THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRATIC THEORY

Robert Dahl

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Robert Dahl is Sterling Professor of Political Science and Emeritus Professor at the Department of Political Science, Yale University. This paper is based on a seminar entitled "The Future of Democratic Theory" presented at the *Center for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences* of the Juan March Institute, Madrid, on May 24, 1996.

Before turning to some reflections on the future of democratic theory, let me say a word about the state of democratic theory today as I see it.

The growth of quantifiable data

Insofar as democratic theory is a field or subfield of political science, it necessarily involves, in my view, both empirical and normative issues. However, not all scholars need concern themselves equally with both, either in a particular work or in their particular interests. The relation is complex and I will not explore it here.

However, there is little doubt that the empirical aspects of democracy are much better understood than they were a generation or more ago. This is so for many reasons. One worth emphasising is the greater possibility of the quantitative analysis of some aspects of democracy. This has become both possible and fruitful thanks to a huge increase in the sheer number both of countries and democracies; in the amount and quality of the data available; and in the number and quality of scholars engaged in research and theory, together with an increase in work by scholars from many different countries.

In addition, there is more agreement among scholars on some of the most relevant questions, and greater agreement on vocabulary and concepts. For example, thanks to Juan Linz, Alfred Stepan and others, we now tend to distinguish a "transition" to democracy from a "consolidation" of democracy.

As an example of our improved capacities for quantitative analysis of certain aspects of democracy, consider the fate of a hypothesis I advanced in *A Preface to Economic Democracy* in 1985 that was based on thirteen cases (which then seemed to me a large number of cases!) in which democracy was replaced by dictatorship. Drawing on work by Linz and Stepan (1978) and Leonardo Morlino, (*Come cambiano i regimi politici*, 1980) I added the case of Uruguay. From these thirteen cases I observed that the only instance in which a democracy with more

than twenty years' duration had broken down was Uruguay. The age of democracy, it appeared, helped to explain breakdowns and survivals: the breakdown of democracy in any democratic country with over twenty years of experience with democratic instutions, I suggested, would be extremely rare.

Since then, however, we have gained much more data on breakdowns. The most impressive analysis with which I am familiar is by Adam Przeworski (1996).[1] For the period 1950-1990 he analyzed 150 countries, 224 regimes, 101 democracies, 123 dictatorships, forty changes from democracy to dictatorship, and fifty changes from dictatorship to democracy. Przeworski's finding, I regret to say, contradicts my earlier hypothesis: "Once we control for the level of development [as measured by per capita income] (. . .) democracies are about equally likely to die at any age (. . .). These findings would indicate that the hazard rates (. . .) decline because countries develop, not because a democracy that has been around is more likely to be around (. . .)"

Sad though it may be to have one's cherished hypothesis shot down, I find myself heartened by the improved possibilities for quantitative analysis like that of Przeworski.

What questions should we explore?

Given changes like these in our understanding of democracy, what questions might we profitably explore? In my view, most of the older questions are still with us, but they have taken on newer aspects as we move into the 21st century.

It is obvious, for example, that the study of breakdown, transition, and consolidation will continue to be of central importance. I would think that one cannot be competent in the field of democratic theory and practice without being

[1] Przeworski, Adam; Mike Alvarez, José Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi. 1996. "What Makes Democracies Endure?" *Journal of Democracy* 7 (No.1, January): 39-56.

aware of this literature. However, lots of people are working on it, and one might choose to take advantage of their work and turn to other questions. What follows are some that I would find worthy of attention. I should add that several explorations I have made in the last few years have been or will be published as articles. But I regard these as preliminary attempts to open up the questions, not in any sense final answers.

