For a discussion of 'State'

Excerpt: pp.62-71 'Tenets of a Non-Existent Science'

- Graeber, David (2004) *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press

Excerpt: pp.46-52 'State and Credit Theories of Money'

- Graeber, David (2011) *Debt: The First Five Thousand Years* London, Brooklyn: Melville House

Excerpt: pp.359-370 'Why the State has no Origin'

- Graeber, David and David Wengrow (2021) *The Dawn of Everything* UK: Penguin Random House

For a discussion on 'Democracy'

Excerpt: pp.82-95 'Democracy'

- Graeber, David (2014) *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press

Excerpt: pp.150-207 ' "The Mob Begins to Think and Reason": The Covert History of Democracy'

- Graeber, David (2014) *The Democracy Project* New York: Random House

Excerpt: pp.329-374 'There Never was a West, or Democracy Emerges from the Spaces In-between'

- Graber, David (2007) *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire* Oakland, Edinburgh: AK Press

is a history which has largely yet to be written, but there are glimmerings. Peter Lamborn Wilson has produced the brightest of these, in a series of essays which include reflections, on, among other things, the collapse of the Hopewell and Mississippian cultures through much of eastern North America. These were societies apparently dominated by priestly elites, caste-based social structures, and human sacrifice—which mysteriously disappeared, being replaced by far more egalitarian hunter/gathering or horticultural societies. He suggests, interestingly enough, that the famous Native American identification with nature might not really have been a reaction to European values, but to a dialectical possibility within their own societies from which they had quite consciously run away. The story continues through the defection of the Jamestown settlers, a collection of servants abandoned in the first North American colony in Virginia by their gentleman patrons, who apparently ended up becoming Indians, to an endless series of "pirate utopias," in which British renegades teamed up with Muslim corsairs, or joined native communities from Hispaniola to Madagascar, hidden "triracial" republics founded by escaped slaves at the margins of European settlements, Antinomians, and other little-known libertarian enclaves that riddled the continent even before the Shakers and Fourierists and all the better-known nineteenth-century "intentional communities."

Most of these little utopias were even more marginal than the Vezo or Tsimihety were in Madagascar; all of them were eventually gobbled up. Which leads to the question of how to neutralize the

state apparatus itself, in the absence of a politics of direct confrontation. No doubt some states and corporate elites will collapse of their own dead weight; a few already have; but it's hard to imagine a scenario in which they all will. Here, the Sakalava and BaKongo might be able to provide us some useful suggestions. What cannot be destroyed can, nonetheless, be diverted, frozen, transformed, and gradually deprived of its substance—which in the case of states, is ultimately their capacity to inspire terror. What would this mean under contemporary conditions? It's not entirely clear. Perhaps existing state apparati will gradually be reduced to window-dressing as the substance is pulled out of them from above and below: i.e., both from the growth of international institutions, and from devolution to local and regional forms of self-governance. Perhaps government by media spectacle will devolve into spectacle pure and simple (somewhat along the lines of what Paul Lafargue, Marx's West Indian son-in-law and author of *The Right to Be Lazy*, implied when he suggested that after the revolution, politicians would still be able to fulfill a useful social function in the entertainment industry). More likely it will happen in ways we cannot even anticipate. But no doubt there are ways in which it is happening already. As Neoliberal states move towards new forms of feudalism, concentrating their guns increasingly around gated communities, insurrectionary spaces open up that we don't even know about. The Merina rice farmers described in the last section understand what many would-be revolutionaries do not: that there are times when the stupidest thing one could possibly

do is raise a red or black flag and issue defiant declarations. Sometimes the sensible thing is just to pretend nothing has changed, allow official state representatives to keep their dignity, even show up at their offices and fill out a form now and then, but otherwise, ignore them.

Tenets of a Non-existent Science

Let me outline a few of the areas of theory an anarchist anthropology might wish to explore:

1) A THEORY OF THE STATE

States have a peculiar dual character. They are at the same time forms of institutionalized raiding or extortion, and utopian projects. The first certainly reflects the way states are actually experienced, by any communities that retain some degree of autonomy; the second however is how they tend to appear in the written record.

In one sense states are the "imaginary totality" par excellence, and much of the confusion entailed in theories of the state historically lies in an inability or unwillingness to recognize this. For the most part, states were ideas, ways of imagining social order as something one could get a grip on, models of control. This is why the first known works of social theory, whether from Persia, or China, or ancient Greece, were always framed as theories of statecraft. This has had two disastrous effects. One is to give utopianism a bad name. (The word "utopia" first calls to mind the image of an ideal city, usually, with perfect geometry—the image seems to harken back originally to the royal military camp: a geometrical space which is entirely the emanation of a single, individual will, a fantasy of total control.) All this has had dire political consequences, to say the least. The second is that we tend to assume that states, and social order, even societies, largely correspond. In other words, we have a tendency to take the most grandiose,

even paranoid, claims of world-rulers seriously, assuming that whatever cosmological projects they claimed to be pursuing actually did correspond, at least roughly, to something on the ground. Whereas it is likely that in many such cases, these claims ordinarily only applied fully within a few dozen yards of the monarch in any direction, and most subjects were much more likely to see ruling elites, on a day-to-day basis, as something much along the lines of predatory raiders.

An adequate theory of states would then have to begin by distinguishing in each case between the relevant ideal of rulership (which can be almost anything, a need to enforce military style discipline, the ability to provide perfect theatrical representation of gracious living which will inspire others, the need to provide the gods with endless human hearts to fend off the apocalypse...), and the mechanics of rule, without assuming that there is necessarily all that much correspondence between them. (There might be. But this has to be empirically established.) For example: much of the mythology of "the West" goes back to Herodotus' description of an epochal clash between the Persian Empire, based on an ideal of obedience and absolute power, and the Greek cities of Athens and Sparta, based on ideals of civic autonomy, freedom and equality. It's not that these ideas—especially their vivid representations in poets like Aeschylus or historians like Herodotus—are not important. One could not possibly understand Western history without them. But their very importance and vividness long blinded historians to what is becoming the increasingly clear reality: that whatever its ideals, the Achmaenid Empire was a pretty light

touch when it came to the day-to-day control of its subjects' lives, particularly in comparison with the degree of control exercised by Athenians over their slaves or Spartans over the overwhelming majority of the Laconian population, who were helots. Whatever the ideals, the reality, for most people involved, was much the other way around.

One of the most striking discoveries of evolutionary anthropology has been that it is perfectly possible to have kings and nobles and all the exterior trappings of monarchy without having a state in the mechanical sense at all. One should think this might be of some interest to all those political philosophers who spill so much ink arguing about theories of "sovereignty"—since it suggests that most sovereigns were not heads of state and that their favorite technical term actually is built on a near-impossible ideal, in which royal power actually does manage to translate its cosmological pretensions into genuine bureaucratic control of a given territorial population. (Something like this started happening in Western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but almost as soon as it did, the sovereign's personal power was replaced by a fictive person called "the people," allowing the bureaucracy to take over almost entirely.) But so far as I'm aware, political philosophers have as yet had nothing to say on the subject. I suspect this is largely due to an extremely poor choice of terms. Evolutionary anthropologists refer to kingdoms which lack full-fledged coercive bureaucracies as "chiefdoms," a term which evokes images more of Geronimo or Sitting Bull than Solomon, Louis the Pious, or the Yellow Emperor. And of course the evolutionist framework itself ensures that such

structures are seen as something which immediately precedes the emergence of the state, not an alternative form, or even something a state can turn into. To clarify all this would be a major historical project.

2) A THEORY OF POLITICAL ENTITIES THAT ARE NOT STATES

So that's one project: to reanalyze the state as a relation between a utopian imaginary, and a messy reality involving strategies of flight and evasion, predatory elites, and a mechanics of regulation and control.

All this highlights the pressing need for another project: one which will ask, If many political entities we are used to seeing as states, at least in any Weberian sense, are not, then what are they? And what does that imply about political possibilities?

In a way it's kind of amazing that such a theoretical literature doesn't already exist. It's yet another sign, I guess, of how hard it is for us to think outside the statist framework. An excellent case in point: one of the most consistent demands of "anti-globalization" activists has been for the elimination of border restrictions. If we're to globalize, we say, let's get serious about it. Eliminate national borders. Let people come and go as they please, and live wherever they like. The demand is often phrased in terms of some notion of global citizenship. But this inspires immediate objections: doesn't a call for "global citizenship" mean calling for some kind of global state? Would we really want that? So then the question becomes how do we theorize a citizenship outside the state. This is often treated as a profound, perhaps insurmountable, dilemma; but

if one considers the matter historically, it's hard to understand why it should be. Modern Western notions of citizenship and political freedoms are usually seen to derive from two traditions, one originating in ancient Athens, the other primarily stemming from medieval England (where it tends to be traced back to the assertion of aristocratic privilege against the Crown in the Magna Carta, Petition of Right, etc., and then the gradual extension of these same rights to the rest of the population). In fact there is no consensus among historians that either classical Athens or medieval England were states at all—and moreover, precisely for the reason that citizens' rights in the first, and aristocratic privilege in the second, were so well established. It is hard to think of Athens as a state, with a monopoly of force by the state apparatus, if one considers that the minimal government apparatus which did exist consisted entirely of slaves, owned collectively by the citizenry. Athens' police force consisted of Scythian archers imported from what's now Russia or Ukraine, and something of their legal standing might be gleaned from the fact that, by Athenian law, a slave's testimony was not admissible as evidence in court unless it was obtained under torture.

So what do we call such entities? "Chiefdoms"? One might conceivably be able to describe King John as a "chief" in the technical, evolutionary sense, but applying the term to Pericles does seem absurd. Neither can we continue to call ancient Athens a "city-state" if it wasn't a state at all. It seems we just don't have the intellectual tools to talk about such things. The same goes for the typology of types of state, or state-like entities in

more recent times: an historian named Spruyt has suggested that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the territorial nation-state was hardly the only game in town; there were other possibilities (Italian city-states, which actually were states; the Hanseatic league of confederated mercantile centers, which involved an entirely different conception of sovereignty) which didn't happen to win out—at least, right away—but were no less intrinsically viable. I have myself suggested that one reason the territorial nation-state ended up winning out was because, in this early stage of globalization, Western elites were trying to model themselves on China, the only state in existence at the time which actually seemed to conform to their ideal of a uniform population, who in Confucian terms were the source of sovereignty, creators of a vernacular literature, subject to a uniform code of laws, administered by bureaucrats chosen by merit, trained in that vernacular literature... With the current crisis of the nation-state and rapid increase in international institutions which are not exactly states, but in many ways just as obnoxious, juxtaposed against attempts to create international institutions which do many of the same things as states but would be considerably less obnoxious, the lack of such a body of theory is becoming a genuine crisis.

3) YET ANOTHER THEORY OF CAPITALISM

One is loathe to suggest this but the endless drive to naturalize capitalism by reducing it to a matter of commercial calculation, which then allows one to claim it is as old as Sumer, just screams out for

it. At the very least we need a proper theory of the history of wage labor, and relations like it. Since after all, it is in performing wage labor, not in buying and selling, that most humans now waste away most of their waking hours and it is that which makes them miserable. (Hence the IWW didn't say they were "anti-capitalist," much though they were; they got right to the point and said they were "against the wage system.") The earliest wage labor contracts we have on record appear to be really about the rental of slaves. What about a model of capitalism that sets out from that? Where anthropologists like Jonathan Friedman argue that ancient slavery was really just an older version of capitalism, we could just as easily—actually, a lot more easily—argue that modern capitalism is really just a newer version of slavery. Instead of people selling us or renting us out we rent out ourselves. But it's basically the same sort of arrangement.

4) POWER/IGNORANCE, or POWER/STUPIDITY

Academics love Michel Foucault's argument that identifies knowledge and power, and insists that brute force is no longer a major factor in social control. They love it because it flatters them: the perfect formula for people who like to think of themselves as political radicals even though all they do is write essays likely to be read by a few dozen other people in an institutional environment. Of course, if any of these academics were to walk into their university library to consult some volume of Foucault without having remembered to bring a valid ID, and decided to enter the stacks anyway, they would soon discover that brute force is really

central bank issued notes based largely on speculation that collapsed the moment investors lost faith. Smith supported the use of paper money, but like Locke before him, he also believed that the relative success of the Bank of England and Bank of Scotland had been due to their policy of pegging paper money firmly to precious metals. This became the mainstream economic view, so much so that alternative theories of money as credit—the one that Mitchell-Innes advocated—were quickly relegated to the margins, their proponents written off as cranks. They were dismissed as the very sort of thinking that led to bad banks and speculative bubbles in the first place.

It might be helpful, then, to consider what these alternative theories actually were.

State and Credit Theories of Money

Mitchell-Innes was an exponent of what came to be known as the Credit Theory of money, a position that over the course of the nineteenth century had its most avid proponents not in Mitchell-Innes's native Britain but in the two up-and-coming rival powers of the day, the United States and Germany. Credit Theorists insisted that money is not a commodity but an accounting tool. In other words, it is not a "thing" at all. For a Credit Theorist can no more touch a dollar or a deutschmark than you can touch an hour or a cubic centimeter. Units of currency are merely abstract units of measurement, and as the credit theorists correctly noted, historically, such abstract systems of accounting emerged long before the use of any particular token of exchange.[9]

The obvious next question is: If money is a just a yardstick, what then does it measure? The answer was simple: debt. A coin is, effectively, an IOU. Whereas conventional wisdom holds that a banknote is, or should be, a promise to pay a certain amount of "real money" (gold, silver, whatever that might be taken to mean), Credit Theorists argued that a banknote is simply the promise to pay *something* of the same value as an ounce of gold. But that's all that

money ever is. There's no fundamental difference in this respect between a silver dollar, a Susan B. Anthony dollar coin made of a copper-nickel alloy designed to look vaguely like gold, a green piece of paper with a picture of George Washington on it, or a digital blip on some bank's computer. Conceptually, the idea that a piece of gold is really just an IOU is always rather difficult to wrap one's head around, but something like this must be true, because even when gold and silver coins were in use, they almost never circulated at their bullion value.

How could credit money come about? Let us return to the economics professors' imaginary town. Say, for example, that Joshua were to give his shoes to Henry, and, rather than Henry owing him a favor, Henry promises him something of equivalent value.[10] Henry gives Joshua an IOU. Joshua could wait for Henry to have something useful and then redeem it. In that case Henry would rip up the IOU and the story would be over. But say Joshua were to pass the IOU on to a third party—Sheila—to whom he owes something else. He could tick it off against his debt to a fourth party, Lola—now Henry will owe that amount to her. Hence, money is born, because there's no logical end to it. Say Sheila now wishes to acquire a pair of shoes from Edith; she can just hand Edith the IOU and assure her that Henry is good for it. In principle, there's no reason that the IOU could not continue circulating around town for years—provided people continue to have faith in Henry. In fact, if it goes on long enough, people might forget about the issuer entirely. Things like this do happen. The anthropologist Keith Hart once told me a story about his brother, who in the '50s was a British soldier stationed in Hong Kong. Soldiers used to pay their bar tabs by writing checks on accounts back in England. Local merchants would often simply endorse them over to each other and pass them around as currency: once, he saw one of his own checks, written six months before, on the counter of a local vendor covered with about forty different tiny inscriptions in Chinese.

What credit theorists like Mitchell-Innes were arguing is that even if Henry gave Joshua a gold coin instead of a piece of paper, the situation would be essentially the same. A gold coin is a promise to

pay something else of equivalent value to a gold coin. After all, a gold coin is not actually useful in itself. One only accepts it because one assumes other people will.

In this sense, the value of a unit of currency is not the measure of the value of an object, but the measure of one's trust in other human beings.

This element of trust of course makes everything more complicated. Early banknotes circulated via a process almost exactly like what I've just described, except that, like the Chinese merchants, each recipient added his or her signature to guarantee the debt's legitimacy. But generally, the difficulty in the Chartalist position—this is what it came to be called, from the Latin *charta*, or token—is to establish why people would continue to trust a piece of paper. After all, why couldn't anyone just sign Henry's name on an IOU? True, this sort of debt-token system might work within a small village where everyone knew one another, or even among a more dispersed community like sixteenth-century Italian or twentieth-century Chinese merchants, where everyone at least had ways of keeping track of everybody else. But systems like these cannot create a full-blown currency system, and there's no evidence that they ever have. Providing a sufficient number of IOUs to allow everyone even in a medium-sized city to be able to carry out a significant portion of their daily transactions in such currency would require millions of tokens.[11] To be able to guarantee all of them, Henry would have to be almost unimaginably rich.

All this would be much less of a problem, however, if Henry were, say, Henry II, King of England, Duke of Normandy, Lord of Ireland, and Count of Anjou.

