination and domination by the collective. But it also testifies to the need for balance and limits on individualism when it descends into flagrant self-aggrandisement and dissipation of one at the expense and to the detriment of all. The inalienable right to freedom is counterbalanced by the inescapable responsibility to utilize that freedom in a manner supportive of the betterment of all.

Prevailing democratic practices flagrantly invite the electorate to support that which will benefit them or their group personally, even at the expense of other citizens, all humanity and future generations. Such a system can never lead to the fullest development and emergence of individuality. Self-actualization and service to humanity are complementary rather than mutually exclusive aspirations. Neither can be fully achieved separately without pursuit of the other.

7.3. Dissemination of Power

A third visible dimension of social evolution is the evolution of power discussed earlier in this paper. That evolution proceeds simultaneously from lesser to greater power of accomplishment for and by the collective and from a domination by privileged elites to a more equitable distribution of power among members of the collective. Neither goal can be fully achieved independent of the other. The increasing power of the collective is patently evident. Global society and its individual members are many times more empowered to communicate and transport locally and globally, improve health and prolong lives, acquire and disseminate knowledge and skills, act remotely, reach out and organize collectively, pray or learn or laugh together.

The increasingly equitable distribution of power is less obvious and more complex. Recent research, such as Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the 21st Century*, suggests that economic power is more concentrated than at any time since the roaring 1920s and the power of organized labor has declined dramatically. Studies show that this is true within nations, but on a global level, economic power is becoming more and more widely distributed between countries. China is already the second largest economy and India is growing rapidly. The power of corporations relative to national governments is increasing. National governments are less able to exercise power over multinational corporations, who seek refuge and leverage by shifting their assets and production facilities to the highest bidder overseas. So too, power is increasingly accessible to enable individuals around the world to communicate, travel, acquire knowledge, improve their health, prolong their lives, and fulfill other aspirations. Today there

are more than 10 million non-governmental organizations operating globally as a fifth estate for self-expression and coordinated action by global civil society. Nuclear weapons no longer are a guarantee of security. Aristocratic elites have given way to new generations of wealth and power. The rights of women, the disabled, racial and religious minorities, immigrants and foreigners are more secure than ever before. It is easy to identify exceptions, but the overall direction and trend from decade to decade is evident. Public exposure and punishment for political corruption, police brutality, sexual misconduct, corporate malfeasance and financial malpractice are on the rise. But clearly the shifting of power from established elites to new centers of power by itself can be only an interim stage in the process of its devolution.

The strength of democracy is that it more widely distributes political power than other political systems. The freedom, self-confidence, self-respect and self-reliance that result release more of the energy of each individual than any other social system. Education informs that energy and raises the aspirations of individuals to further develop their capacities and transcend the limits of their inheritance. Social rights combined with social organization and technology empower the individual to more fully utilize the opportunities afforded by freedom.

Yet for all its virtues, the prevailing system of democracy severely constrains the true exercise of power by the individual. The right to vote may be granted, but freedom of choice implies alternatives, which are very often severely limited. Freedom of choice is often illusory, as power resides more with the party than elected individuals and the behavior of elected officials is constrained by their preoccupation with re-election. True distribution of political power cannot be achieved under a party system in which the individual voter only has the option of choosing between two increasingly polarized viewpoints and value systems. Life is too complex to be reduced to multiple choice questions.

8. Promise and Threat of Technology

Ever since the invention of the printing press, newspaper, radio and television, technology has exerted considerable influence on the evolution of democracy. The role of the mass media and social media in the recent US Presidential election dramatically illustrates their central role today. During the 19th century, dissemination of information to the public was quite limited and depended largely on local newspapers, which reflected the prevalent views of the editors or of a specific region. The mass broadcasting media of the 20th century tended to unify the national electorate by presenting a common mainstream view of unfolding events. Today the multiplication and fragmentation of media sources inundate the public with different, contrasting and conflicting news reports purporting to be factual but heavily skewed to influence public opinion in one direction or another. Of special concern is the tendency noted in the 2016 US elections of the public to give preference to sources of information that validate and reinforce their own existing values and beliefs and to ignore or disparage those sources which contradict or challenge their views. As Nobel laureate Amartya Sen once pointed out, no famine has ever been recorded in a democratic country with an independent judiciary and a free press. But today a free press is not necessarily synonymous with a fair, objective or factual one.