Democratic culture[2]

What is a democratic culture? How do we construct or strengthen it? Although the utility of "political culture" is dismissed by some, I think it important. Admittedly, both as a term and as an explanation, "culture" is often abused, misused, or overused.[3] Yet explanations that ignore it seem to me unsatisfactory, as I can make clear with the aid of several assumptions, none of which, I think, is likely to be strongly contested. I assume, to begin with, that sooner or later virtually all countries encounter fairly deep crises - political, ideological, economic, military, international. Second, it follows that if a democratic political system is to endure it must be capable of surviving through the challenges of these crises. Achieving stable democracy is not just fair weather sailing; it also means sailing sometimes in foul and dangerous weather. Although the hard empirical evidence for my next assumption is weak, I think few would seriously contest it: an important factor in the prospects for stable democracy in a country is the strength of the diffuse support for democratic ideas, values, and practices embedded in the country's culture and transmitted, in large part, from

[2] This section draws on my forthcoming article, "Political Culture and Economic Development," in Ragnvald Kalleberg and Frederik Engelstad, eds., *Social Time and Social Change, Historical aspects in the social sciences* (Oslo: 1997).

[3] By culture I mean a body of norms that guide behavior, values that influence judgments, and cognitive maps that are widespread and persist between generations. This loose definition is roughly consistent with the definition provided by A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhon in 1952 after reviewing several hundred definitions of "culture" in an effort to arrive at a definition that would be generally acceptable. See Milton Singer, "Culture: the Concept of Culture," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, David Sills, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1968): 527-543, p. 528.

one generation to the next. This diffuse intergenerational support is what I mean by a democratic political culture.

Finally, I assume that the diffuse support provided by a democratic political culture is not identical with support stemming from a perception that the government is effective in dealing with matters that concern citizens.[4] Although a democratic political culture may be eroded if large numbers of citizens persistently perceive the government to be highly ineffective in coping with problems that really matter to them, a strong democratic culture will help to sustain even an ineffective government for some considerable period of time. In Italy, for example, support for democracy is fairly high despite the dismal performance of the national government since 1945.[5] This support could give a government enough time to overcome some failures, perhaps some pretty substantial ones. As in a strong marriage a serious quarrel does not have to end in divorce.

Political culture and political crisis.

Let me elaborate briefly on the assumption that sooner or later virtually all countries experience acute crises - political, economic, military. Countries with democratic institutions and market economies have certainly not escaped severe challenges in this century: labor unrest, ideological polarization, economic depression, war, foreign invasion. In some countries, democratic institutions and beliefs have withstood harsh trials like these; in others, however, they have

[4] For example, Leonardo Morlino and José R. Montero found in surveys of Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece that the "diffuse legitimacy" of democracy was high but the "perceived efficacy" of their governments was considerably lower. Thus in Greece 87% said that democracy is preferable to any other regime and 59% said of the previous dictatorship that "it was only bad". But only 35% agreed that "our democracy works well" while 46% agreed that "our democracy has many defects, but it works." The corresponding figures for Italy were 70%, 37%, and 4%."Legitimacy and Democracy in Southern Europe," in P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, Hans-Jürgen Puhle and Richard Gunther, eds., *The Politics of Democratic Consolidation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

[5] On this point, see Morlino and Montero, *supra*. In contrast to the generally poor performance of the national government, some of the regional governments have performed well. See Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

collapsed. In a country where democracy is newly established, a democratic culture is weak, and economic conditions are difficult, the danger of breakdown is fairly high.

We cannot know whether a "transition to democracy" has been successful, then, until a recently democratized country weathers its first deep and protracted crisis. South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore have not yet met this test. If democratic political institutions arrive in China, they will undoubtedly face a number of acute crises.[6]

Even where an authoritarian regime does give way to democratization, without a pervasive democratic culture democratic institutions may be uneven and incomplete. That is to say, democracy may not be fully consolidated.[7] Important elements may be badly impaired or missing altogether - freedom of the press or assembly, for example, or the opportunities for political oppositions to organize, express themselves, and contest elections. Or democratic institutions may be spread unevenly across a country; though present in some regions they may be - as in Central America - extremely weak or virtually nonexistent in other parts.[8] Or representative institutions may be so ineffectual that important decisions are essentially the prerogative of the chief executive: authoritarian rule is replaced by what Guillermo O'Donnell has called "delegative democracy" as in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, and Peru.[9]

To sum up: We need to know much more about the nature of a democratic

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[6] Including those caused by the pressure of overpopulation on badly depleted and overexploited resources of water and land.

[7] See Philippe C. Schmitter, "Democratic Dangers and Dilemmas", *Journal of Democracy* 5 (April 1994): 57-74.