The real impetus for the Chartalist position, in fact, came out of what came to be known as the "German Historical School," whose most famous exponent was the historian G.F. Knapp, whose *State Theory of Money* first appeared in 1905.[12] If money is simply a unit of measure, it makes sense that emperors and kings should concern themselves with such matters. Emperors and kings are almost always concerned to established uniform systems of weights and measures throughout their kingdoms. It is also true, as Knapp

observed, that once established, such systems tend to remain remarkably stable over time. During the reign of the actual Henry II (1154–1189), just about everyone in Western Europe was still keeping their accounts using the monetary system established by Charlemagne some 350 years earlier—that is, using pounds, shillings, and pence—despite the fact that some of these coins had never existed (Charlemagne never actually struck a silver pound), none of Charlemagne's actual shillings and pence remained in circulation, and those coins that did circulate tended to vary enormously in size, weight, purity, and value.[13] According to the Chartalists, this doesn't really matter. What matters is that there is a uniform system for measuring credits and debts, and that this system remains stable over time. The case of Charlemagne's currency is particularly dramatic because his actual empire dissolved quite quickly, but the monetary system he created continued to be used for keeping accounts within his former territories for more than 800 years. It was referred to, in the sixteenth century, quite explicitly as "imaginary money," and derniers and livres were only completely abandoned as units of account around the time of the French Revolution.[14]

According to Knapp, whether or not the actual, physical money stuff in circulation corresponds to this "imaginary money" is not particularly important. It makes no real difference whether it's pure silver, debased silver, leather tokens, or dried cod—provided the state is willing to accept it in payment of taxes. Because whatever the state was willing to accept, for that reason, became currency. One of the most important forms of currency in England in Henry's time were notched "tally sticks" used to record debts. Tally sticks were quite explicitly IOUs: both parties to a transaction would take a hazelwood twig, notch it to indicate the amount owed, and then split it in half. The creditor would keep one half, called "the stock" (hence the origin of the term "stock holder") and the debtor kept the other, called "the stub" (hence the origin of the term "ticket stub.") Tax assessors used such twigs to calculate amounts owed by local sheriffs. Often, though, rather than wait for the taxes to come due, Henry's exchequer would often sell the tallies at a discount,

and they would circulate, as tokens of debt owed to the government, to anyone willing to trade for them.[15]

Modern banknotes actually work on a similar principle, except in reverse.[16] Recall here the little parable about Henry's IOU. The reader might have noticed one puzzling aspect of the equation: the IOU can operate as money only as long as Henry never pays his debt. In fact this is precisely the logic on which the Bank of England—the first successful modern central bank—was originally founded. In 1694, a consortium of English bankers made a loan of £1,200,000 to the king. In return they received a royal monopoly on the issuance of banknotes. What this meant in practice was they had the right to advance IOUs for a portion of the money the king now owed them to any inhabitant of the kingdom willing to borrow from them, or willing to deposit their own money in the bank—in effect, to circulate or "monetize" the newly created royal debt. This was a great deal for the bankers (they got to charge the king 8 percent annual interest for the original loan and simultaneously charge interest on the same money to the clients who borrowed it), but it only worked as long as the original loan remained outstanding. To this day, this loan has never been paid back. It cannot be. If it ever were, the entire monetary system of Great Britain would cease to exist.[17]

If nothing else, this approach helps solve one of the obvious mysteries of the fiscal policy of so many early kingdoms: Why did they make subjects pay taxes at all? This is not a question we're used to asking. The answer seems self-evident. Governments demand taxes because they wish to get their hands on people's money. But if Smith was right, and gold and silver became money through the natural workings of the market completely independently of governments, then wouldn't the obvious thing be to just grab control of the gold and silver mines? Then the king would have all the money he could possibly need. In fact, this is what ancient kings would normally do. If there were gold and silver mines in their territory, they would usually take control of them. So what exactly was the point of extracting the gold, stamping one's

picture on it, causing it to circulate among one's subjects—and then demanding that those same subjects give it back again?

This does seem a bit of a puzzle. But if money and markets do not emerge spontaneously, it actually makes perfect sense. Because this is the simplest and most efficient way to bring markets into being. Let us take a hypothetical example. Say a king wishes to support a standing army of fifty thousand men. Under ancient or medieval conditions, feeding such a force was an enormous problem. Such a force would likely consume anything edible within ten miles of their camp in as many days; unless they were on the march, one would need to employ almost as many men and animals just to locate, acquire, and transport the necessary provisions.[18] On the other hand, if one simply hands out coins to the soldiers and then demands that every family in the kingdom was obliged to pay one of those coins back to you, one would, in one blow, turn one's entire national economy into a vast machine for the provisioning of soldiers, since now every family, in order to get their hands on the coins, must find some way to contribute to the general effort to provide soldiers with things they want. Markets are brought into existence as a side effect.

This is a bit of a cartoon version, but it is very clear that markets did spring up around ancient armies; one need only take a glance at Kautilya's *Arthasasatra*, the Sassanian "circle of sovereignty," or the Chinese "Discourses on Salt and Iron" to discover that most ancient rulers spent a great deal of their time thinking about the relation between mines, soldiers, taxes, and food. Most concluded that the creation of markets of this sort was not just convenient for feeding soldiers, but useful in all sorts of ways, since it meant officials no longer had to requisition everything they needed directly from the populace or figure out a way to produce it on royal estates or royal workshops. In other words, despite the dogged liberal assumption—again, coming from Smith's legacy—that the existence of states and markets are somehow opposed, the historical record implies that exactly the opposite is the case. Stateless societies tend also to be without markets.

As one might imagine, state theories of money have always been anathema to mainstream economists working in the tradition of Adam Smith. In fact, Chartalism has tended to be seen as a populist underside of economic theory, favored mainly by cranks.[19] The curious thing is that the mainstream economists often ended up actually working for governments and advising such governments to pursue policies much like those the Chartalists described—that is, tax policies designed to create markets where they had not existed before—despite the fact that they were in theory committed to Smith's argument that markets develop spontaneously of their own accord.

This was particularly true in the colonial world. To return to Madagascar for a moment: I have already mentioned that one of the first things that the French general Gallieni, conqueror of Madagascar, did when the conquest of the island was complete in 1901 was to impose a head tax. Not only was this tax quite high, it was also only payable in newly issued Malagasy francs. In other words, Gallieni did indeed print money and then demand that everyone in the country give some of that money back to him.

Most striking of all, though, was language he used to describe this tax. It was referred to as the "*impôt moralisateur*," the "educational" or "moralizing tax." In other words, it was designed—to adopt the language of the day—to teach the natives the value of work. Since the "educational tax" came due shortly after harvest time, the easiest way for farmers to pay it was to sell a portion of their rice crop to the Chinese or Indian merchants who soon installed themselves in small towns across the country. However, harvest was when the market price of rice was, for obvious reasons, at its lowest; if one sold too much of one's crop, that meant one would not have enough left to feed one's family for the entire year, and thus be forced to buy one's own rice back, on credit, from those same merchants later in the year when prices were much higher. As a result, farmers quickly fell hopelessly into debt (the merchants doubling as loan sharks). The easiest way to pay back the debt was either to find some kind of cash crop to sell—to start growing coffee, or pineapples—or else to send one's children off to work for

wages in the city or on one of the plantations that French colonists were establishing across the island. The whole project might seem no more than a cynical scheme to squeeze cheap labor out of the peasantry, and it was that, but it was also something more. The colonial government was also quite explicit (at least in their own internal policy documents) about the need to make sure that peasants had at least some money of their own left over, and to ensure that they became accustomed to the minor luxuries—parasols, lipstick, cookies—available at the Chinese shops. It was crucial that they develop new tastes, habits, and expectations; that they lay the foundations of a consumer demand that would endure long after the conquerors had left, and keep Madagascar forever tied to France.

Most people are not stupid, and most Malagasy understood exactly what their conquerors were trying to do to them. Some were determined to resist. More than sixty years after the invasion, a French anthropologist, Gerard Althabe, was able to observe villages on the east coast of the island whose inhabitants would dutifully show up at the coffee plantations to earn the money for their poll tax and then, having paid it, studiously ignore the wares for sale at the local shops and instead turn over any remaining money to lineage elders, who would then use it to buy cattle for sacrifice to their ancestors.[20] Many were quite open in saying that they saw themselves as resisting a trap.

Still, such defiance rarely lasts forever. Markets did gradually take shape, even in those parts of the island where none had previously existed. With them came the inevitable network of little shops. And by the time I got there, in 1990, a generation after the poll tax had finally been abolished by a revolutionary government, the logic of the market had become so intuitively accepted that even spirit mediums were reciting passages that might as well have come from Adam Smith.

Such examples could be multiplied endlessly. Something like this occurred in just about every part of the world conquered by European arms where markets were not already in place. Rather than discovering barter, they ended up using the very techniques

that mainstream economics rejected to bring something like the market into being.

In Search of a Myth

Anthropologists have been complaining about the Myth of Barter for almost a century. Occasionally, economists point out with slight exasperation that there's a fairly simple reason why they're still telling the same story despite all the evidence against it: anthropologists have never come up with a better one.[21] This is an understandable objection, but there's a simple answer to it. The reasons why anthropologists haven't been able to come up with a simple, compelling story for the origins of money is because there's no reason to believe there could be one. Money was no more ever "invented" than music or mathematics or jewelry. What we call "money" isn't a "thing" at all; it's a way of comparing things mathematically, as proportions: of saying one of X is equivalent to six of Y. As such it is probably as old as human thought. The moment we try to get any more specific, we discover that there are any number of different habits and practices that have converged in the stuff we now call "money," and this is precisely the reason why economists, historians, and the rest have found it so difficult to come up with a single definition.

Credit Theorists have long been hobbled by the lack of an equally compelling narrative. This is not to say that all sides in the currency debates that ranged between 1850 and 1950 were not in the habit of deploying mythological weaponry. This was true particularly, perhaps, in the United States. In 1894, the Greenbackers, who pushed for detaching the dollar from gold entirely to allow the government to spend freely on job-creation campaigns, invented the idea of the March on Washington—an idea that was to have endless resonance in U.S. history. L. Frank Baum's book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which appeared in 1900, is often held to be a parable for the Populist campaign of William Jennings Bryan, who twice ran for president on the Free Silver platform—vowing to replace the

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Why the State Has No Origin

The humble beginnings of sovereignty, bureaucracy and politics

The quest for the 'origins of the state' is almost as long-standing, and hotly contested, as the pursuit of the 'origins of social inequality' – and in many ways, it is just as much of a fool's errand. It is generally accepted that, today, pretty much everyone in the world lives under the authority of a state; likewise, a broad feeling exists that past polities such as Pharaonic Egypt, Shang China, the Inca Empire or the kingdom of Benin qualify as states, or at least as 'early states'. However, with no consensus among social theorists about what a state actually is, the problem is how to come up with a definition that includes all these cases but isn't so broad as to be absolutely meaningless. This has proved surprisingly hard to do.

Our term 'the state' only came into common usage in the late sixteenth century, when it was coined by a French lawyer named Jean Bodin, who also wrote, among many other things, an influential treatise on witchcraft, werewolves and the history of sorcerers. (He is further remembered today for his profound hatred of women.) But perhaps the first to attempt a systematic definition was a German philosopher named Rudolf von Ihering, who, in the late nineteenth century, proposed that a state should be defined as any institution that claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of coercive force within a given territory (this definition has since come to be identified with the sociologist Max Weber). On this definition, a government is a 'state' if it lays claim to a certain stretch of land and insists that, within its borders, it is the only institution whose agents can kill people, beat them up, cut off parts of their body or lock them in cages; or, as von Ihering emphasized, that can decide who else has the right to do so on its behalf.

Von Ihering's definition worked fairly well for modern states. However, it soon became clear that for most of human history, rulers either didn't

make such grandiose claims – or, if they did, their claims to a monopoly on coercive force held about the same status as their claims to control the tides or the weather. To retain von Ihering and Weber's definition one would either have to conclude that, say, Hammurabi's Babylon, Socrates' Athens or England under William the Conqueror weren't states at all – or come up with a more flexible or nuanced definition. Marxists offered one: they suggested that states make their first appearance in history to protect the power of an emerging ruling class. As soon as one has a group of people living routinely off the labour of another, the argument ran, they will necessarily create an apparatus of rule, officially to protect their property rights, in reality to preserve their advantage (a line of thinking very much in the tradition of Rousseau). This definition brought Babylon, Athens and medieval England back into the fold, but also introduced new conceptual problems, such as how to define exploitation. And it was unpalatable to liberals, ruling out any possibility that the state could ever become a benevolent institution.

For much of the twentieth century, social scientists preferred to define a state in more purely functional terms. As society became more complex, they argued, it was increasingly necessary for people to create top-down structures of command in order to co-ordinate everything. This same logic is still followed in essence by most contemporary theorists of social evolution. Evidence of 'social complexity' is automatically treated as evidence for the existence of some sort of governing apparatus. If one can speak, say, of a settlement hierarchy with four levels (e.g. cities, towns, villages, hamlets), and if at least some of those settlements also contained full-time craft specialists (potters, blacksmiths, monks and nuns, professional soldiers or musicians), then whatever apparatus administered it must *ipso facto* be a state. And even if that apparatus did not claim a monopoly of force, or support a class of elites living off the toil of benighted labourers, this was inevitably going to happen sooner or later. This definition, too, has its advantages, especially when speculating about very ancient societies, whose nature and organization has to be teased out from fragmentary remains; but its logic is entirely circular. Basically, all it says is that, since states are complicated, any complicated social arrangement must therefore be a state.

Actually, almost all these 'classic' theoretical formulations of the last century started off from exactly this assumption: that any large and complex

society necessarily required a state. The real bone of contention was, why? Was it for good practical reasons? Or was it because any such society would necessarily produce a material surplus, and if there was a material surplus – like, for instance, all that smoked fish on the Pacific Northwest Coast – then there would also, necessarily, be people who managed to grab hold of a disproportionate share?

As we've already seen in Chapter Eight, these assumptions don't hold up particularly well for the earliest cities. Early Uruk, for example, does not appear to have been a 'state' in any meaningful sense of the word; what's more, when top-down rule does emerge in the region of ancient Mesopotamia, it's not in the 'complex' metropolises of the lowland river valleys, but among the small, 'heroic' societies of the surrounding foothills, which were averse to the very principle of administration and, as a result, don't seem to qualify as 'states' either. If there is a good ethnographic parallel for these latter groups it might be the societies of the Northwest Coast, since there too political leadership lay in the hands of a boastful and vainglorious warrior aristocracy, competing in extravagant contests over titles, treasures, the allegiance of commoners and the ownership of slaves. Recall, here, that Haida, Tlingit and the rest not only lacked anything that could be called a state apparatus; they lacked any kind of formal governmental institutions.[1]

One might then argue that 'states' first emerged when the two forms of governance (bureaucratic and heroic) merged together. A case could be made. But equally we might ask if this is really such a significant issue in the first place? If it is possible to have monarchs, aristocracies, slavery and extreme forms of patriarchal domination, even without a state (as it evidently was); and if it's equally possible to maintain complex irrigation systems, or develop science and abstract philosophy without a state (as it also appears to be), then what do we actually learn about human history by establishing that one political entity is what we would like to describe as a 'state' and another isn't? Are there not more interesting and important questions we could be asking?

In this chapter we are going to explore the possibility that there are. What would history look like if – instead of assuming that there must be some deep internal resemblance between the governments of, say, ancient Egypt and modern Britain, and our task is therefore to figure out precisely what it is – we were to look at the whole problem with new eyes. There is no doubt

that, in most of the areas that saw the rise of cities, powerful kingdoms and empires also eventually emerged. What did they have in common? Did they, in fact, have anything in common? What does their appearance really tell us about the history of human freedom and equality, or its loss? In what way, if any, do they mark a fundamental break with what came before?

IN WHICH WE LAY OUT A THEORY CONCERNING THE THREE ELEMENTARY FORMS OF DOMINATION, AND BEGIN TO EXPLORE ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN HISTORY

The best way to go about this task, we suggest, is by returning to first principles. We have already talked about fundamental, even primary, forms of freedom: the freedom to move; the freedom to disobey orders; the freedom to reorganize social relations. Can we speak similarly about elementary forms of domination?

Recall how Rousseau, in his famous thought experiment, felt that everything went back to private property, and especially property in land: in that terrible moment when a man first threw up a barrier and said, 'This territory is mine, and mine alone', all subsequent forms of domination – and therefore, all subsequent catastrophes – became inevitable. As we've seen, this obsession with property rights as the basis of society, and as a foundation of social power, is a peculiarly Western phenomenon – indeed, if 'the West' has any real meaning, it would probably refer to that legal and intellectual tradition which conceives society in those terms. So, to begin a thought experiment of a slightly different kind, it might be good to start right here. What are we really saying when we say that the power of a feudal aristocracy, or a landed gentry, or absentee landlords is 'based on land'?