The promise and threat of technology are also apparent with respect to the future of employment. Humanity now possesses the technological potential to meet the needs of all human beings. But in the absence of a coherent overall social strategy, the indiscriminate application of this technology could as well impoverish as improve the lives of countless millions. A full exploration of the impact of emerging technologies on society and democracy is beyond the scope of this article, but it is necessary to emphasize that political stability and social cohesion necessitate that technologies invented by human beings with the intention of promoting welfare and well-being are not permitted to blindly dominate and rampantly undermine social and economic security. As the quality of food and medicine is not regulated universally to protect the general public, society has a right and government has an obligation to ensure that the impact of technology on human beings is beneficial or to introduce other measures to compensate for any negative consequences it may entail. Technology can unite or divide, augment cooperation or competition, support democracy or destroy it. It is the task of government to ensure that emerging technology becomes part of the solution to make democracy more effective.

The participation of individual members of society in its governance—either directly through participative processes or indirectly through election of representatives—lies at the heart of all forms of democracy. Technology has played a key role in reducing or marginalizing the importance of the individual in innumerable ways, such as the mechanization of warfare, the mechanization and automation of economic functions, and most recently the automation of knowledge acquisition and decision-making processes through artificial intelligence. At the same time technology has played an immense role in empowering the individual citizen by enhancing access to information, communication, transportation, education, health, economic productivity, and so forth. Today, it greatly empowers individuals to acquire knowledge, project their views and ideas, communicate with a wider audience, network of other people and multiplying their individual capacities through association with other people.

9. Known Remedies

The Nordic countries are well-known examples of countries where the practice of democracy appears to avoid many of the pitfalls evident elsewhere. Among the common characteristics these countries share are a relatively homogeneous population, high levels of investment in human capital, a long tradition of liberal values and pluralism, high levels of participation in democratic processes, and the application of the principle of subsidiarity to decentralize decision making to the local level.

In other countries where these characteristics are difficult to emulate, there are still known remedies that can dramatically increase the efficiency and effectiveness of democratic institutions while reducing the common abuses, such as the following:

- Decentralizing authority to the local and state level to encourage local participation in decision-making.
- Limiting campaign financing and making fully transparent the amount and source of funding received by candidates.

- Imposing term limits to attract non-career politicians to seek elected office.
- Most nations already have laws in place to punish false statements by parliamentarians and other public officials during parliamentary proceedings, but they are either neglected or only enforced in extreme circumstances. Legislate and implement stricter codes of accountability for truthfulness by elected officials and those running for office, regardless of whether the statements are made in parliament, during election campaigns or to the media. Intentional falsification by public officials must be as punishable as testimony under oath in court.⁶
- Implement a wide range of practical and effective ethical standards in government and the civil service, including transparent government decision-making, protection for whistle-blowers, merit-based promotion of civil service, external and internal compliance and redress procedures.*
- Measures to eliminate election fraud.
- Rigorous anti-corruption standards and enforcement to fight corruption.
- Regulate the revolving door between elected office in the private sector and the powerful influence of lobbyists.
- Establish weekly state-of-the-union and state-of-the-state broadcasts conducted by a cross-section of representative civil society organizations to revitalize participative democracy at the national and local level. This would act as a check and balance on the biases of public broadcasting networks, political parties and private media.[†]
- Establish annual state-of-the-world and global citizenship broadcasts conducted by a cross-section of representative international civil society organizations from the perspective of the world's citizenry, rather than that of governments, corporations and mainstream media. This would act as a check and balance on the biases of public broadcasting networks, political parties and private media.[‡]
- Establishment by the national academies of science of Evidence-Based Policy Centers for high priority problems relating to education, health, public safety, the environment, law enforcement, corruption, justice, etc. to more closely align and direct the capabilities and resources of the scientific community to address pressing domestic and international issues.[§]

These and many other known remedies have been applied successfully by different nations at one time or another and could be included on a more comprehensive set of democratic standards.

* Howard Whitton, February 2001 <https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/35521740.pdf>

† Proposal by Lloyd Etheredge, Director, Policy Sciences Center, Fellow, World Academy of Art & Science

‡ Proposal by Lloyd Etheredge

§ Proposal by Lloyd Etheredge

10. Alternative Pathways

“Prevailing policies and institutions are founded on and draw their legitimacy from entrenched economic doctrines, which need to be challenged and replaced by a human-centered, value-based transdisciplinary conceptual framework.”