[8] See Terry Lynn Karl, "Central America," a paper presented at the conference on *Democracy in the Americas: Approaching the Year 2000,* University of Notre Dame, April 29, 1994.

[9] "Delegative democracies," he writes, "rest on the premise that whoever wins election to the presidency is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office. The president is taken to be the embodiment of the nation and the main custodian and definer of its interests." "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (January 1994):55-69, pp. 59-60.

culture, and how to create it.

The challenge of multiculturalism[10]

Even in many older democracies, a new test of the strength of their democratic culture is the challenge of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism raises an old problem: the *unit*. What are the proper boundaries for the unit in which democratic institutions are to exist - for example, city-state, nation-state, or what? Both in theory and practice the unit has always been more or less assumed. But new forces are at work to challenge existing assumptions. One of these is *immigration*. The passage of Proposition 187 in California in November, 1994, could be interpreted as an early warning that immigration politics is about to become a major issue not only in the United States but in most economically advanced democratic countries. It is highly unlikely that the issue of immigration will subside. On the contrary: it will very likely be one of the major issues on the political agenda of a good many democratic countries for a long time to come. Unfortunately, the problem of immigration is badly suited for resolution by the play of ordinary democratic politics, among other reasons because it is a perfect issue for demagoguery and passion. The challenge, then, is to search for solutions that would at least be more or less consistent with democratic values, institutions, and procedures.

The problem is hardly a new one, at least in some countries like the United States, where immigration is part and parcel of its national history. But for many democratic countries the problem *is* new. What is more, in the coming decades it may well develop into a major problem for which previous experience - including that of the United States - will provide insufficient guidance.

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[10] This section draws on "From Immigrants to Citizens: A New Yet Old Challenge to Democracies," in Sun Yul Chang, ed., *Democracy and Communism, Theory Reality and Future* (Seoul: The Korean Association of International Studies, 1995): 3-25.

The interaction of two factors promises to make the problem of immigration even more acute in the future. For one thing, immigrants are likely to enter democratic countries in significant numbers, as indeed they already have. Economic differences between countries with advanced economies - the rich countries - and those at much lower levels of economic development provide many people in the poorer countries with strong incentives to migrate, legally or illegally, toward the richer countries.

Another pressure for emigration is, of course, to escape from the violence, repression, genocidal terror, and "ethnic cleansing" that torments the lives of so many people in our time. As the 20th century draws to an end, floods of terror-stricken refugees are trying desperately to escape from the horrors they face at home.

In addition, living outside the democratic countries are many people who are neither escapees from abject misery nor terrorized refugees but who simply want to improve the quality of their lives by emigrating to a rich country with greater opportunities for themselves and their children. Persons like these are often highly resourceful, energetic, determined, and willing to devote much thought, ingenuity and effort to the task of gaining entry to a country where they could lead a better life.

Inside the democratic countries are some citizens who have powerful reasons for encouraging immigration. Employers in the rich countries, for example, may want to hire immigrants at wage levels and under working conditions that can no longer attract citizens in their own rich countries, particularly given the protections provided by modern welfare and social security systems. Some citizens want their relatives abroad to reunite with them. Others, moved by considerations of humanity and simple justice, are unwilling to force refugees to remain forever in refugee camps or face the misery, terror, and possibly outright murder confronting them at home. A few people - a very few, to be sure - may believe that unlimited freedom of movement between countries is a categorical human right.

In addition, the boundaries of many democratic countries are rather porous.

Illegal entry by land or sea is fairly easy and rather difficult to prevent; indeed, it may be impossible to prevent without heavy expenditures for policing borders in ways that, aside from the expense, many citizens would find distasteful or intolerably inhumane.

Unfortunately, satisfactory solutions are very hard to come by. And precisely because of this difficulty, immigration is likely to remain a persistently controversial issue. The moral and ethical difficulties are deep and perplexing. Do foreigners have a (moral) right to migrate to a country of their choice, in particular a democratic country? If such a right exists, what, if any, are its scope and limits? Some writers defend a right to migrate with "few or no restrictions."[11] Others argue that every democratic country is entitled to limit immigration. The first argument may draw on liberal egalitarian concerns for human freedom, including freedom of movement, while the counter argument to this sweeping defense of the right to migrate rests on some of the highly probable *consequences* of unlimited immigration.