Often we use such language as a way of cutting through airy abstractions or high-minded pretensions to address simple material realities. For example, the two dominant political parties in nineteenth-century England, the Whigs and the Tories, liked to represent themselves as arguing about ideas: a certain conception of free-market liberalism versus a certain notion of tradition. An historical materialist might object that, in fact, Whigs represented the interests of the commercial classes, and the Tories those of the landowners. They are of course right. It would be foolhardy to deny it. What we might question, however, is the premise that 'landed' (or any other

form of) property is itself particularly material. Yes: soil, stones, grass, hedges, farm buildings and granaries are all material things; but when one speaks of 'landed property' what one is really talking about is an individual's claim to exclusive access and control over all the soil, stones, grass, hedges, etc. within a specific territory. In practice, this means a legal right to keep anyone else off it. Land is only really 'yours', in this sense, if no one would think to challenge your claim over it, or if you have the capacity to summon at will people with weapons to threaten or attack anyone who disagrees, or just enters without permission and refuses to leave. Even if you shoot the trespassers yourself, you still need others to agree you were within your rights to do so. In other words, 'landed property' is not actual soil, rocks or grass. It is a legal understanding, maintained by a subtle mix of morality and the threat of violence. In fact, land ownership illustrates perfectly the logic of what Rudolf von Ihering called the state's monopoly of violence within a territory – just within a much smaller territory than a nation state.

All this might sound a little abstract, but it is a simple description of what happens in reality, as any reader who has ever tried to squat a piece of land, occupy a building or for that matter overthrow a government will be keenly aware. Ultimately, everyone knows it all comes down to whether someone will eventually be given orders to remove you by force, and if it does, then everything comes down to whether that someone is actually willing to follow orders. Revolutions are rarely won in open combat. When revolutionaries win, it's usually because the bulk of those sent to crush them refuse to shoot, or just go home.

So does that mean property, like political power, ultimately derives (as Chairman Mao so delicately put it) 'from the barrel of a gun' – or, at best, from the ability to command the loyalties of those trained to use them?

No. Or not exactly.

To illustrate why not, and continue our thought experiment, let's take a different sort of property. Consider a diamond necklace. If Kim Kardashian walks down the street in Paris wearing a diamond necklace worth millions of dollars, she is not only showing off her wealth, she is also flaunting her power over violence, since everyone assumes she would not be able to do so without the existence, visible or not, of an armed personal security detail, trained to deal with potential thieves. Property rights of all sorts are ultimately backed up by what legal theorists like von Ihering

euphemistically called ‘force’. But let us imagine, for a moment, what would happen if everyone on earth were suddenly to become physically invulnerable. Say they all drank a potion which made it impossible for anyone to harm anyone else. Could Kim Kardashian still maintain exclusive rights over her jewellery?

Well, perhaps not if she showed it off too regularly, since someone would presumably snatch it; but she certainly could if she normally kept it hidden in a safe, the combination of which she alone knew and only revealed to trusted audiences at events which were not announced in advance. So there is a second way of ensuring that one has access to rights others do not have: the control of information. Only Kim and her closest confidants know where the diamonds are normally kept, or when she is likely to appear wearing them. This obviously applies to all forms of property that are ultimately backed up by the ‘threat of force’ – landed property, wares in stores, and so forth. If humans were incapable of hurting each other, no one would be able to declare something absolutely sacred to themselves or to defend it against ‘all the world’. They could only exclude those who agreed to be excluded.

Still, let us take the experiment a step further and imagine everyone on earth drank another potion which rendered them all incapable of keeping a secret, but still unable to harm one another physically as well. Access to information, as well as force, has now been equalized. Can Kim still keep her diamonds? Possibly. But only if she manages to convince absolutely everyone that, being Kim Kardashian, she is such a unique and extraordinary human being that she actually deserves to have things no one else can.

We would like to suggest that these three principles – call them control of violence, control of information, and individual charisma – are also the three possible bases of social power.[2] The threat of violence tends to be the most dependable, which is why it has become the basis for uniform systems of law everywhere; charisma tends to be the most ephemeral. Usually, all three coexist to some degree. Even in societies where interpersonal violence is rare, one may well find hierarchies based on knowledge. It doesn’t even particularly matter what that knowledge is about: maybe some sort of technical know-how (say, of smelting copper, or using herbal medicines); or maybe something we consider total mumbo jumbo (the names of the

twenty-seven hells and thirty-nine heavens, and what creatures one would be likely to meet if one travelled there).

Today, it is quite commonplace – for instance, in parts of Africa and Papua New Guinea – to find initiation ceremonies that are so complex as to require bureaucratic management, where initiates are gradually introduced to higher and higher levels of arcane knowledge, in societies where there are otherwise no formal ranks of any sort. Even where such hierarchies of knowledge do not exist, there will obviously always be individual differences. Some people will be considered more charming, funny, intelligent or physically attractive than others. This will always make some sort of difference, even within groups that develop elaborate safeguards to ensure that it doesn't (as, for instance, with the ritual mockery of successful hunters among 'egalitarian' foragers like the Hadza).

As we've noted, an egalitarian ethos can take one of two directions: it can either deny such individual quirks entirely, and insist that people are (or at least should be) treated as if they were exactly the same; or it can celebrate their quirks in such a way as to imply that everyone is so profoundly different that any overall ranking would be inconceivable. (After all, how do you measure the best fisherman against the most dignified elder, against the person who tells the funniest jokes, and so on?). In such cases, it might happen that certain 'extreme individuals' – if we may call them that – do gain an outstanding, even leadership role. Here we might think of Nuer prophets, or certain Amazonian shamans, Malagasy *mpomasy* or astrologer-magicians, or for that matter the 'rich' burials of the Upper Palaeolithic, which so often focus on individuals with strikingly anomalous physical (and probably other) attributes. As those examples imply, however, such characters are so highly unusual that it would be difficult to turn their authority into any sort of ongoing power.

What really concerns us about these three principles is that each has become the basis for institutions now seen as foundational to the modern state. In the case of control over violence, this is obvious. Modern states are 'sovereign': they hold the power once held by kings, which in practice translates into von Ihering's monopoly on the legitimate use of coercive force within their territory. In theory, a true sovereign exercised a power that was above and beyond the law. Ancient kings were rarely able to enforce this power systematically (often, as we've seen, their supposedly absolute power really just meant they were the only people who could mete

out arbitrary violence within about 100 yards of where they were standing or sitting at any given time). In modern states, the very same kind of power is multiplied a thousand times because it is combined with the second principle: bureaucracy. As Weber, the great sociologist of bureaucracy, observed long ago, administrative organizations are always based not just on control of information, but also on 'official secrets' of one sort or another. This is why the secret agent has become the mythic symbol of the modern state. James Bond, with his licence to kill, combines charisma, secrecy and the power to use unaccountable violence, underpinned by a great bureaucratic machine.

The combination of sovereignty with sophisticated administrative techniques for storing and tabulating information introduces all sorts of threats to individual freedom – it makes possible surveillance states and totalitarian regimes – but this danger, we are always assured, is offset by a third principle: democracy. Modern states are democratic, or at least it's generally felt they really should be. Yet democracy, in modern states, is conceived very differently to, say, the workings of an assembly in an ancient city, which collectively deliberated on common problems. Rather, democracy as we have come to know it is effectively a game of winners and losers played out among larger-than-life individuals, with the rest of us reduced largely to onlookers.

If we are seeking an ancient precedent to *this* aspect of modern democracy, we shouldn't turn to the assemblies of Athens, Syracuse or Corinth, but instead – paradoxically – to aristocratic contests of 'heroic ages', such as those described in the *Iliad* with its endless *agons*: races, duels, games, gifts and sacrifices. As we noted in Chapter Nine, the political philosophers of later Greek cities did not actually consider elections a democratic way of selecting candidates for public office at all. The democratic method was sortition, or lottery, much like modern jury duty. Elections were assumed to belong to the aristocratic mode (aristocracy meaning 'rule of the best'), allowing commoners – much like the retainers in an old-fashioned, heroic aristocracy – to decide who among the well born should be considered best of all; and well born, in this context, simply meant all those who could afford to spend much of their time playing at politics.[3]

Just as access to violence, information and charisma defines the very possibilities of social domination, so the modern state is defined as a

combination of sovereignty, bureaucracy and a competitive political field.[4] It seems only natural, then, that we should examine history in this light too; but as soon as we try to do so, we realize there is no actual reason why these three principles should go together, let alone reinforce each other in the precise fashion we have come to expect from governments today. For one thing, the three elementary forms of domination have entirely separate historical origins. We've already seen this in ancient Mesopotamia, where initially the bureaucratic-commercial societies of the river valleys existed in tension with the heroic polities of the hills and their endless petty princelings, vying for the loyalty of retainers through spectacular contests of one sort or another; while the hill people, in turn, rejected the very principle of administration.

Nor is there any compelling evidence that ancient Mesopotamian cities, even when ruled by royal dynasties, achieved any measure of real territorial sovereignty, so we are still a long way here from anything like an embryonic version of the modern state.[5] In other words, they simply weren't states in von Ihering's sense of the term; and even if they had been, it makes little sense to define a state simply in terms of sovereignty. Recall the example of the Natchez of Louisiana, whose Great Sun wielded absolute power within his own (rather small) Great Village, where he could order summary executions and appropriate goods pretty much as he had a mind to, but whose subjects largely ignored him when he wasn't around. The divine kingship of the Shilluk, a Nilotic people of East Africa, worked on similar lines: there were very few limits on what the king could do to those in his physical presence, but there was also nothing remotely resembling an administrative apparatus to translate his sovereign power into something more stable or extensive: no tax system, no system to enforce royal orders, or even report on whether or not they had been obeyed.

As we can now begin to see, modern states are, in fact, an amalgam of elements that happen to have come together at a certain point in human history – and, arguably, are now in the process of coming apart again (consider, for instance, how we currently have planetary bureaucracies, such as the WTO or IMF, with no corresponding principle of global sovereignty). When historians, philosophers or political scientists argue about the origin of the state in ancient Peru or China, what they are really doing is projecting that rather unusual constellation of elements backwards: typically, by trying to find a moment when something like sovereign power

came together with something like an administrative system (the competitive political field is usually considered somewhat optional). What interests them is precisely how and why these elements came together in the first place.

For instance, a standard story of human political evolution told by earlier generations of scholars was that states arose from the need to manage complex irrigation systems, or perhaps just large concentrations of people and information. This gave rise to top-down power, which in turn came to be tempered, eventually, by democratic institutions. That would imply a sequence of development somewhat like this:

Administration ⟶ *Sovereignty* ⟶ *(eventually) Charismatic Politics*

As we showed in Chapter Eight, contemporary evidence from ancient Eurasia now points to a different pattern, where urban administrative systems inspire a cultural counter-reaction (a further example of schismogenesis), in the form of squabbling highland princedoms ('barbarians', from the perspective of the city dwellers),[6] which eventually leads to some of those princes establishing themselves in cities and systematizing their power:

Administration ⟶ *Charismatic Politics* ⟶ *Sovereignty*
(by schismogenesis)

This may well have happened in some cases – Mesopotamia, for example – but it seems unlikely to be the only way in which such developments might culminate in something that (to us at least) resembles a state. In other places and times – often in moments of crisis – the process may begin with the elevation to pre-eminent roles of charismatic individuals who inspire their followers to make a radical break with the past. Eventually, such figureheads assume a kind of absolute, cosmic authority, which is finally translated into a system of bureaucratic roles and offices.[7] The path then might look more like this:

Charismatic vision ⟶ *Sovereignty* ⟶ *Administration*

What we are challenging here is not any particular formulation, but the underlying teleology. All these accounts seem to assume that there is only

one possible end point to this process: that these various types of domination were somehow bound to come together, sooner or later, in something like the particular form taken by modern nation states in America and France at the end of the eighteenth century, a form which was gradually imposed on the rest of the world after both world wars.

What if this wasn't true?

What we are going to do here is to see what happens if we approach the history of some of the world's first kingdoms and empires without any such preconceptions. Along with the origins of the state, we will also be putting aside such similarly vague and teleological notions as the 'birth of civilization' or the 'rise of social complexity' in order to take a closer look at what actually happened. How did large-scale forms of domination first emerge, and what did they actually look like? What, if anything, do they have to do with arrangements that endure to this day?

Let's start by examining those few cases in the pre-Columbian Americas which even the greatest sticklers for definition tend to agree were 'states' of some kind.

ON AZTECS, INCA AND MAYA (AND THEN ALSO SPANIARDS)

The general consensus is that there were only two unambiguous 'states' in the Americas at the time of the Spanish conquest: the Aztecs and the Inca. Of course, that is not how the Spanish would have referred to them. Hernán Cortés, in his letters and communications, wrote of cities, kingdoms and occasionally republics. He hesitated to refer to the Aztec ruler, Moctezuma, as an 'emperor' – presumably so as not to risk ruffling the feathers of his own lord, the 'most Catholic emperor Charles V'. But it would never have occurred to him to ponder whether any of these kingdoms or cities qualified as 'states', since the concept barely existed at the time. Nonetheless, this is the question which has preoccupied modern scholars, so let us consider each of these polities in turn.

We will begin with an anecdote, recorded in a Spanish source not long after the *conquista*, about the raising of children in the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, shortly before it fell to Spanish forces: 'at birth boys were given a shield with four arrows. The midwife prayed that they might be courageous warriors. They were presented four times to the sun and told of

For a discussion of 'State'

Excerpt: pp.62-71 'Tenets of a Non-Existent Science'

- Graeber, David (2004) *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press

Excerpt: pp.46-52 'State and Credit Theories of Money'

- Graeber, David (2011) *Debt: The First Five Thousand Years* London, Brooklyn: Melville House

Excerpt: pp.359-370 'Why the State has no Origin'

- Graeber, David and David Wengrow (2021) *The Dawn of Everything* UK: Penguin Random House

For a discussion on 'Democracy'

Excerpt: pp.82-95 'Democracy'

- Graeber, David (2014) *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press

Excerpt: pp.150-207 ' "The Mob Begins to Think and Reason": The Covert History of Democracy'

- Graeber, David (2014) *The Democracy Project* New York: Random House

Excerpt: pp.329-374 'There Never was a West, or Democracy Emerges from the Spaces In-between'

- Graber, David (2007) *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire* Oakland, Edinburgh: AK Press

> if revolution will probably never take such an apocalyptic form. This of course brings up the "who will do the dirty jobs?" question—one which always gets thrown at anarchists or other utopians. Peter Kropotkin long ago pointed out the fallacy of the argument. There's no particular reason dirty jobs have to exist. If one divided up the unpleasant tasks equally, that would mean all the world's top scientists and engineers would have to do them too; one could expect the creation of self-cleaning kitchens and coal-mining robots almost immediately.

All this is something of an aside though because what I really want to do in this final section is focus on:

(3) DEMOCRACY

This might give the reader a chance to have a glance at what anarchist, and anarchist-inspired, organizing is actually like—some of the contours of the new world now being built in the shell of the old—and to show what the historical-ethnographic perspective I've been trying to develop here, our non-existent science, might be able to contribute to it.

The first cycle of the new global uprising—what the press still insists on referring to, increasingly ridiculously, as "the anti-globalization movement"—began with the autonomous municipalities of Chiapas and came to a head with the *asambleas barreales* of Buenos Aires, and cities throughout Argentina. There is hardly room here to tell the whole story: beginning

with the Zapatistas' rejection of the idea of seizing power and their attempt instead to create a model of democratic self-organization to inspire the rest of Mexico; their initiation of an international network (People's Global Action, or PGA) which then put out the calls for days of action against the WTO (in Seattle), IMF (in Washington, Prague...) and so on; and finally, the collapse of the Argentine economy, and the overwhelming popular uprising which, again, rejected the very idea that one could find a solution by replacing one set of politicians with another. The slogan of the Argentine movement was, from the start, *que se vayan todas*—get rid of the lot of them. Instead of a new government they created a vast network of alternative institutions, starting with popular assemblies to govern each urban neighborhood (the only limitation on participation is that one cannot be employed by a political party), hundreds of occupied, worker-managed factories, a complex system of "barter" and newfangled alternative currency system to keep them in operation—in short, an endless variation on the theme of direct democracy.