The Dubrovnik Roundtable also explored meaningful efforts to envision systemic political reforms that could more successfully fulfill the potentials of democracy. The Independent Constitutionals of the United Kingdom, for example, have developed a platform for radical decentralization and devolution of democratic processes to address some of the central ills of the present system.*⁷ Their recommendations include—

- Shift from elective representative democracy in which citizen participation is limited to voting in elections to participative representative democracy which combines the involvement of citizens in the management of public affairs with genuine bottom-up representation, mandated and accountable.
- Shift from adversarial bipolar party politics to one that fosters loyalty of elected officials who place loyalty in their constituencies over party allegiance and compliance.
- Shift from winner-loser take all electoral systems to ones based on proportionality to maintain a greater correlation with votes cast and the resulting representation.
- Adoption of an ethical code for elected representatives that establishes high standards for truthfulness and accountability for acting on the promises and pledges made during elections.
- Measures to increase opportunities for citizens to represent their communities on specific issues now under the purview of professional politicians.
- Wider use of referendums to directly ascertain the views of the electorate and allow the direct action of citizens on decision-making.
- Fair political funding that limits the influence of any individual, corporation or lobbying group to determine the outcome of elections while also enhancing campaign financing transparency.

These and similar prescriptions need to be seriously considered. The exact form in which they are cast and the means of implementation must necessarily differ from country to country and level to level, but the intention behind them is applicable to most democratic societies. Both conventional and new approaches can be adopted to address them more effectively. For instance, governments can mandate that all election expenses, such as media advertising,

* ICUK declaration of purpose <http://www.icuk.life/declaration.html>

must be paid for by a special digital currency issued by the government and fully redeemable in national currency. By this means, the government could electronically track the identity of those making the expenditure and the use to which it is put and make that information transparently available to the general public in real time.

A fully effective system would have to extend changes far beyond political institutions and processes to address the economic and financial practices that threaten the stability and viability of contemporary society. The New Economic Theory Working Group established by the World Academy of Art and Science (WAAS) in collaboration with a consortium of partner organizations and concerned social scientists, has concluded that piecemeal modification of policies and institutions will not be sufficient to bring about the magnitude of changes required. Prevailing policies and institutions are founded on and draw their legitimacy from entrenched economic doctrines, which need to be challenged and replaced by a human-centered, value-based transdisciplinary conceptual framework.⁸

Similarly, WAAS and the World University Consortium have concluded that effective measures to address the multidimensional challenges confronting humanity today will require radical changes in the global educational system. The capacity of the system will have to be rapidly expanded and upgraded to provide the huge number of aspiring youth in developing countries with opportunities for accessible, affordable quality education. But a mere extension and replication of the existing system will not be sufficient. The present fragmented system of education is itself part of the problem. There is need for a new value-based paradigm in education that shifts the focus from the subject to the student, from passive indoctrination to active learning, from memorization of information to independent thinking, from competition to collaborative, peer-to-peer forms of learning.* Institutions and procedures can only go so far in eliminating the ills democracy confronts today. The only real and lasting solution is a culture of liberalism. Such a culture cannot be established or safeguarded simply by legal provisions and institutional measures. It must be established in the minds of the people through a spirit of independent thinking, rational analysis and allegiance to truth rather than personal preference. These are the greatest endowments rightly bestowed by a progressive system of education that places emphasis on thinking rather than facts, questioning rather than learning all the right answers, and perceiving reality in its rich many-sided complexity. The truths on which democracy can prosper are truths that complement and complete other truths rather than those that contradict, negate and deny them.

The challenges to the future of democracy extend beyond the nation-state to the governance of the global community. It is ironic that the institutions established by the world's leading nation-states with the specific ideal of promoting freedom and democracy at the national level should cling to outdated, undemocratic principles and practices for global governance. The evolution of the international political system is beyond the scope of this article, but it is important to consider the intermediate territory that lies between national and international systems of governance. Globalization has placed many of the issues confronting nation-states and citizens today beyond the sole authority of national governments to address on their

* See <http://wunicon.org/files/reports/Report%20-Conference-Future-Education-Rome-Nov-2017.pdf>

own. International financial crises, financial speculation, tax havens, economic inequality, immigration, nuclear proliferation and global warming all require concerted action by groups of nations. The present democratic system provides little opportunity for citizens to influence the policies of their governments that require international cooperation. Innovative approaches, such as those by SIMPOL to establish a means for citizens to promote simultaneous policy formulation internationally on issues of critical importance, deserve to be experimented on widely. The SIMPOL model is an innovative approach to encourage electoral candidates to support a set of policy measures that require international collaboration.⁹

“The blockchain could serve as the basis for establishing a globally inclusive system of polling for conducting referendums of the entire world population on issues of critical importance to the future of humanity.”