Like other moral principles that require persistently heroic or altruistic behavior toward strangers, an unrestricted right to migration treats lightly any injurious consequences unlimited immigration may inflict on the existing citizens of the country to which they migrate. Yet even if we were to regard immigration as primarily a moral issue, consequences cannot be ignored. As Rawls rightly says, "All ethical doctrines worth our attention take consequences into account in judging rightness. One which did not would simply be irrational, crazy."[12]

The moral argument for an unlimited right to migrate is sometimes treated as if the problem were one of individual or personal moral action. Yet it would be one thing for a particular *individual* to be willing to accept as morally obligatory the consequences of unlimited immigration. It would be quite another for a

[11] See Joseph H. Carens, "Migration and Morality: A Liberal Egalitarian Perspective," in Brian Barry and Robert E. Goodin, *Free Movement: Ethical Issues in the Transnational Migration of People and Money* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992): 25-47, citing his own and other works representing this position, fn. 1, p. 46.

[12] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1971), p. 30.

country to do so. To be effective in a democratic country, the principle would require extraordinarily altruistic behavior on the part not merely of a few enlightened citizens but of a very large number, in principle a majority. Not only is it highly unrealistic to suppose that unlimited immigration would be endorsed by a majority of citizens, but it seems doubtful that the early waves of immigrants, the first beneficiaries of unlimited immigration, would indefinitely support unlimited immigration for future migrants.

Faced with actual or possible adverse consequences, even those sympathetic to the idea concede the need for restrictions.[13] One can only conclude, I think, that a right to *unlimited* immigration stands no chance of being adopted by any democratic country.

Political Consequences. If it is true that none of the democratic countries with an advanced economy can be expected to adopt a policy of unlimited immigration, the obvious and inescapable consequence is that every acceptable policy will require a *selection* - or, to use a more offensive word, discrimination. Selecting some who will be admitted means discriminating against others who will be rejected. What criteria should govern the process of selection? A country might choose to ignore other consequences and concentrate exclusively, let us say, on economic effects. It would then select its immigrants solely on the basis of their potential economic contributions. I am going to assume, however, that the citizens and leaders of a democratic country might well be concerned with the possible effects of immigration on cultural homogeneity and diversity, and indirectly on national identity and prevailing beliefs, including beliefs in democracy and political rights.[14] What policy might they adopt that would be acceptable if judged by the criteria of justice to the well-being and human rights of both immigrants and existing citizens and preserving the basic institutions of a democratic political order?

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[13] Thus Carens, *supra*, 28ff.

[14] "Cultural-ethnic-racial" would be more accurate, but for simplicity I shall use the word "cultural."

The theoretical possibilities appear to be exhausted by six alternatives. A democratic country might attempt to

1. Prevent cultural pluralism by

    1.1. Exclusion; or

    1.2. Discriminatory admission; or

    1.3. Separation, autonomy, independence (for example, Canada); or

    1.4. Assimilating aliens;

2. Accept or encourage cultural pluralism

    2.1. Within limits (limited pluralism).

    2.2. Without limits (unlimited pluralism).

Although these alternatives would not prove to be as sharply distinct in practice as they are in principle, I find it helpful to reflect on them as if they were more or less pure types. Each of the alternatives would permit a variety of concrete policies. Each would probably attract some support. Yet each also has some profound drawbacks.

The question that we must ask, then, is what can we say about these alternatives? Or others? The problem is perplexing, troubling, important, and urgent. I am inclined to think that it will move to center stage in the next century.

The consequences for democracy of internationalization.[15]

The European Union has presented citizens and leaders in democratic countries with a fundamental democratic dilemma: They could choose to preserve

[15] This section draws on "A Democratic Dilemma: System Effectiveness versus Citizen Participation," *Political Science Quarterly* 109 (1994): 23-34.

the authority of a smaller democratic political unit (say Norway or Sweden) within which they could act more effectively to influence the conduct of their government, even though some important matters might remain beyond the capacity of that government to deal with effectively. Or they could choose to increase the capacity of a larger political unit to deal more effectively with these matters, even if their ability to influence the government were significantly less in the larger unit (the EU) than in the smaller unit (Denmark).