All of this has happened completely below the radar screen of the corporate media, which also missed the point of the great mobilizations. The organization of these actions was meant to be a living illustration of what a truly democratic world might be like, from the festive puppets to the careful organization of affinity groups and spokescouncils, all operating without a leadership structure, always based on principles of consensus-based direct democracy. It was the kind of organization which most people would have, had they

simply heard it proposed, written off as a pipe-dream; but it worked, and so effectively that the police departments of city after city were completely flummoxed with how to deal with them. Of course, this also had something to do with the unprecedented tactics (hundreds of activists in fairy suits tickling police with feather dusters, or padded with so many inflatable inner tubes and rubber cushions they seemed to roll along like the Michelin man over barricades, incapable of damaging anyone else but also pretty much impervious to police batons...), which completely confused traditional categories of violence and nonviolence.

When protesters in Seattle chanted "this is what democracy looks like," they meant to be taken literally. In the best tradition of direct action, they not only confronted a certain form of power, exposing its mechanisms and attempting literally to stop it in its tracks: they did it in a way which demonstrated why the kind of social relations on which it is based were unnecessary. This is why all the condescending remarks about the movement being dominated by a bunch of dumb kids with no coherent ideology completely missed the mark. The diversity was a function of the decentralized form of organization, and this organization *was* the movement's ideology.

The key term in the new movement is "process," by which is meant, decision-making process. In North America, this is almost invariably done through some process of finding consensus. This is as I mentioned much less ideologically stifling than it may sound because the assumption behind all good consensus process is that one should not even try to

convert others to one's overall point of view; the point of consensus process is to allow a group to decide on a common course of action. Instead of voting proposals up and down, then, proposals are worked and reworked, scotched or reinvented, until one ends up with something everyone can live with. When it comes to the final stage, actually "finding consensus," there are two levels of possible objection: one can "stand aside," which is to say "I don't like this and won't participate but I wouldn't stop anyone else from doing it," or "block," which has the effect of a veto. One can only block if one feels a proposal is in violation of the fundamental principles or reasons for being of a group. One might say that the function which in the US constitution is relegated to the courts, of striking down legislative decisions that violate constitutional principles, is here relegated to anyone with the courage to actually stand up against the combined will of the group (though of course there are also ways of challenging unprincipled blocks).

One could go on at length about the elaborate and surprisingly sophisticated methods that have been developed to ensure all this works; of forms of modified consensus required for very large groups; of the way consensus itself reinforces the principle of decentralization by ensuring one doesn't really want to bring proposals before very large groups unless one has to, of means of ensuring gender equity and resolving conflict... The point is this is a form of direct democracy which is very different than the kind we usually associate with the term—or, for that matter, with the kind usually employed by European or North

American anarchists of earlier generations, or still employed, say, in urban Argentine *asambleas*. In North America, consensus process emerged more than anything else through the feminist movement, as part of broad backlash against some of the more obnoxious, self-aggrandizing macho leadership styles of the '60s New Left. Much of the procedure was originally adopted from the Quakers, and Quaker-inspired groups; the Quakers, in turn, claim to have been inspired by Native American practice. How much the latter is really true is, in historical terms, difficult to determine. Nonetheless, Native American decision-making did normally work by some form of consensus. Actually, so do most popular assemblies around the world now, from the Tzeltal or Tzotzil or Tojolobal-speaking communities in Chiapas to Malagasy *fokon'olona*. After having lived in Madagascar for two years, I was startled, the first time I started attending meetings of the Direct Action Network in New York, by how familiar it all seemed—the main difference was that the DAN process was so much more formalized and explicit. It had to be, since everyone in DAN was just figuring out how to make decisions this way, and everything had to be spelled out; whereas in Madagascar, everyone had been doing this since they learned to speak.

In fact, as anthropologists are aware, just about every known human community which has to come to group decisions has employed some variation of what I'm calling "consensus process"—every one, that is, which is not in some way or another drawing

on the tradition of ancient Greece. Majoritarian democracy, in the formal, Roberts Rules of Order-type sense rarely emerges of its own accord. It's curious that almost no one, anthropologists included, ever seems to ask oneself why this should be.

An hypothesis.
Majoritarian democracy was, in its origins, essentially a military institution.

Of course it's the peculiar bias of Western historiography that this is the only sort of democracy that is seen to count as "democracy" at all. We are usually told that democracy originated in ancient Athens—like science, or philosophy, it was a Greek invention. It's never entirely clear what this is supposed to mean. Are we supposed to believe that before the Athenians, it never really occurred to anyone, anywhere, to gather all the members of their community in order to make joint decisions in a way that gave everyone equal say? That would be ridiculous. Clearly there have been plenty of egalitarian societies in history—many far more egalitarian than Athens, many that must have existed before 500 BCE—and obviously, they must have had some kind of procedure for coming to decisions for matters of collective importance. Yet somehow, it is always assumed that these procedures, whatever they might have been, could not have been, properly speaking, "democratic."

Even scholars with otherwise impeccable radical credentials, promoters of direct democracy, have been known to bend themselves into pretzels trying to justify this attitude. Non-Western egali-

tarian communities are "kin-based," argues Murray Bookchin. (And Greece was not? Of course the Athenian agora was not itself kin-based but neither is a Malagasy *fokon'olona* or Balinese *seka*. So what?) "Some might speak of Iroquois or Berber democracy," argued Cornelius Castoriadis, "but this is an abuse of the term. These are primitive societies which assume the social order is handed to them by gods or spirits, not self-constituted by the people themselves as in Athens." (Really? In fact the "League of the Iroquois" was a treaty organization, seen as a common agreement created in historical times, and subject to constant renegotiation.) The arguments never make sense. But they don't really have to because we are not really dealing with arguments at all here, so much as with the brush of a hand.

The real reason for the unwillingness of most scholars to see a Sulawezi or Tallensi village council as "democratic"—well, aside from simple racism, the reluctance to admit anyone Westerners slaughtered with such relative impunity were quite on the level as Pericles—is that they do not vote. Now, admittedly, this is an interesting fact. Why not? If we accept the idea that a show of hands, or having everyone who supports a proposition stand on one side of the plaza and everyone against stand on the other, are not really such incredibly sophisticated ideas that they never would have occurred to anyone until some ancient genius "invented" them, then why are they so rarely employed? Again, we seem to have an example of explicit rejection. Over and over, across the world, from Australia to Siberia, egalitarian communities have preferred some variation on consensus process. Why?

The explanation I would propose is this: it is much easier, in a face-to-face community, to figure out what most members of that community want to do, than to figure out how to convince those who do not to go along with it. Consensus decision-making is typical of societies where there would be no way to compel a minority to agree with a majority decision—either because there is no state with a monopoly of coercive force, or because the state has nothing to do with local decision-making. If there is no way to compel those who find a majority decision distasteful to go along with it, then the last thing one would want to do is to hold a vote: a public contest which someone will be seen to lose. Voting would be the most likely means to guarantee humiliations, resentments, hatreds, in the end, the destruction of communities. What is seen as an elaborate and difficult process of finding consensus is, in fact, a long process of making sure no one walks away feeling that their views have been totally ignored.

Majority democracy, we might say, can only emerge when two factors coincide:

1. a feeling that people should have equal say in making group decisions, and
2. a coercive apparatus capable of enforcing those decisions.

For most of human history, it has been extremely unusual to have both at the same time. Where egalitarian societies exist, it is also usually considered wrong to impose systematic coercion. Where a machinery of coercion did exist, it did not even occur to those wielding it that they were enforcing any sort of popular will.

It is of obvious relevance that Ancient Greece was one of the most competitive societies known to history. It was a society that tended to make everything into a public contest, from athletics to philosophy or tragic drama or just about anything else. So it might not seem entirely surprising that they made political decision-making into a public contest as well. Even more crucial though was the fact that decisions were made by a populace in arms. Aristotle, in his *Politics*, remarks that the constitution of a Greek city-state will normally depend on the chief arm of its military: if this is cavalry, it will be an aristocracy, since horses are expensive. If hoplite infantry, it will have an oligarchy, as all could not afford the armor and training. If its power was based in the navy or light infantry, one could expect a democracy, as anyone can row, or use a sling. In other words if a man is armed, then one pretty much has to take his opinions into account. One can see how this worked at its starkest in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, which tells the story of an army of Greek mercenaries who suddenly find themselves leaderless and lost in the middle of Persia. They elect new officers, and then hold a collective vote to decide what to do next. In a case like this, even if the vote was 60/40, everyone could see the balance of forces and what would happen if things actually came to blows. Every vote was, in a real sense, a conquest.

Roman legions could be similarly democratic; this was the main reason they were never allowed to enter the city of Rome. And when Machiavelli revived the notion of a democratic republic at the dawn of the "modern" era, he immediately reverted to the notion of a populace in arms.

This in turn might help explain the term "democracy" itself, which appears to have been coined as something of a slur by its elitist opponents: it literally means the "force" or even "violence" of the people. *Kratos*, not *archos*. The elitists who coined the term always considered democracy not too far from simple rioting or mob rule; though of course their solution was the permanent conquest of the people by someone else. And ironically, when they did manage to suppress democracy for this reason, which was usually, the result was that the only way the general populace's will was known was precisely through rioting, a practice that became quite institutionalized in, say, imperial Rome or eighteenth-century England.

All this is not to say that direct democracies—as practiced, for example, in medieval cities or New England town meetings—were not normally orderly and dignified procedures; though one suspects that here too, in actual practice, there was a certain baseline of consensus-seeking going on. Still, it was this military undertone which allowed the authors of the *Federalist Papers*, like almost all other literate men of their day, to take it for granted that what they called "democracy"—by which they meant, direct democracy—was in its nature the most unstable, tumultuous form of government, not to mention one which endangers the rights of minorities (the specific minority they had in mind in this case being the rich). It was only once the term "democracy" could be almost completely transformed to incorporate the principle of representation—a term which itself has a very curious history, since as Cornelius Castoriadis

notes, it originally referred to representatives of the people before the king, internal ambassadors in fact, rather than those who wielded power in any sense themselves—that it was rehabilitated, in the eyes of well-born political theorists, and took on the meaning it has today.

In a sense then anarchists think all those right-wing political theorists who insist that "America is not a democracy; it's a republic" are quite correct. The difference is that anarchists have a problem with that. They think it ought to be a democracy. Though increasing numbers have come to accept that the traditional elitist criticism of majoritarian direct democracy is not entirely baseless either.

I noted earlier that all social orders are in some sense at war with themselves. Those unwilling to establish an apparatus of violence for enforcing decisions necessarily have to develop an apparatus for creating and maintaining social consensus (at least in that minimal sense of ensuring malcontents can still feel they have freely chosen to go along with bad decisions); as an apparent result, the internal war ends up projected outwards into endless night battles and forms of spectral violence. Majoritarian direct democracy is constantly threatening to make those lines of force explicit. For this reason it does tend to be rather unstable: or more precisely, if it does last, it's because its institutional forms (the medieval city, New England town council, for that matter gallup polls, referendums...) are almost invariably ensconced within a larger framework of governance in which ruling elites

use that very instability to justify their ultimate monopoly of the means of violence. Finally, the threat of this instability becomes an excuse for a form of "democracy" so minimal that it comes down to nothing more than insisting that ruling elites should occasionally consult with "the public"—in carefully staged contests, replete with rather meaningless jousts and tournaments—to reestablish their right to go on making their decisions for them.

It's a trap. Bouncing back and forth between the two ensures it will remain extremely unlikely that one could ever imagine it would be possible for people to manage their own lives, without the help of "representatives." It's for this reason the new global movement has begun by reinventing the very meaning of democracy. To do so ultimately means, once again, coming to terms with the fact that "we"—whether as "the West" (whatever that means), as the "modern world," or anything else—are not really as special as we like to think we are; that we're not the only people ever to have practiced democracy; that in fact, rather than disseminating democracy around the world, "Western" governments have been spending at least as much time inserting themselves into the lives of people who have been practicing democracy for thousands of years, and in one way or another, telling them to cut it out.

One of the most encouraging things about these new, anarchist-inspired movements is that they propose a new form of internationalism. Older, communist internationalism had some very beautiful ideals, but in organizational terms, everyone basically

flowed one way. It became a means for regimes outside Europe and its settler colonies to learn Western styles of organization: party structures, plenaries, purges, bureaucratic hierarchies, secret police... This time—the second wave of internationalism one could call it, or just, anarchist globalization—the movement of organizational forms has largely gone the other way. It's not just consensus process: the idea of mass non-violent direct action first developed in South Africa and India; the current network model was first proposed by rebels in Chiapas; even the notion of the affinity group came out of Spain and Latin America. The fruits of ethnography—and the techniques of ethnography—could be enormously helpful here if anthropologists can get past their—however understandable—hesitancy, owing to their own often squalid colonial history, and come to see what they are sitting on not as some guilty secret (which is nonetheless their guilty secret, and no one else's) but as the common property of humankind.

ANTHROPOLOGY

(in which the author somewhat reluctantly bites the hand that feeds him)

The final question—one that I've admittedly been rather avoiding up to now—is why anthropologists haven't, so far? I have already described why I think academics, in general, have rarely felt much affinity with anarchism. I've talked a little about the radical inclinations in much early twentieth-century anthropology, which often showed a very strong affinity with anarchism, but that seemed to largely evaporate over time. It's all a little odd. Anthropologists are after all the only group of scholars who know anything about actually-existing stateless societies; many have actually lived in corners of the world where states have ceased to function or at least temporarily pulled up stakes and left, and people are managing their own affairs autonomously; if nothing else, they are keenly aware that the most commonplace assumptions about what would happen in the absence of a state ("but people would just kill each other!") are factually untrue.

Why, then?

Well, there are any number of reasons. Some are understandable enough. If anarchism is, essentially, an ethics of practice, then meditating on anthropological practice tends to kick up a lot of unpleasant things. Particularly if one concentrates on the experience of anthropological fieldwork—which is what anthropologists invariably tend to do when they

THREE

"THE MOB BEGIN TO THINK AND TO REASON"

The Covert History of Democracy

Reading accounts of social movements written by outright conservatives can often feel strangely refreshing. Particularly when one is used to dealing with liberals. Liberals tend to be touchy and unpredictable because they claim to share the ideas of radical movements—democracy, egalitarianism, freedom—but they've also managed to convince themselves that these ideals are ultimately unattainable. For that reason, they see anyone determined to bring about a world based on those principles as a kind of moral threat. I noticed this during the days of the Global Justice Movement. There was a kind of mocking defensiveness on the part of many in the "liberal media" that was in its own way just as caustic as anything thrown at us by the right. As I read their critiques of the movement, it became clear to me that many senior members of the media, having gone to college in the 1960s, thought of themselves as former campus revolutionaries, if only through generational association. Within their work was an argument they were having with themselves; they were convincing themselves that even though they were now working for the establishment, they hadn't really sold out because their former revolutionary dreams were profoundly unrealistic, and actually, fighting for abortion rights or gay marriage is about as radical as one can realistically be. If you are a radical, at least with conservatives you know where you stand: they are your enemies. If they wish to understand you, it is only to facilitate your being violently suppressed. This leads to a certain clarity. It also means they often honestly do wish to understand you.

In the early days of Occupy Wall Street, the first major salvo from the right took the form of an essay in *The Weekly Standard* by one Matthew Continetti entitled "Anarchy in the U.S.A.: The Roots of American Disorder."[1] "Both left and right," Continetti argued, "have made the error of thinking that the forces behind Occupy Wall Street are interested in democratic politics and problem solving." In fact, their core were anarchists dreaming of a utopian socialist paradise as peculiar as the phalanxes of Charles Fourier or free love communes like the 1840s New Harmony. The author goes on to quote proponents of contemporary anarchism, mainly Noam Chomsky and myself:

> This permanent rebellion leads to some predictable outcomes. By denying the legitimacy of democratic politics, the anarchists undermine their ability to affect people's lives. No living wage movement for them. No debate over the Bush tax rates. Anarchists don't believe in wages, and they certainly don't believe in taxes. David Graeber, an anthropologist and a leading figure in Occupy Wall Street, puts it this way: "By participating in policy debates the very best one can achieve is to limit the damage, since the very premise is inimical to the idea of people managing their own affairs." The reason that Occupy Wall Street has no agenda is that anarchism allows for no agenda. All the anarchist can do is set an example—or tear down the existing order through violence.

This paragraph is typical: it alternates legitimate insights with a series of calculated slurs and insinuations designed to encourage violence. It is true that anarchists did, as I said, refuse to enter the political system itself, but this was on the grounds that the system itself was undemocratic—having been reduced to a system of open institutionalized bribery, backed up by coercive force. We wanted to make that fact evident to everyone, in the United States and elsewhere. And that is what OWS did—in a way that no amount of waving of policy statements could ever have done. To say that we have no agenda, then, is absurd; to assert that we have no choice but to eventually resort to violence, despite the studious nonviolence of the occupiers, is the kind of statement one only

makes if one is desperately trying to come up with justifications for violence oneself.