11. Envisioning the Future

The recent development of distributed ledger technology, commonly known as blockchain, opens up new and unprecedented opportunities as great in variety and magnitude as those generated by the development of the World Wide Web (WWW) over the past two decades. The blockchain is essentially a parallel system to the WWW that also rides on the foundations of the global electronic communications network we call the Internet, but with a fundamentally different structure and distribution of authority. The blockchain is a global database distributed on a large number of independently owned and operated computers around the world that enabled fully verifiable and highly secure transactions to be carried out without resort to a central repository of data or a centralized authority for verification. This permits a level of decentralization or uncentralization far beyond that realized by the WWW.¹⁰

It is still too early to clearly envision the ultimate implications of the global blockchain, but its revolutionary character is already apparent. It could make possible the development of a rapid, low cost, peer-to-peer global payments and lending system, an inclusive system of banking accessible to every human being with access to a mobile phone, a universal registry for property ownership and transactions (roughly 70% of landowners in the world today lack legally verifiable documentation to establish their rights), a universal registry for human identity to replace the innumerable means by which individuals have to prove their identity today, a universal inventory of the earth’s resources and consumption, and countless other applications until now unthinkable.

More specifically with reference to democracy, the blockchain has the potential to usher in a whole new age of participative democracy. At the national level, it could support tamper-proof online voting systems that reverse the steep downward trend in electoral participation in the world’s mature democracies. It could enable voters to transparently track in detail the actual voting records of elected officials on any issues of importance to them. It can make

possible very low cost public referendums to assess public support on specific issues. It can serve as the basis for transparent tamper-proof reporting of suspected criminal or civil wrongdoing by public officials and submission of evidence.

“Democracy can thrive only under conditions in which power is widely distributed, in which peace, freedom, equality and prosperity are widely shared, and in which a culture of democratic values is freely and fully embraced by both leaders and the electorate.”

Representative democracy as it is practiced today is predicated on the recognition that informed decision-making on many legislative issues requires in-depth knowledge, which many voters are unlikely to possess. To circumvent this limitation yet still significantly enhance voter participation, the blockchain could also serve as a vehicle to make the introduction of *delegative democratic* processes in which voters assign their voting rights on specific issues to different representatives whom they regard as better informed, trusted experts or advisers.*

At the international level, the blockchain could serve as the basis for establishing a globally inclusive system of polling for conducting referendums of the entire world population on issues of critical importance to the future of humanity, as envisioned by this journal seven years ago.¹¹ This would, for the first time, represent a direct voice for humanity in its own governance and, perhaps, an essential step in the establishment of an effective system of global governance that transcends the narrow provincialism of nation-states to establish the sovereign right of the entire human community.

The newly emerging technologies of the 4th Industrial Revolution present both unprecedented opportunities and challenges to humanity. This brief discussion of the potential impact of blockchain technologies points to emerging opportunities to dramatically enhance participative democracy. But the decisive determinant of humanity’s future will not be technology. It will be *human choice* whether to subordinate ourselves to the power of the technology we develop or assume authority and responsibility as its creators for ensuring that it is applied to promote human welfare and well-being.

One of the characteristics of paradigm change is that it is very difficult to conceive until it is already upon us, as the potentials of the World Wide Web were understood by only a few visionaries until they began to be realized in practice, as the world’s financial experts grapple to comprehend the significance of the digital currency revolution which is now in an early stage of unfolding. That is why in this article we have focused on the irresistible long term forces that are driving global society to progressively embrace universal human values

* For an extended discussion of the potential impact of blockchain on democracy, see Chapter 8 of *Blockchain Revolution: How the Technology Behind Bitcoin is Changing Money, Business and the World*, by Don Tapscott and Alex Tapscott, Penguin Random House LLC, New York, 2016.

and to develop more free, equitable and effective systems for the governance of humanity's ever increasing social power. Democracy can thrive only under conditions in which power is widely distributed, in which peace, freedom, equality and prosperity are widely shared, and in which a culture of democratic values is freely and fully embraced by both leaders and the electorate. Democracy is incompatible with a social environment in which human welfare is at risk and individuals are left to fend entirely for themselves. Secure borders, rule of law, economic development, investment in quality education and social equity are essential conditions. But even more so, it is at risk when the underlying values of liberalism are reduced to platitudes or discarded as impediments to imposition of central authority. Representative government must be truly representative of the will of the people, but it must be respectful and inclusive of the will and well-being of all the people, rather than that of being either a dominant elected majority or powerful ruling elite.

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