The dilemma transcends the EU. Wherever and whenever the societies and economies within democratic states are subject to significant external influences beyond their control, the dilemma exists. It has, therefore, existed ever since the idea and practice of democracy evolved in ancient Greece 2500 years ago.

Whenever *economic life* extends beyond a state's boundaries, for example, internal choices are limited by actions taken outside the country. *Military and strategic choices* have always been constrained by decisions, or expectations about decisions, made by external actors. Although economic and strategic limits are ancient, only recently have many people realized that actions having decisive consequences for a country's *environment* cannot be controlled exclusively by people within that country. Even the capacity to *control immigration* has, as I have suggested, begun to slip away from the sovereign control of nation-states.

Transnational actions affect all democratic countries in varying degrees. In general, decisions in small democracies like Denmark are more constrained by external forces than in large countries, if only because their economies - in advanced countries like Denmark, at any rate - are more dependent on international trade; and ordinarily, too, they are strategically more vulnerable (Switzerland being an exception only in part.) Yet it is obvious that external actors and actions impose crucial limits on the choices available even to the people of a large and powerful country like the United States. Indeed, these limits may be particularly painful for Americans because of the rather swift change in the country's international economic position from relatively high autonomy earlier in this century to much greater interdependence as the century comes to a close. Only thirty years ago, for example, officials in charge of fiscal and monetary policy, and

their official and unofficial advisors, could reflect on the possibility of employing orthodox Keynesian remedies for a recession, such as reducing interest rates and increasing federal spending, without giving a great deal of weight to the responses of foreign investors. It is hard to imagine them doing so today.

Because historical changes in the nature of democratic institutions have a poignant bearing on the dilemma I just suggested, a word about them may be helpful. The history of democracy can be viewed as consisting of three great transformations. So, my questions are: Is democracy in the national-state destined to meet the fate of democracy in the city-state? Will it grow more and more attenuated until finally it lingers on as little more than a ghostly reminder of its earlier vigorous existence? In the same way that the idea and practice of democracy were shifted away from the city-state to the larger scale of the national-state, will democracy as an idea and a set of practices now shift to the grander scale of transnational governments? If so, just as democracy on the scale of the national-state required a new and unique historical pattern of political institutions radically different from the ancient practices of assembly democracy that the small scale of the city-state made possible, desirable, and even self-evident, will democracy on a transnational scale require a new set of institutions that are different in some respects, perhaps radically different, from the familiar political institutions of modern representative democracy?

A more democratic polyarchy?

I now want to pose two related questions: (1) How can we best evaluate and compare polyarchies? (2) How can we strengthen the democratic qualities of polyarchies?

Modern representative democracy with universal suffrage - what I call polyarchal democracy - may be interpreted in two ways. In one, it is at the top of a scale running from full polyarchy, in which all the major political institutions of polarchy are present, to full authoritarianism, in which all are lacking. We may

call this *the scale of polyarchy*. But seen in another perspective, polyarchy lies on a theoretical continuum running from full democracy in an ideal sense to full nondemocracy, or what one might term a fully totalitarian regime. We may call this *a scale of democracy*. On the first scale, the extremes are provided by some actually existing or historical systems. In the second, both the extremes are hypothetical.

Although the cut-off for polyarchy on these scales is not arbitrary, we might wonder whether among all polyarchies some are more democratic than others. If we were to use the second kind of scale, would we locate some polyarchies higher on the scale than others? How would we determine these relative locations? Is it feasible to compare the relative *democracy* or "democraticness" of polyarchy in different countries? Or would that effort involve too many possible indicators? And would different countries end up differently on different indicators? Perhaps no scale is possible. Perphaps we could only conclude that country A is more democratic than B and C on one indicator but B is more democratic on another, and C with respect to still another.

Polyarchy, we must remember, is one historical form of democracy. It is not the only form, and perhaps not the only possible form. And certainly we have no strong reason for supposing that it is either the final form or the best potential form that democracy might take in the 21st century. For the immediate future, it seems, democracy (or at least polyarchy) has largely driven its main contenders into the corner. In these circumstances, the question of how and whether polyarchies can be made more democratic surely deserves our serious attention.