The piece went on to correctly trace the origins of the current global anticapitalist networks back to the Zapatista revolt in 1994, and, again correctly, to note their increasingly anti-authoritarian politics, their rejection of any notion of seizing power by force, their use of the Internet. Continetti concludes:

> An intellectual, financial, technological, and social infrastructure to undermine global capitalism has been developing for more than two decades, and we are in the middle of its latest manifestation.... The occupiers' tent cities are self-governing, communal, egalitarian, and networked. They reject everyday politics. They foster bohemianism and confrontation with the civil authorities. They are the Phalanx and New Harmony, updated for postmodern times and plopped in the middle of our cities.
>
> There may not be that many activists in the camps. They may appear silly, even grotesque. They may resist "agendas" and "policies." They may not agree on what they want or when they want it. And they may disappear as winter arrives and the liberals whose parks they are occupying lose patience with them. But the utopians and anarchists will reappear.... The occupation will persist as long as individuals believe that inequalities of property are unjust and that the brotherhood of man can be established on the earth.

You can see why anarchists might find this sort of thing refreshingly honest. The author makes no secret of his desire to see us all in prison, but at least he's willing to make an honest assessment of what the stakes are.

Still, there is one screamingly dishonest theme that runs throughout the *Weekly Standard* piece: the intentional conflation of "democracy" with "everyday politics," that is, lobbying, fund-raising, working for electoral campaigns, and otherwise participating in the current American political system. The premise is that the author stands in favor of democracy, and that occupiers, in rejecting the existing system, are against it. In fact, the conservative tradition that produced and sustains journals like *The Weekly Standard* is profoundly antidemocratic. Its heroes, from Plato to Edmund Burke, are, almost uniformly, men who opposed

democracy on principle, and its readers are still fond of statements like "America is not a democracy, it's a republic." What's more, the sort of arguments Continetti breaks out here—that anarchist-inspired movements are unstable, confused, threaten established orders of property, and must necessarily lead to violence—are precisely the arguments that have, for centuries, been leveled by conservatives against democracy itself.

In reality, OWS *is* anarchist-inspired, but for precisely that reason it stands squarely in the very tradition of American popular democracy that conservatives like Continetti have always staunchly opposed. Anarchism does not mean the negation of democracy—or at least, any of the aspects of democracy that most Americans have historically liked. Rather, anarchism is a matter of taking those core democratic principles to their logical conclusions. The reason it's difficult to see this is because the word "democracy" has had such an endlessly contested history: so much so that most American pundits and politicians, for instance, now use the term to refer to a form of government established with the explicit purpose of ensuring what John Adams once called "the horrors of democracy" would never come about.[2]

As I mentioned at the beginning of the book, most Americans are unaware that nowhere in the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution does it say anything about the United States being a democracy.[*] In fact, most of those who took part in composing those founding documents readily agreed with the seventeenth-century Puritan preacher John Winthrop, who wrote that "a democracy is, among most civil nations, accounted the meanest and worst of all forms of government."[3]

Most of the Founders learned what they did know about the subject of democracy from Thomas Hobbes's English translation of Thucydides' *History*, his account of the Peloponnesian War. Hobbes undertook this project, he was careful to inform his readers, to warn about the dangers of democracy. As a result, the founders used the word in its ancient Greek sense, assuming democracy to refer to

communal self-governance through popular assemblies such as the Athenian agora. It was what we would now call “direct democracy.” One might say that it was a system of rule by General Assemblies, except that these assemblies were assumed to always operate exclusively by the principle of 51 to 49 percent majority rule. James Madison for instance, made clear in his contributions to the Federalist Papers why he felt this sort of Athenian democracy was not only impossible in a great nation of his day, since it could not by definition operate over an extended geographical area, but was actively undesirable, since he felt history showed that any system of direct democracy would inevitably descend into factionalism, demagoguery, and finally, the seizure of power by some dictator willing to restore order and control:

> A pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction.... Hence it is that such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.[4]

Like all the men we’ve come to know as Founding Fathers, Madison insisted that his preferred form of government, a “republic,” was necessarily quite different:

> In a democracy the people meet and exercise the government in person; in a republic they assemble and administer it by their representatives and agents. A democracy, consequently, must be confined to a small spot. A republic may be extended over a large region.[5]

Now, this notion that republics were administered by “representatives” might seem odd at first glance, since they borrowed the term “republic” from ancient Rome, and Roman senators were not elected; they were aristocrats who held their seats by birthright, which meant they weren’t really “representatives and agents” of anyone but themselves. Still, the idea of representative bodies was something the Founders had

inherited from the British during the Revolution: the rulers of the new nation were precisely those who had been elected, by a vote of property-holding males, to representative assemblies like the Continental Congress, originally meant to allow a limited measure of self-governance under the authority of the king. After the revolution, they immediately transferred the power of government from King George III to themselves. As a result, the representative bodies meant to operate under the authority of the king would now operate under the authority of the people, however narrowly defined.

The custom of electing delegates to such bodies was nothing new. In England it went back to at least the thirteenth century. By the fifteenth century, it had become standard practice to allow men of property to select their parliamentary representatives by sending in their votes to their local sheriff (usually recorded on notched sticks). At that time it never would have occurred to anyone that this system had anything to do with "democracy."[6] Elections were assumed to be an extension of monarchical systems of government, since representatives were in no sense empowered to govern. They did not rule anything, collectively or as individuals; their role was to speak for ("represent") the inhabitants of their district before the sovereign power of the king, to offer advice, air grievances, and, above all, deliver their county's taxes. So while the representatives were powerless and the elections rarely contested, the system of elected representatives was considered necessary according to the prevailing medieval legal principle of consent: it was felt that while orders naturally came from above, and ordinary subjects should have no role in framing policy, those same ordinary subjects could not be held to be bound by orders to which they had not, in some broad sense, assented. True, after the English Civil War, Parliament did begin to assert its own rights to have a say in the disposal of tax receipts, creating what the framers called a "limited monarchy"—but still, the American idea of saying that the people could actually exercise sovereign power, the power once held by kings, by voting for representatives with real governing power, was a genuine innovation and immediately recognized as such.[7]

The American War of Independence had been fought in the name of “the people,” and all the framers felt that the “whole body of the people” had to be consulted at some point to make their revolution legitimate—but the entire purpose of the Constitution was to ensure that this form of consultation was extremely limited, lest the “horrors of democracy” ensue. At the time, the common assumption among educated people was that there were three elementary principles of government that were held to exist, in different measure, in all known human societies: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. The framers agreed with ancient political theorists who held that the Roman Republic represented the most perfect balance between them. Republican Rome had two consuls (elected by the Senate) who filled the monarchical function, a permanent patrician class of senators, and, finally, popular assemblies with limited powers of their own. These assemblies selected from among aristocratic candidates for magistracies, and also chose two tribunes, who represented the interest of the plebeian class; tribunes could not vote or even enter the Senate (they sat just outside the doorway) but they were granted veto power over senatorial decisions.

The American Constitution was designed to achieve a similar balance. The monarchical function was to be filled by a president elected by the Senate; the Senate was meant to represent the aristocratic interests of wealth, and Congress was to represent the democratic element. Its purview was largely to be confined to raising and spending money, since the Revolution had, after all, been fought on the principle of “no taxation without representation.” Popular assemblies were eliminated altogether. The American colonies, of course, lacked any hereditary aristocracy. But by electing a temporary monarch, and temporary representatives, the framers argued they could instead create what they sometimes explicitly called a kind of “natural aristocracy,” drawn from the educated and propertied classes who had the same sober concern for the public welfare that they felt characterized the Roman senate of Cicero and Cincinnatus.

It is worthwhile, I think, to dwell on this point for a moment. When the framers spoke of an "aristocracy" they were not using the term metaphorically. They were well aware that they were creating a new political form that fused together democratic and aristocratic elements. In all previous European history, elections had been considered—as Aristotle had originally insisted—the quintessentially aristocratic mode of selecting public officials. In elections, the populace chooses between a small number of usually professional politicians who claim to be wiser and more educated than everyone else, and chooses the one they think the best of all. (This is what "aristocracy" literally means: "rule of the best.") Elections were ways that mercenary armies chose their commanders, or nobles vied for the support of future retainers. The democratic approach—employed widely in the ancient world, but also in Renaissance cities like Florence—was lottery, or, as it was sometimes called, "sortition." Essentially, the procedure was to take the names of anyone in the community willing to hold public office, and then, after screening them for basic competence, choose their names at random. This ensured all competent and interested parties had an equal chance of holding public office. It also minimalized factionalism, since there was no point making promises to win over key constituencies if one was to be chosen by lot. (Elections, by contract, fostered factionalism, for obvious reasons.) It's striking that while in the generations immediately before the French and American revolutions there was a lively debate among Enlightenment thinkers like Montesquieu and Rousseau on the relative merits of election and lottery, those creating the new revolutionary constitutions in the 1770s and 1780s did not consider using lotteries at all. The only use they found for lottery was in the jury system, and this was allowed to stand largely because it was already there, a tradition inherited from English common law. And even the jury system was compulsory, not voluntary; juries were (and still are) regularly informed that their role is not to consider the justice of the law, but only to judge the facts of evidence.

There were to be no assemblies. There was to be no sortition. The Founding Fathers insisted that sovereignty belongs to the people,

but that—unless they rose up in arms in another revolution—the people could *only* exercise that sovereignty by choosing among members of a class of superior men—superior both because they were trained as lawyers, and because coming from the upper classes they were wiser and better able to understand the people's true interests than the people themselves were. Since "the people" would also be bound to obey the laws passed by the legislative bodies over which this new natural aristocracy presided, the Founders' notion of popular sovereignty was really not too far removed from the old medieval notion of consent to orders from above.

Actually, if one reads the work of John Adams, or the Federalist Papers, one might well wonder why such authors spent so much time discussing the dangers of Athenian-style direct democracy at all. This was, after all, a political system that had not existed for more than two thousand years and no major political figure of the time was openly advocating reestablishing it.

Here is where it becomes useful to consider the larger political context. There might not have been democracies in the eighteenth-century North Atlantic, but there were definitely men who referred to themselves as "democrats." In America, Tom Paine is perhaps the most famous example. During the same period in which the Continental Congress was beginning to contemplate severing relations with the English Crown, the term was undergoing something of a revival in Europe, where populists opposed to aristocratic rule increasingly began to refer to themselves as "democrats"—at first, it would seem, mainly for shock value, in much the same way that the gay rights movement defiantly adopted the word "queer." In most places, they were a tiny minority of rabble-rousers, not intellectuals; few propounded any elaborate theory of government. Most appear to have been involved in campaigns against noble or ecclesiastical privilege, and for very basic principles like equality before the law. When revolutions did break out, however, such men found their natural homes in the mass meetings and assemblies that always emerge in such situations

—whether in New England town hall meetings or in the "sections" of the French revolutions—and many of them came to see such assemblies as potential building blocks for a new political order.[8] Since, unlike elected bodies, there were no property restrictions on voting at mass meetings, they tended to entertain far more radical ideas.

In the years immediately leading up to the American Revolution, the Patriots made much use of mass meetings, as well as calling up "the mob" or "mobility" (as they liked to call it) for mass actions like the Boston Tea Party. Often they were terrified by the results. On May 19, 1774, for example, a mass meeting was called in New York City to discuss a tax boycott to respond to the British closing of Boston Harbor—a meeting probably held not far from the present Zuccotti Park, and which apparently produced the very first proposal to convene a Continental Congress. We have an account of it from Gouverneur Morris, then chief justice of New Jersey, scion of the family that then owned most of what's now the Bronx. Morris describes watching as common mechanics and tradesmen who had taken the day off work ended up locked in a prolonged debate with the gentry and their supporters over "the future forms of our government, and whether it should be founded on aristocratic or democratic principles." As the gentry argued the merits of continuing with the existing (extremely conservative) English constitution, butchers and bakers responded with arguments from the Gracchi and Polybius:

> I stood in the balcony, and on my right hand were ranged all the people of property, with some few poor dependants, and on the other all the tradesmen, &c., who thought it worth their while to leave daily labor for the good of the country. The spirit of the English Constitution has yet a little influence left, but just a little. The remains of it, however, will give the wealthy people a superiority this time, but would they secure it, they must banish all schoolmasters, and confine all knowledge to themselves. This cannot be.
>
> The mob begin to think and to reason. Poor reptiles! it is with them a vernal morning, they are struggling to cast off their winter's slough, they bask in the sunshine, and ere noon they will bite, depend upon it. The gentry begin to fear this.[9]

So did Morris, who concluded from the event that full independence from Britain would be a very bad idea, lest, "I see it with fear and trembling, we will be under the worst of all possible dominions—a riotous mob."

Still, this conclusion seems rather disingenuous. What his account makes clear is it was not the irrational passions of "the mob" that frightened Morris, but precisely the opposite, the fact that so many of New York's mechanics and tradesmen could apparently not only trade classical references with the best of them, but frame thoughtful, reasoned arguments for democracy. *The mob begin to think and to reason*. Since there seemed no way to deny them access to education, the only remaining expedient was to rely on the force of British arms.

Morris ended the letter noting that the gentry put together a committee loaded with the wealthy to "trick" the ordinary people into thinking they had their best interests at heart. Unlike most of New York's propertied classes, he did eventually come over to the revolutionaries and ultimately went on to compose the final draft of the U.S. Constitution, although some of his strongest proposals at the Constitutional Convention, for instance, that senators should be appointed for life, were considered too conservative even for his fellow delegates, and were not ultimately adopted.

Even after the war, it was difficult to put the genie of democracy back in the bottle. Mobilizations, mass meetings, and threats of popular uprising continued. As before the Revolution, many of these protests centered on debt. After the war, there was a heated debate over what to do about the Revolutionary War debt. The popular demand was to let it inflate away into nothing and base the currency on paper notes issued by local "land banks" under public control. The Continental Congress took the opposite approach, following the advice of wealthy Philadelphia merchant Robert Morris (apparently no relation to Gouverneur) that wealthy speculators who'd bought up the debt at depreciated prices should be paid in full. This, he said, would cause wealth to flow "into the hands of those who would render it most productive"; at the same time, creating a single, central bank, on the model of the Bank of

England, would allow the national debt to circulate as "new medium of commerce."[10] This system, of making government war debt the basis of the currency, was tried and true, and in a way it's the one we still have now in the Federal Reserve—but in the early days of the republic the ramifications for simple farmers who ended up effectively having to pay the debt were catastrophic. Thousands of returning Revolutionary War veterans would often find themselves greeted by "sheriff's wagons" arriving to seize their most valuable possessions. The result was waves of popular mobilizations and at least two major uprisings, one in western Massachusetts, one in rural Pennsylvania, and even calls, in some quarters, to introduce legislation to expropriate the largest speculators instead.[†]

For men like Adams, Madison, or Hamilton, such projects bore a disturbing similarity to those of revolutionary movements of antiquity, with their calls to abolish debts and redistribute the land, and became prima facie evidence that America should never operate by a principle of majority rule. For instance, John Adams:

> If all were to be decided by a vote of the majority, the eight or nine millions who have no property, would not think of usurping over the rights of the one or two millions who have? …
>
> Debts would be abolished first; taxes laid heavy on the rich, and not at all on the others; and at last a downright equal division of everything be demanded, and voted. What would be the consequence of this? The idle, the vicious, the intemperate, would rush into the utmost extravagance of debauchery, sell and spend all their share, and then demand a new division of those who purchased from them. The moment the idea is admitted into society, that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence.[11]

Similarly, for Madison, republican government was not just superior because it was capable of operating over a wide geographical range; it was better to have a government operating over a wide geographical range because if there ever was "a rage for paper money, for an abolition of debts, for an equal division of

property, or for any other improper or wicked project,"[12] it was likely to occur on a local level—and a strong central government would ensure it could be quickly contained.