The problem of civic competence.[16]

Three interrelated developments cast doubt on the continuing adequacy of the conventional solution.

[16] Adapted from *Journal of Democracy* 3 (October 1992): 45-59.

(1) Changes in scale. As I have already mentioned, actions that significantly affect the lives of people are made over larger and larger areas that include more and more people within their boundaries.

(2) Complexity. The average level of formal education has risen in all democratic countries, and probably it will continue to rise. If the cognitive difficulty of public matters were more or less static, the increase in levels of education could be chalked up as a net gain for civic competence. The problem is, however, that the difficulty of understanding public affairs has also increased and may have outstripped the gains from higher levels of education. The major cause of increased cognitive difficulty is that public matters have become more complex. Although the idea of increasing (or decreasing) complexity is difficult to make precise, it could be shown more rigorously than I shall attempt here that over the course of the last half century or so in every democratic country the number of different matters relevant to politics, government and the state has increased, to the point, indeed, where literally no single person can be expert in them all - in no more than a few, in fact.

Cognitive difficulty is increased not just by the sheer number but also by the *internal* complexity of issues and policies within a given domain. Moreover, the diversity of considerations that bear on policy decisions, whether in a broad domain (like foreign affairs) or in a narrower field within that domain (foreign economic aid, for example), make it difficult or impossible to generalize usefully from judgments about policy *A* to judgments about policy *B*. Then too, policies change over time, and they change at different rates in different spheres of policy, sometimes slowly and incrementally, sometimes abruptly and dramatically. Finally, policy decisions ordinarily require judgments about trade-offs - how much of *x* we shall give up to yield more of *y*. These judgments are not only fraught with uncertainty but in important (though not all) respects they are not strictly empirical in character: for example, how much should we pay in higher gasoline taxes in order to reduce consumption and thus pollution?

(3) Communications. As everyone knows, the social and technical framework of human communication in advanced countries has undergone

extraordinary changes during this century: telephone, radio, television, interactive tv, fax, opinion surveys almost instantaneous with events, focus groups, techniques by which advertisers, politicians, political advisers and others can make sophisticated analyses of public responses and strategies for manipulating them etc.

It is surely the case that with changes in the technology of communications, the sheer amount of available information about political matters, at all levels of complexity, has increased enormously in democratic countries in this century. It is also true, no doubt, that increasing supply has been accompanied by lower costs to consumers of information. To this extent, political information may be more widely available than ever before. Nevertheless, an increased availability of information does not necessarily lead to greater competence or heightened understanding: as we have just seen, scale, complexity and the greater quantity of information itself impose ever stronger demands on the capacities of citizens.

The question I pose, then, is this: Do we need some new institutions for improving the capacities of citizens to make choices and decisions in political life? If so, what are they?

An old issue, not yet settled

I want to conclude by drawing attention to a problem that has long been with us and yet seems to me to remain in a highly unsatisfactory state. This is *the relation between democracy and capitalism*. What can we say about this perplexing and problematic relationship of coexistence? Let me propose some broad generalizations.

*Modern market capitalism is not strictly a necessary condition for democratization - or at least was not for the male polyarchies that developed in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century: U.S.A., Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland.

*Modern market capitalism is definitely not sufficient for maintaining democracy: consider Germany in the 1920s.

*Yet modern market capitalism appears to generate conditions highly favorable to polyarchy.

* What is more, no country without some form of capitalism and private ownership, whether agrarian or modern capitalism, has developed into a stable democracy.

* Yet modern capitalism also generates a wide range of inequalities in the distribution of resources, thus political resources. In this sense, it is inimical to the political equality necessary for full democracy.

These observations lead me to a provocative conclusion: Capitalism is fundamentally inconsistent with democracy but capitalism is the only economic order that has so far proved to be consistent with polyarchy.

If this is valid, we are left with a problem that a century of debate has not yet settled: How can the relative efficiencies of capitalism best be reconciled with its harmful effects on political equality? To repeat an earlier question, how, if at all, can polyarchy be made more democratic?