This, then, is what the nightmare vision of Athenian democracy seemed to mean for such men: that if the town hall assemblies and mass meetings of farmers, mechanics, and tradesmen that had formed in the years leading up to the Revolution became institutionalized, these—"abolition of debts … equal division of property"—were the sorts of demands they would likely make. Even more, they feared the specter of orgy, tumult, and indiscipline, where the sort of grave republicans who led Rome to glory and whom the Founders saw as their model would be cast aside for the vulgar passions of the masses. Another telling Adams quote about Athens: "From the first to the last moment of her democratical constitution, levity, gayety, inconstancy, dissipation, intemperance, debauchery, and a dissolution of manners, were the prevailing character of the whole nation."[13] Dr. Benjamin Rush, a physician and stalwart of Philadelphia's Sons of Liberty, actually felt that this democratic loosening of manners could be diagnosed as a kind of disease—thinking, here, particularly of the effects of "the changes in the habits of diet, and company, and manners, produced by annihilation of just debts by means of depreciated paper money":

> The excess of the passion for liberty, inflamed by the successful issue of the war, produced, in many people, opinions and conduct which could not be removed by reason nor restrained by government.… The extensive influence which these opinions had upon the understandings, passions and morals of many of the citizens of the United States, constituted a species of insanity, which I shall take the liberty of distinguishing by the name of Anarchia.[14]

The reference to "depreciated paper money" is significant here. One of the issues that drove the Federalists to convene the Constitutional convention in the first place was not just the threat of riots and rebellions against hard-money policies, which could be militarily contained, but the fear that "democratic" forces might begin to take over state governments and begin printing their own currency—

both George Washington, then the richest man in America, and Thomas Jefferson, had personally lost considerable chunks of their personal fortunes through such schemes. And this is precisely what had already begun to happen in Pennsylvania, which had eliminated property qualifications for voting, and quickly saw the formation of a populist legislature that, in 1785, first revoked the charter for Robert Morris's central bank, and then began a scheme to create a system of public credit, with paper money designed to depreciate in value over time, so as to relieve debtors and thwart speculators. One of the leaders of the popular faction, Quaker preacher Herman Husband—who men like Rush referred to as "the madman of Alleghenies"—openly argued that such measures were justified because vast inequalities of wealth made it impossible for freeborn citizens to participate in politics.[‡] When the Framers assembled in Philadelphia in 1787, Morris among them, they were determined to prevent the contagion from spreading. To get a sense of the flavor of the debate at the convention, we might consider its opening remarks, by Edmund Randolph, then governor of Virginia. Even outside of Pennsylvania, state constitutions did not contain sufficient safeguards against "government exercised by the people":

> Our chief danger arises from the democratic parts of our constitutions. It is a maxim which I hold incontrovertible, that the powers of government exercised by the people swallows up the other branches. None of the constitutions have provided sufficient checks against the democracy. The feeble senate of Virginia is a phantom. Maryland has a more powerful senate, but the late distractions in that state have discovered that it is not powerful enough. The check established in the constitution of New York and Massachusetts is yet a stronger barrier against democracy, but they all seem insufficient.[§]

The Canadian political scientist Francis Dupuis-Déri has carefully mapped out the way the word "democracy" was used by major political figures in the United States, France, and Canada during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and has discovered in every case exactly the same pattern. When the word first gains currency between 1770 and 1800, it is deployed almost exclusively as a term

of opprobrium and abuse. The French revolutionaries disdained "democracy" almost as much as the American ones. It was seen as anarchy, the lack of government, and riotous chaos. Over time, a few begin to use the term, often as a provocation: as when Robespierre, at the height of the terror, began to refer to himself as a democrat, or when in 1800, Thomas Jefferson—who never mentioned the word "democracy" at all in his early writings,‖ but who ran against Adams as a radical, sympathetic with the organizers of debt uprisings and strongly opposed to central banking schemes—decided to rename his party the "Democratic-Republicans."

Still, it took some time before the term came into common use.

It was between 1830 and 1850 that politicians in the United States and France began to identify themselves as democrats and to use *democracy* to designate the electoral regime, even though no constitutional change or transformation of the decision-making process warranted this change in name. The shift in meaning first occurred in the United States. Andrew Jackson was the first presidential candidate to present himself as a democrat, a label by which he meant that he would defend the interests of the little people (in particular, small Midwest farmers and laborers in the large Eastern cities) against the powerful (bureaucrats and politicians in Washington and the upper classes in large cities).[15]

Jackson was running as a populist—once again, against the central banking system, which he did temporarily manage to dismantle. As Dupuis-Déri observes, "Jackson and his allies were well aware that their use of *democracy* was akin to what would today be called political marketing"; it was basically a cynical ploy, but it was wildly successful—so much so that within ten years time all candidates of all political parties were referring to themselves as "democrats." Since the same thing happened everywhere—France, England, Canada—where the franchise was widened sufficiently that masses of ordinary citizens were allowed to vote, the result was that the term "democracy" itself changed as well—so that the elaborate republican system that the Founders had created with the express purpose of containing the dangers of democracy, itself was

relabeled “democracy,” which is how we continue to use the term today.

Clearly, then, the word “democracy” meant something different for ordinary Americans, as well as ordinary Frenchmen and Englishmen, than it did for members of the political elite. The question is precisely what. Owing to the limited nature of our sources—we have no way of knowing for instance, once the New York mob “began to think and reason,” what arguments they actually put forth—we can really only guess. But I think we can reconstruct some broad principles.

First of all, when members of the educated classes spoke of “democracy,” they were thinking of a system of government, which traced back specifically to the ancient world. Ordinary Americans in contrast appear to have seen it, as we would say today, in much broader social and cultural terms: “democracy” was freedom, equality, the ability of a simple farmer or tradesman to address his “betters” with dignity and self-respect—the kind of broader democratic sensibility that was soon to so impress foreign observers like Alexis de Tocqueville when they spoke of “Democracy in America” two generations later. The roots of this sensibility, like the real roots of many of the political innovations that made the great eighteenth-century revolutions possible, are difficult to reconstruct. But they do not seem to lie where we are used to looking for them.

One reason we find it so difficult to reconstruct the history of these democratic sensibilities, and the everyday forms of organization and decision making they inspired, is that we are used to telling the story in a very peculiar way. It’s a story that only really took shape in the wake of World War I, when universities in the United States and some parts of Europe began promulgating the notion that democracy was an intrinsic part of what they called “Western civilization.” The idea that there even was something called “Western civilization” was, at the time, relatively new: the expression would have been meaningless in the time of Washington

or Jefferson. According to this new version of history, which soon became gospel to American conservatives, and is largely taken for granted by everyone else, democracy is really a set of institutional structures, based on voting, that was first "invented" in ancient Athens and has remained somehow embedded in a grand tradition that traveled from Greece to Rome to medieval England, making a detour through Renaissance Italy, and then finally lodging itself in the North Atlantic, which is now its special home. This formulation is how former cold warriors like Samuel Huntington can argue that we are now engaged in a "war of civilizations," with the free and democratic West vainly trying to inflict its values on everyone else. As an historical argument, this is an obvious example of special pleading. The whole story makes no sense. First of all, about the only thing Voltaire, Madison, or Gladstone really had in common with an inhabitant of ancient Greece is that he grew up reading ancient Greek books. But if the Western tradition is simply an intellectual tradition, how can one possibly call it democratic? In fact, not a single surviving ancient Greek author was in favor of democracy, and for 2,400 years at least, virtually every author now identified with "Western civilization" was explicitly antidemocratic. When someone has the temerity to point this out, the usual response by conservatives is to switch gears and say that "the West" is a cultural tradition, whose unique love of liberty can already be witnessed in medieval documents like the Magna Carta and was just waiting to burst out in the Age of Revolutions. This makes a little better sense. If nothing else, it would explain the popular enthusiasm for democracy in countries like the United States and France, even in the face of universal elite disapproval. But, if one takes that approach, and says "the West" is really a deep cultural tradition, then other parts of the conventional story fall apart. For one thing, how can one say that the Western tradition begins in Greece? After all, if we're speaking in cultural terms, the people alive today most similar to ancient Greeks are obviously modern Greeks. Yet most of those who celebrate the "Western tradition" don't even think modern Greece is part of the West anymore—

Greece apparently having defected back around A.D. 600 when they chose the wrong variety of Christianity.

In fact, as it's currently used, "the West" can mean almost anything. It can be used to refer to an intellectual tradition, a cultural tradition, a locus of political power ("Western intervention"), even a racial term ("the bodies discovered in Afghanistan appeared to be those of Westerners"), more or less depending on the needs of the moment.

It's not surprising then that American conservatives react so violently to any challenge to the primacy of "Western civilization"—since "Western civilization" is, essentially, something they made up. In fact for all its incoherence it might well be the only powerful idea they ever made up. In order to have any chance of understanding the real history of democracy, we have to put all this aside and start from scratch. If we do not see Western Europe as some special chosen land, then what, in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, do we really see? Well, first of all, we see a group of North Atlantic kingdoms that were in almost every case moving *away* from earlier forms of popular participation in government, and forming ever more centralized, absolutist governments. Remember, until that time Northern Europe had been something of a backwater. During this period, European societies were not only expanding everywhere, with projects of overseas trade, conquest, and colonization across Asia, Africa, and the Americas, but they were also, as a result, being flooded with a dazzling welter of new and unfamiliar political ideas. Most European intellectuals who encountered these ideas were interested in using them to create even stronger centralized monarchies: like the German scholar Leibniz, who found inspiration in the example of China, with its cultural uniformity, national examination boards, and rational civil service, or Montesquieu, who became equally intrigued by the example of Persia. Others (John Locke, for example, or many of the other English political philosophers so beloved by the Founding Fathers) became fascinated by the discovery of societies in North America that appeared to be

simultaneously far more egalitarian, and far more individualistic, than anything Europeans had previously imagined possible.

In Europe, tracts and arguments about the significance, and political and moral implications, of these newly discovered social possibilities abounded. In the American colonies, this was not a matter of mere intellectual reflection. The first European settlers in North America not only were in the paradoxical situation of being in direct contact with indigenous nations, and being obliged to learn many of their ways just to be able to survive in their new environment, at exactly the same time; they were also displacing and largely exterminating them. In the process—at least, according to the scandalized accounts of the leaders of early settler communities—they themselves, and especially their children, began acting more and more like Indians.

This is important since most debates over the influence of indigenous societies on American democracy largely miss the profoundly cultural transformation that resulted. There has been quite a lively debate on the topic since the 1980s. It's usually referred to in the scholarly literature as "the influence debate." While the scholars who kicked it off, historians Donald Grinde, himself a Native American, and Bruce Johansen, were making a much broader argument, the whole debate quickly became sidetracked over one very specific question: whether certain elements in the American Constitution, particularly its federal structure, were originally inspired by the example of the League of Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois. This particular debate began in 1977, when Grinde pointed out that the idea of a federation of colonies seemed to have been first proposed by an Onondaga ambassador named Canassatego during negotiations over the Lancaster Treaty of 1744. Exhausted by having to negotiate with six different colonies, he snapped an arrow in half to show how easy it was to break it, then took a bundle of six arrows, and challenged his interlocutors to do the same. (This bundle of arrows still appears on the Seal of the Union of the United States, though with the number increased to thirteen.) Benjamin Franklin, who had

taken part in the negotiations, did later propose the colonies adopt a federal system, though it was at first without success.

Grinde was not the first to suggest that Iroquois federal institutions might have had some influence on the U.S. Constitution. Similar ideas were occasionally proposed in the nineteenth century and, at the time, no one found anything particularly threatening or remarkable about it. When it was proposed again in the 1980s it set off a firestorm. Congress passed a bill recognizing the Haudenosaunee contribution and conservatives were up in arms at any suggestion that the Founders were influenced by anything but the tradition of "Western civilization." Almost all scholars of Native American descent embraced the notion, but they also emphasized that this was simply one example of a broader process of settlers being influenced by the freedom-loving ways of indigenous societies. Meanwhile, both (nonnative) anthropologists who studied the Six Nations and American constitutional historians insisted on focusing exclusively on the constitutional question, and rejected the argument out of hand. This meant insisting that despite the fact that many of the Founders had taken part in treaty negotiations with the Haudenosaunee federation, and despite the fact that this was the only federal system with which any of them had direct experience, that experience played no role whatsoever in their thinking when they pondered how to create a federal system themselves.

On the face of it, this seems an extraordinary claim. The reason it's possible to make it is that when the authors of the Federalist Papers did openly discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different sorts of federal systems, they did not mention the one they had seen, but rather others they'd only read about: the organization of Judaea in the time of the Book of Judges, the Achaean League, the Swiss Confederacy, the United Provinces of the Netherlands. When they did refer to indigenous peoples, they ordinarily referred to them as "the American savages," who were perhaps to be occasionally celebrated as exemplars of individual liberty but whose political experience was strictly irrelevant for that very reason. John Adams, for instance, compared them to the ancient Goths, a people unusual, he held, in that they actually could support a

largely democratic system of government without it being plunged into violent unrest. This was possible for both peoples, he concluded, because they were too scattered and indolent to have accumulated any significant amount of property, and therefore did not need institutions designed to protect wealth.

Still, the entire constitutional debate was something of a sideshow. It's a way of keeping everything focused on the reading habits of the educated gentry, and the kinds of arguments and allusions they considered appropriate to employ in public debate. For instance, it's clear that the Founders were well aware of Canassatego's metaphor of the arrows—after all, they put the image on the seal of their new republic—it never seems to have occurred to any to so much as allude to it in their published writings, speeches, or debates. Even New York's butchers and wainwrights knew that when debating with the gentry, they had to adorn their arguments with plenty of classical references.

If we want to explore the origins of those democratic sensibilities that caused ordinary New Yorkers to feel sympathetic to the idea of democratic rule in the first place, or even to find where people actually had direct, hands-on experience in collective decision making that might have influenced their sense of what democracy might actually be like, we not only have to look beyond the sitting rooms of the educated gentry. In fact, we soon find ourselves in places that might seem, at first, genuinely startling. In 1999, one of the leading contemporary historians of European democracy, John Markoff, published an essay called "Where and When Was Democracy Invented?" In it there appears the following passage:

> That leadership could derive from the consent of the led, rather than be bestowed by higher authority, would have been a likely experience of the crews of pirate vessels in the early modern Atlantic world. Pirate crews not only elected their captains, but were familiar with countervailing power (in the forms of the quartermaster and ship's council) and contractual relations of individual and collectivity (in the form of written ship's articles specifying shares of booty and rates of compensation for on-the-job injury).[16]

He makes the remark very much in passing but in a way it's a very telling example. If existing ship constitutions are anything to go by, the typical organization of eighteenth-century pirate ships was remarkably democratic.[17] Captains were not only elected, they usually functioned much like Native American war chiefs: granted total power during chase or combat, but otherwise treated like ordinary crewmen. Those ships whose captains were granted more general powers also insisted on the crew's right to remove them at any time for cowardice, cruelty, or any other reason. In every case, ultimate power rested in a general assembly, which often ruled on even the most minor matters, always, apparently, by a majority show of hands.

This isn't surprising if one considers the pirates' origins. Pirates were generally mutineers, sailors often originally pressed into service against their will in port towns across the Atlantic, who had mutinied against tyrannical captains and "declared war against the whole world." They often became classic social bandits, wreaking vengeance against captains who abused their crews, and releasing or even rewarding those against whom they found no complaints. The makeup of crews was often extraordinarily heterogeneous. According to Marcus Rediker's *Villains of All Nations*, "Black Sam Bellamy's crew of 1717 was 'a Mix'd Multitude of all Country's,' including British, French, Dutch, Spanish, Swedish, Native American, African American, and two dozen Africans who had been liberated from a slave ship."[18] In other words, we are dealing with a collection of people in which there was likely to be at least some firsthand knowledge of a very wide range of directly democratic institutions, ranging from Swedish *things* (councils) to African village assemblies to Native American federal structures, suddenly finding themselves forced to improvise some mode of self-government in the complete absence of any state. It was the perfect intercultural space of experiment. There was likely to be no more conducive ground for the development of new democratic institutions anywhere in the Atlantic world at the time.

Did the democratic practices developed on Atlantic pirate ships in the early part of the eighteenth century have any influence, direct

or indirect, on the evolution of democratic constitutions in the North Atlantic world sixty or seventy years later? It's possible. There's no doubt that the typical eighteenth-century New York mechanic or tradesman had spent plenty of time trading pirate stories over a pint at dockside bars. Sensationalist accounts of the pirates did circulate widely and it's likely that men like Madison or Jefferson had read them, at least as children. But it's impossible to really know if such men culled any ideas from such accounts; if such stories had influenced them in any way, it would have been the last influence they would ever have openly acknowledged.

One might even speculate about the existence of a kind of broad democratic unconscious that lay behind many of the ideas and arguments of the American Revolution, ideas whose origins even ordinary citizens felt uncomfortable with, since they were so firmly associated with savagery and criminality. The pirates are just the most vivid example. Even more important in the North American colonies were the societies of the frontier. But those early colonies were far more similar to pirate ships than we are given to imagine. Frontier communities might not have been as densely populated as pirate ships, or in as immediate need of constant cooperation, but they were spaces of intercultural improvisation, and, like the pirate ships, largely outside the purview of any states. It's only recently that historians have begun to document just how thoroughly entangled the societies of settlers and natives were in those early days,[19] with settlers adopting Indian crops, clothes, medicines, customs, and styles of warfare. They engaged in trading, often living side by side, sometimes intermarrying, while others lived for years as captives in Indian communities before returning to their homes having learned native languages, habits, and mores. Most of all, historians have noted the endless fears among the leaders of colonial communities and military units that their subordinates were —in the same way that they had taken up the use of tomahawks, wampum, and canoes—beginning to absorb Indian attitudes of equality and individual liberty.

The result was a cultural transformation that affected almost every aspect of settler life. For instance, Puritans felt that corporal

punishment was absolutely essential in the raising of children: the birch was required to teach children the meaning of authority, to break their will (tainted by original sin), in much the way one breaks a horse or other animal—in the same way as, they also held, the birch was required in adult life to discipline wives and servants. Most Native Americans in contrast felt that children should never be beaten, under any circumstances. In the 1690s, at the same time as the famous Boston Calvinist minister Cotton Mather was inveighing against pirates as a blaspheming scourge of mankind, he was also complaining that his fellow settlers, led astray by the ease of the climate in the New World and relaxed attitudes of its native inhabitants, had begun to undergo what he called "Indianization"—refusing to apply corporal punishment to their children, and thus undermining the principles of discipline, hierarchy, and formality that should govern relations between masters and servants, men and women, or young and old:

> Though the first English planters in this country had usually a government and a discipline in their families and had a sufficient severity in it, yet, as if the climate had taught us to Indianize, the relaxation of it is now such that it is wholly laid aside, and a foolish indulgence to children is become an epidemical miscarriage of the country, and like to be attended with many evil consequences.[20]

In other words, insofar as an individualistic, indulgent, freedom-loving spirit first began emerging among the colonists, the early Puritan Fathers laid it squarely at the feet of the Indians—or, as they still called them at the time, "the Americans," since the settlers then still considered themselves not American but English. One of the ironies of the "influence debate" is that in all the sound and fury over the Iroquois influence on the federal system, this was what Grinde and Johansen were really trying to emphasize: that ordinary Englishmen and Frenchmen settled in the colonies only began to think of themselves as "Americans," as a new sort of freedom-loving people, when they began to see themselves as more like Indians.

What was true in towns like Boston was all the more true on the frontiers, especially in those communities often made up of escaped

slaves and servants who “became Indians” outside the control of colonial governments entirely,[21] or island enclaves of what historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker have called “the Atlantic proletariat,” the motley collection of freedmen, sailors, ship’s whores, renegades, Antinomians, and rebels who developed in the port cities of the North Atlantic world before the emergence of modern racism, and from whom much of the democratic impulse of the American—and other—revolutions seems to have first emerged.[22] Men like Mather would have agreed with that as well: he often wrote that Indian attacks on frontier settlements were God’s punishment on such folk for abandoning their rightful masters and living like Indians themselves.

If the history were truly written, it seems to me that the real origin of the democratic spirit—and most likely, many democratic institutions—lies precisely in those spaces of improvisation just outside the control of governments and organized churches. I might add that this includes the Haudenosaunee themselves. The league was originally formed—we don’t know precisely when—as a kind of contractual agreement among the Seneca, Onondaga, Cayuga, Oneida, and Mohawk (the sixth tribe, the Tuscarora, joined later) to create a way of mediating disputes and making peace; but during their period of expansion in the seventeenth century it became an extraordinary jumble of peoples, with large proportions of the population adopted war captives from other indigenous nations, captured settlers, and runaways. One Jesuit missionary at the height of the seventeenth century Beaver Wars complained that it was almost impossible to preach to the Seneca in their own language, since so many were barely fluent in it! Even during the eighteenth century, for instance, while Canassatego, the ambassador who first suggested a federation to the colonists, was born to Onondaga parents, the other main Haudenosaunee negotiator with the colonists at this time, Swatane, was actually French—or, anyway, originally born to French parents in Quebec. Like all living constitutions, the league was constantly changing and evolving, and no doubt much of the careful architecture and solemn dignity of its

council structure was the product of just such a creative mix of cultures, tradition, and experience.

Why do conservatives insist that democracy was invented in ancient Greece, and that it is somehow inherent in what they call "Western civilization"—despite all the overwhelming evidence to the contrary? In the end, it's just a way of doing what the rich and powerful always do: taking possession of the fruits of other people's labor. It's a way of staking a property claim. And property claims must be defended. This is why, if whenever someone like Amartya Sen appears (as he has recently done) to make the obvious point that democracy can just as easily be found in village councils in southern Africa, or India, one can count on an immediate wave of indignant responses in conservative journals and web pages arguing that he has completely missed the point.

Generally speaking, if you can find a concept—truth, freedom, democracy—that everyone agrees is a good thing, then you can be sure that no one will agree on precisely what it is. But the moment you ask *why* most Americans, or most people generally, like the idea of democracy, the conventional story not only falls apart, it becomes completely irrelevant.

Democracy was not invented in ancient Greece. Granted, the word "democracy" was invented in ancient Greece—but largely by people who didn't like the thing itself very much. Democracy was never really "invented" at all. Neither does it emerge from any particular intellectual tradition. It's not even really a mode of government. In its essence it is just the belief that humans are fundamentally equal and ought to be allowed to manage their collective affairs in an egalitarian fashion, using whatever means appear most conducive. That, and the hard work of bringing arrangements based on those principles into being.

In this sense democracy is as old as history, as human intelligence itself. No one could possibly own it. I suppose, if one were so inclined, one could argue it emerged the moment hominids ceased merely trying to bully one another and developed the

communication skills to work out a common problem collectively. But such speculation is idle; the point is that democratic assemblies can be attested in all times and places, from Balinese seka to Bolivian ayllu, employing an endless variety of formal procedures, and will always crop up wherever a large group of people sat down together to make a collective decision on the principle that all taking part should have equal say.

One of the reasons it is easy for political scientists to ignore such local associations and assemblies when speaking of the history of democracy is that in most such assemblies, things never come down to a vote. The idea that democracy is simply a matter of voting—which the Founders, too, assumed—also allows one to think of it as an innovation, some sort of conceptual breakthrough: as if it had never occurred to anyone in previous epochs to test support for a proposal by asking people to all put up their hands, scratch something on a potsherd, or have everyone supporting a proposal stand on one side of a public square. But even if people throughout history have always known how to count, there are good reasons why counting has often been avoided as a means of reaching group decisions. Voting is divisive. If a community lacks means to compel its members to obey a collective decision, then probably the stupidest thing one could do is to stage a series of public contests in which one side will, necessarily, be seen to lose; this would not only allow decisions that as many as 49 percent of the community strongly oppose, it would also maximize the possibility of hard feelings among that part of the community one most needs to convince to go along despite their opposition. A process of consensus finding, of mutual accommodation and compromise to reach a collective decision everyone at least does not find strongly objectionable, is far more suited to situations where those who have to carry out a decision lack the sort of centralized bureaucracy, and particularly, the means of systematic coercion, that would be required to force an angry minority to comply with decisions they found stupid, obnoxious, or unfair.

Historically, it is extremely unusual to find both of these together. Throughout most of human history, egalitarian societies

were precisely those that did not have some military or police apparatus to force people to do things they did not wish to do (all those sekas and ayllus referred to above); where the means of compulsion did exist, it never occurred to anyone that ordinary people's opinions were in any way important.

Where do we find voting, then? Sometimes in societies where spectacles of public competition are considered normal—such as ancient Greece (ancient Greeks would make a contest out of anything)—but mainly in situations where everyone taking part in an assembly is armed or, at least, trained in the use of weapons. In the ancient world, voting occurred mainly within armies. Aristotle was well aware of this: the constitution of a Greek state, he observed, largely depends on the chief arm of its military: if it's a cavalry, one can expect an aristocracy, if it's heavy infantry, voting rights will be extended to those wealthy men who can afford armor, if it's light troops, archers, slingers, or a navy (as in Athens), one can expect democracy. Similarly, in Rome, popular assemblies that also relied on majority vote were based directly on military units of one hundred men, called centuries. Underlying the institution was the rather commonsensical idea that if a man was armed, his opinions had to be taken into account. Ancient military units often elected their own officers. It's also easy to see why majority voting would make sense in a military unit: even if a vote was 60–40, both sides are armed; if it did come down to a fight, one could see immediately who was most likely to win. And this pattern applies, broadly, more or less across the historical record: in the 1600s, for instance, Six Nations councils—which were primarily engaged in peacemaking—operated by consensus, but pirate ships, which were military operations, used majority vote.

All this is important because it shows that the aristocratic fears of the wealthy early Patriots—who when they thought of their nightmare vision "democracy" thought of an armed populace making decisions by majority show of hands—were not entirely unfounded.

Democracy, then, is not necessarily defined by majority voting: it is, rather, the process of collective deliberation on the principle of full and equal participation. Democratic creativity, in turn, is most likely to occur when one has a diverse collection of participants, drawn from very different traditions, with an urgent need to improvise some means to regulate their common affairs, free of a preexisting overarching authority.

In today's North America, it's largely anarchists—proponents of a political philosophy that has generally been opposed to governments of any sort—who actively try to develop and promote such democratic institutions. In a way the anarchist identification with this notion of democracy goes back a long way. In 1550, or even 1750, when both words were still terms of abuse, detractors often used "democracy" interchangeably with "anarchy," or "democrat" with "anarchist." In each case, some radicals eventually began using the term, defiantly, to describe themselves. But while "democracy" gradually became something everyone felt they had to support (even as no one agreed on what precisely it was), "anarchy" took the opposite path, becoming for most a synonym for violent disorder.

What then is anarchism?

Actually the term means simply "without rulers." Just as in the case of democracy, there are two different ways one could tell the history of anarchism. On the one hand, we could look at the history of the word "anarchism," which was coined by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in 1840 and was adopted by a political movement in late-nineteenth-century Europe, becoming especially strongly established in Russia, Italy, and Spain, before spreading across the rest of the world; on the other hand, we could see it as a much broader political sensibility.

The easiest way to explain anarchism in either sense is to say that it is a political movement that aims to bring about a genuinely free society—and that defines a "free society" as one where humans only enter those kinds of relations with one another that would not have to be enforced by the constant threat of violence. History has shown that vast inequalities of wealth, institutions like slavery, debt

peonage, or wage labor, can only exist if backed up by armies, prisons, and police. Even deeper structural inequalities like racism and sexism are ultimately based on the (more subtle and insidious) threat of force. Anarchists thus envision a world based on equality and solidarity, in which human beings would be free to associate with one another to pursue an endless variety of visions, projects, and conceptions of what they find valuable in life. When people ask me what sorts of organization could exist in an anarchist society, I always answer: any form of organization one can imagine, and probably many we presently can't, with only one proviso—they would be limited to ones that could exist without anyone having the ability, at any point, to call on armed men to show up and say "I don't care what you have to say about this; shut up and do what you're told."

In this sense there have always been anarchists: you find them pretty much any time a group of people confronted with some system of power or domination imposed over them object to it so violently that they begin imagining ways of dealing with each other free of any such forms of power or domination. Most such projects remain lost to history but every now and then evidence for one or another crops up. In China around 400 B.C., for example, there was a philosophical movement that came to be known as the "School of the Tillers," which held that both merchants and government officials were both useless parasites, and attempted to create communities of equals where the only leadership would be by example, and the economy would be democratically regulated in unclaimed territories between the major states. Apparently, the movement was created by an alliance between renegade intellectuals who fled to such free villages and the peasant intellectuals they encountered there. Their ultimate aim appears to have been to gradually draw off defectors from surrounding kingdoms and thus, eventually, cause their collapse. This kind of encouragement of mass defection is a classic anarchist strategy. Needless to say they were not ultimately successful, but their ideas had enormous influence on court philosophers of later generations.

And in the cities, anarchist ideas gave rise to notions that the individual should not be bound by any social conventions and that all technology should be rejected in order to return to an imagined primitive utopia—a pattern that was to repeat itself many times through world history. Those individualist and primitivist ideas, in turn, had an enormous influence on the Taoist philosophy of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu.[23]

How many similar movements have there been throughout human history? We cannot know. (We only happen to know about the Tillers because they also compiled manuals of agricultural technology so good they were read and recopied for thousands of years.) But really all the Tillers were doing was an intellectually self-conscious version of what, as James Scott has recently shown in his "anarchist history of Southeast Asia," millions of people in that part of the world have been doing for centuries: flee from the control of nearby kingdoms and try to set up societies based on a rejection of everything those states represent; then try to convince others to do the same.[24] There are likely to have been many such movements winning free spaces of one sort or another from different states. My point is that such initiatives have always been around. For most of human history, rejection has been more likely to take the form of flight, defection, and the creation of new communities than of revolutionary confrontation with the powers-that-be. Of course, all this is much easier when there are distant hills to run away to and states that had difficulty extending their control over wide stretches of terrain. After the industrial revolution, when radical workers' movements began to emerge across Europe, and some factory workers in places like France or Spain began to espouse openly anarchist ideas, this option was no longer available. Anarchists instead embraced a variety of strategies, from the formation of alternative economic enterprises (co-ops, mutualist banking), workplace strikes and sabotage, and the general strike, to outright insurrection.

Marxism emerged as a political philosophy around the same time and, in its early days especially, aspired to the same ultimate goal as anarchism: a free society, the abolition of all forms of social

inequality, self-managed workplaces, the dissolution of the state. But from the debates surrounding the creation of the First International onwards there was a key difference. Most Marxists insisted that it was necessary first to seize state power—whether by the ballot or otherwise—and use its mechanisms to transform society, to the point where, the argument usually went, such mechanisms would ultimately become redundant and simply fade away into nothingness. Even back in the nineteenth century, anarchists pointed out this was a pipe dream. One cannot, they argued, create peace by training for war, equality by creating top-down chains of command, or, for that matter, human happiness by becoming grim joyless revolutionaries who sacrifice all personal self-realization or self-fulfillment to the cause. Anarchists insisted that it wasn't just that the ends do not justify the means (though the ends do not, of course, justify the means) but that you will never achieve the ends at all unless the means are themselves a model for the world you wish to create. Hence the famous anarchist call to begin "building the new society in the shell of the old" with egalitarian experiments ranging from nonhierarchical schools (like the Escuela Moderna in Spain or the Free School movement in the United States) to radical labor unions (CGT in France, CNT in Spain, IWW in North America) to an endless variety of communes (from the Modern Times collective in New York in 1851 to Christiania in Denmark in 1971; the kibbutz movement in Israel, which was originally largely anarchist-inspired, being perhaps the most famous and successful spin-off from such experiments).

Sometimes, too, around the turn of the nineteenth century, individual anarchists would strike directly against world leaders or robber barons (as they were then called) with assassinations or bombings: in the period from roughly 1894 to 1901 there was a particularly intense spate, which led to the deaths of one French president, one Spanish prime minister, and U.S. president William McKinley, as well as attacks on at least a dozen other kings, princes, secret police chiefs, industrialists, and heads of state. This is the period that produced the notorious popular image of the anarchist bomb thrower, which has lingered in the popular imagination ever

since. Anarchist thinkers like Peter Kropotkin and Emma Goldman often struggled with what to say about such attacks, which were often carried out by isolated individuals who were not actually part of any anarchist union or association. Still, it's worthy of note that anarchists were perhaps the first modern political movement to (gradually) realize that, as a political strategy, terrorism, even when it is not directed at innocents, doesn't work. For nearly a century now, in fact, anarchism has been one of the very few political philosophies whose exponents never blow anyone up (indeed, the twentieth-century political leader who drew most from the anarchist tradition was Mohandas K. Gandhi). Yet for the period of roughly 1914 to 1989, during which time the world was continually either fighting or preparing for world wars, anarchism went into something of an eclipse for precisely that reason: to seem "realistic" in such violent times a political movement had to be capable of organizing tank armies, aircraft carriers, and ballistic missile systems, and that was one thing at which Marxists could often excel, but everyone recognized that anarchists—rather to their credit, in my opinion—would never be able to pull off. It was only after 1989, when the age of great-war mobilizations seemed to have come to an end, that a global revolutionary movement based on anarchist principles—the Global Justice Movement—reappeared.

There are endless varieties, colors, and tendencies of anarchism. For my own part, I like to call myself a "small-a" anarchist. I'm less interested in figuring out what sort of anarchist I am than in working in broad coalitions that operate in accord with anarchist principles: movements that are not trying to work through or become governments; movements uninterested in assuming the role of de facto government institutions like trade organizations or capitalist firms; groups that focus on making our relations with each other a model of the world we wish to create. In other words, people working toward truly free societies. After all, it's hard to figure out exactly what kind of anarchism makes the most sense when so many questions can only be answered further down the

road. Would there be a role for markets in a truly free society? How could we know? I myself am confident, based on history,[25] that even if we did try to maintain a market economy in such a free society—that is, one in which there would be no state to enforce contracts, so that agreements came to be based only on trust—economic relations would rapidly morph into something libertarians would find completely unrecognizable, and would soon not resemble anything we are used to thinking of as a "market" at all. I certainly can't imagine anyone agreeing to work for wages if they have any other options. But who knows, maybe I'm wrong. I am less interested in working out what the detailed architecture of what a free society would be like than in creating the conditions that would enable us to find out.

We have little idea what sort of organizations, or for that matter, technologies, would emerge if free people were unfettered to use their imagination to actually solve collective problems rather than to make them worse. But the primary question is: how do we even get there? What would it take to allow our political and economic systems to become a mode of collective problem solving rather than, as they are now, a mode of collective war?

Even anarchists have taken a very long time to come around to grappling with the full extent of this problem. When anarchism was part of the broader workers' movement, for example, it tended to accept that "democracy" meant majority voting and Robert's Rules of Order, relying on appeals to solidarity to convince the minority to go along. Appeals to solidarity can be very effective when one is locked in life-or-death conflict of one sort or another, as revolutionaries usually were. The CNT, the anarchist labor union in Spain of the 1920s and 1930s, relied on a principle that when a workplace voted to strike, no member who had voted against striking was bound by the decision; the result was, almost invariably, 100 percent compliance. But again, strikes were quasi-military operations. Local rural communes tended to fall back, as rural communities everywhere do, on some sort of de facto consensus.

In the United States, on the other hand, consensus, rather than majority voting, has often been used by grassroots organizers who were not, explicitly, anarchists: SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which was the horizontal branch of the civil rights movement, operated by consensus, and SDS, Students for a Democratic Society, claimed in their constitutional principles to operate by parliamentary procedure, but in fact tended to rely on consensus in practice. Most of those who participated in such meetings felt the process used at the time was crude, improvised, and often extremely frustrating. Part of it was just because Americans, for all their democratic spirit, mostly had absolutely no experience of democratic deliberation. There's a famous story from the civil rights movement of a small group of activists trying to come to a collective decision in an emergency situation, unable to attain consensus. At one point, one of them gave up and pulled out a gun and aimed it directly at the facilitator. "Either make a decision for us," he said, "or I'll shoot you." The facilitator replied, "Well I guess you'll just have to shoot me then." It took a very long time to develop what might be called a culture of democracy, and when it did emerge, it came from surprising directions: spiritual traditions, Quakerism, for instance, and feminism.

The American Society of Friends, the Quakers, for instance, had spent centuries developing their own form of consensus decision making as a spiritual exercise. Quakers had also been active in most grassroots American social movements from Abolitionism onward, but until the 1970s they were not, for the most part, willing to teach others their techniques for the precise reason that they considered it a spiritual matter, a part of their religion. "You rely on consensus," George Lakey, a famous Quaker pacifist activist once explained, "when you have a shared understanding of the theology. It is not to be imposed on people. Quakers, at least in the '50s, were anti-proselytizing."[26] It was really only a crisis in the feminist movement—which started using informal consensus in small consciousness-raising groups of usually around a dozen people, but found themselves running into all sorts of problems with cliques and tacit leadership structures when those became larger in size—that

eventually inspired some dissident Quakers (the most famous was Lakey himself) to pitch in and begin disseminating some of their techniques. These techniques, in turn, now infused with a specifically feminist ethos, came to be modified when adopted for larger and more diverse groups.[27]

This is just one example of how what has now come to be called "Anarchist Process"—all those elaborate techniques of facilitation and consensus finding, the hand signals and the like—emerged from radical feminism, Quakerism, and even Native American traditions. In fact, the particular variety employed in North America should really be called "feminist process" rather than "anarchist process." These methods became identified with anarchism precisely because anarchists recognized them to be forms that could be employed in a free society, in which no one could be physically coerced to go along with a decision they found profoundly objectionable.[a]

Consensus is not just a set of techniques. When we talk about process, what we're really talking about is the gradual creation of a culture of democracy. This brings us back to rethinking some of our most basic assumptions about what democracy is even about.

If we return to the writings of men like Adams and Madison or even Jefferson in this light, it's easy to see that, elitist though they were, some of their criticisms of democracy deserve to be taken seriously. First of all, they argued that instituting a system of majoritarian direct democracy among white adult males in a society deeply divided by inequalities of wealth would likely lead to tumultuous, unstable, and ultimately bloody results, to the rise of demagogues and tyrants. Here they were probably right.

Another argument they made is that only established men of property should be allowed to vote and hold office because only they were sufficiently independent and therefore free of self-interest that they could afford to think about the common good. This latter is an important argument and deserves more attention than it has usually been given.

Obviously, the way it was framed was nothing if not elitist. The profound hypocrisy of arguing that the common people lacked education or rationality come through clearly in the writings of men like Gouverneur Morris, who was willing to admit, at least in a private letter to a fellow member of the gentry, that it was the opposite idea—that ordinary people had acquired education and were capable of framing rational arguments—that terrified him most of all.

But the real problem with arguments based on the presumed "irrationality" of the common people was in the underlying assumptions about what constituted "rationality." One common argument against popular rule in the early republic was that the "eight or nine millions who have no property" as Adams put it, were incapable of rational judgment because they were unused to managing their own affairs. Servants and wage laborers, let alone women and slaves, were accustomed to taking orders. Some among the elites held this to be because they were capable of nothing else; some simply saw it as the outcome of their habitual circumstances. But almost all agreed that if such people were given the vote, they would not think about what was best for the country but immediately attach themselves to some leader—either because that leader bought them off in some way (promised to abolish their debts, or even directly paid them), or just because following others is all they knew how to do. An excess of liberty, therefore, would only lead to tyranny as the people threw themselves to the mercies of charismatic leaders. At best, it would result in "factionalism," a political system dominated by political parties—almost all the framers were strongly opposed to the emergence of a party system—battling over their respective interests. Here they were right: while major class warfare didn't ensue—partly because of the existence of the escape hatch of the frontier—factionalism and political parties immediately followed once an even modestly expanded franchise began to be put into place in the 1820s and 1830s. The fears of the elites were not entirely misplaced.

The notion that only men with property can be fully rational, and that others exist primarily to follow orders, traces back at least to

Athens. Aristotle states the matter quite explicitly in the beginning of his *Politics*, where he argues that only free adult males can be fully rational beings, in control of their own bodies, just as they are in control over others: their women, children, and slaves. Here then is the real flaw in the whole tradition of "rationality" that the Founders inherited. It's not ultimately about self-sufficiency, being disinterested. To be rational in this tradition has everything to do with the ability to issue commands: to stand apart from a situation, assess it from a distance, make the appropriate set of calculations, and then tell others what to do.[28] Essentially, it is the kind of calculation one can make *only* when one can tell others to shut up and do as they are told, not work with them as free equals in search of solutions. It's only the habit of command that allows one to imagine that the world can be reduced to the equivalent of mathematical formulae, formulae that can be applied to any situation, regardless of its real human complexities.

This is why any philosophy that begins by proposing that humans are, or should be, rational—as cold and calculating as a lord—invariably ends up concluding that, really, we're the opposite: that reason, as Hume so famously put it, is always, and can only be, the "slave of the passions." We seek pleasure; therefore we seek property, to guarantee our access to pleasure; therefore, we seek power, to guarantee our access to property. In every case there's no natural end to it; we'll always seek more and more and more. This theory of human nature is already present in the ancient philosophers (and is their explanation why democracy can only be disastrous), and recurs in the Christian tradition of Saint Augustine in the guise of original sin, and in the atheist Thomas Hobbes's theory of why a state of nature could only have been a violent "war of all against all," and again, of course, of why democracy must necessarily be disastrous. The creators of the eighteenth-century republican constitutions shared these assumptions as well. Humans were really incorrigible. So for all the occasional high-minded language, most of these philosophers were ultimately willing to admit that the only real choice was between utterly blind passions and the rational calculation of the interests of an elite class; the

ideal constitution, therefore, was one designed to ensure that such interests checked each other and ultimately balanced off.

This has some curious implications. On the one hand, it is universally held that democracy means little without free speech, a free press, and the means for open political deliberation and debate. At the same time, most theorists of liberal democracy—from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to John Rawls—grant that sphere of deliberation an incredibly limited purview, since they assume a set of political actors (politicians, voters, interest groups) who already know what they want before they show up in the political arena. Rather than using the political sphere to decide how to balance competing values, or make up their minds about the best course of action, such political actors, if they think about anything, consider only how best to pursue their already existing interests.[29]

So this leaves us with a democracy of the "rational," where we define rationality as detached mathematical calculation born of the power to issue commands, the kind of "rationality" that will inevitably produce monsters. As the basis for a true democratic system, these terms are clearly disastrous. But what is the alternative? How to found a theory of democracy on the kind of reasoning that goes on, instead, between equals?

One reason this has been difficult to do is that this sort of reasoning is actually more complex and sophisticated than simple mathematical calculation, and therefore doesn't lend itself to the quantifiable models beloved of political scientists and those who assess grant applications. After all, when one asks if a person is being rational, we aren't asking very much: really, just whether they are capable of making basic logical connections. The matter rarely comes up unless one suspects someone might actually be crazy or perhaps so blinded by passion that their arguments make no sense. Consider, in contrast, what's entailed when one asks if someone is being "reasonable." The standard here is much higher. Reasonableness implies a much more sophisticated ability to achieve a balance between different perspectives, values, and imperatives, none of which, usually, could possibly be reduced to mathematical formulae. It means coming up with a compromise between positions

that are, according to formal logic, incommensurable, just as there's no formal way, when deciding what to cook for dinner, to measure the contrasting advantages of ease of preparation, healthiness, and taste. But of course we make such decisions all the time. Most of life—particularly life with others—consists of making reasonable compromises that could never be reduced to mathematical models.

Another way to put this is that political theorists tend to assume actors who are operating on the intellectual level of an eight-year-old. Developmental psychologists have observed that children begin to make logical arguments not to solve problems, but when coming up with reasons for what they already want to think. Anyone who deals with small children on a regular basis will immediately recognize that this is true. The ability to compare and coordinate contrasting perspectives on the other hand comes later and is the very essence of mature intelligence. It's also precisely what those used to the power of command rarely have to do.

The philosopher Stephen Toulmin, already famous for his models of moral reasoning, made something of an intellectual splash in the 1990s when he tried to develop a similar contrast between rationality and reasonableness: though he started his analysis on the basis for rationality as deriving not from the power of command, but from the need for absolute certainty. Contrasting the generous spirit of an essayist like Montaigne, who wrote in the expansive Europe of the sixteenth century and assumed that truth is always situational, with the well-nigh paranoid rigor of René Descartes, who wrote a century later when Europe had collapsed into bloody wars of religion and who conceived a vision of society as based on purely "rational" grounds, Toulmin proposed that all subsequent political thought has been bedeviled by attempts to apply impossible standards of abstract rationality to concrete human realities. But Toulmin wasn't the first to propose the distinction. I myself first encountered it in a rather whimsical essay published in 1960 by the British poet Robert Graves called "The Case for Xanthippe."

For those who lack the classical education of New York's early butchers and bakers,[b] Xanthippe was Socrates' wife, and has gone

down in history as an atrocious nag. Socrates' equanimity in enduring (ignoring) her is regularly held out as a proof of his nobility of character. Graves begins by pointing out: why is it that for two thousand years, no one seems to have asked what it might have actually been like to be married to Socrates? Imagine you were saddled with a husband who did next to nothing to support a family, spent all his time trying to prove everyone he met was wrong about everything, and felt true love was only possible between men and underage boys? You wouldn't express some opinions about this? Socrates has been held out ever since as the paragon of a certain unrelenting notion of pure consistency, an unflinching determination to follow arguments to their logical conclusions, which is surely useful in its way—but he was not a very reasonable person, and those who celebrate him have ended up producing a "mechanized, insensate, inhumane, abstract rationality" that has done the world enormous harm. Graves writes that as a poet, he feels no choice but to identify himself more with those frozen out of the "rational" space of Greek city, starting with women like Xanthippe, for whom reasonableness doesn't exclude logic (no one is actually *against* logic) but combines it with a sense of humor, practicality, and simple human decency.

With that in mind, it only makes sense that so much of the initiative for creating new forms of democratic process—like consensus—has emerged from the tradition of feminism, which means (among other things) the intellectual tradition of those who have, historically, tended not to be vested with the power of command. Consensus is an attempt to create a politics founded on the principle of reasonableness—one that, as feminist philosopher Deborah Heikes has pointed out, requires not only logical consistency, but "a measure of good judgment, self-criticism, a capacity for social interaction, and a willingness to give and consider reasons."[30] Genuine deliberation, in short. As a facilitation trainer would likely put it, it requires the ability to listen well enough to understand perspectives that are fundamentally different from one's own, and then try to find pragmatic common ground without attempting to convert one's interlocutors completely to

one's own perspective. It means viewing democracy as common problem solving among those who respect the fact they will always have, like all humans, somewhat incommensurable points of view.

This is how consensus is supposed to work: the group agrees, first, to some common purpose. This allows the group to look at decision making as a matter of solving common problems. Seen this way, a diversity of perspectives, even a radical diversity of perspectives, while it might cause difficulties, can also be an enormous resource. After all, what sort of team is more likely to come up with a creative solution to a problem: a group of people who all see matters somewhat differently, or a group of people who all see things exactly the same?

As I've already observed, spaces of democratic creativity are precisely those where very different sorts of people, coming from very different traditions, are suddenly forced to improvise. One reason is because in such situations, people are forced to reconcile divergent assumptions about what politics is even about. In the 1980s, a group of would-be Maoist guerrillas from urban Mexico descended to the mountains of the Mexican southwest, where they began to create revolutionary networks, first by beginning women's literacy campaigns. Eventually, they became the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, who initiated a brief insurrection in 1994—not, however, to overthrow the state, but to create a liberated territory in which largely indigenous communities could begin experimenting with new forms of democracy. From the beginning, there were constant differences between the originally urban intellectuals, like the famous Subcomandante Marcos, who assumed democracy meant majority vote and elected representatives, and Mam, Cholti, Tzeltal, and Tzotzil speakers, whose communal assemblies had always operated by consensus, and preferred to see a system where, if delegates had to be selected, they could be recalled the moment communities no longer felt they were conveying the communal will. As Marcos recalled, they soon found there was no agreement about what "democracy" actually meant:

> The communities are promoting democracy. But the concept seems vague. There are many kinds of democracy. That's what I tell them. I try to explain to them: "You can operate by consensus because you have a communal life." When they arrive at an assembly, they know each other, they come to solve a common problem. "But in other places it isn't so," I tell them. "People live separate lives and they use the assembly for other things, not to solve the problem."
>
> And they say, "no," but it means "yes, it works for us."
>
> And it indeed does work for them, they solve the problem. So they propose that method for the Nation and the world. The world must organize itself thus.… And it is very difficult to go against that because that is how they solve their problems.[31]

Let us take this proposal seriously. Why shouldn't democracy be a matter of collective problem solving? We might have very different ideas about what life is ultimately about, but it's perfectly apparent that human beings on this planet share a large number of common problems (climate change comes most readily to mind as a pressing and immediate one, but there are any number of them) that we would do well to work together to try to solve. Everyone seems to agree that in principle it would be better to do this democratically, in a spirit of equality and reasonable deliberation. Why does the idea that we might actually do so seem like such a utopian pipe dream?

Perhaps instead of asking what the best political system is that our current social order could support, we should be asking, What social arrangements would be necessary in order for us to have a genuine, participatory, democratic system that could dedicate itself to solving collective problems?[c]

It seems kind of an obvious question. If we are not used to asking it, it's because we've been taught from an early age that the answer is itself unreasonable. Because the answer, of course, is anarchism.

In fact, there is reason to believe the Founders were right: one cannot create a political system based on the principle of direct, participatory democracy in a society such as their own, divided by vast inequalities of wealth, the total exclusion of the bulk of the population (in early America, women, slaves, indigenous people), and where most people's lives were organized around the giving

and taking of orders. Nor is it possible in a society such as our own, in which 1 percent of the population controls 42 percent of the wealth.

If you propose the idea of anarchism to a roomful of ordinary people, someone will almost inevitably object: but of course we can't eliminate the state, prisons, and police. If we do, people will simply start killing one another. To most, this seems simple common sense. The odd thing about this prediction is that it can be empirically tested; in fact, it frequently has been empirically tested. And it turns out to be false. True, there are one or two cases like Somalia, where the state broke down when people were already in the midst of a bloody civil war, and warlords did not immediately stop killing each other when it happened (though in most respects, even in Somalia, a worst-case hypothesis, education, health, and other social indicators had actually improved twenty years after the dissolution of the central state!).[32] And of course we hear about the cases like Somalia for the very reason that violence ensues. But in most cases, as I myself observed in parts of rural Madagascar, very little happens. Obviously, statistics are unavailable, since the absence of states generally also means the absence of anyone gathering statistics. However, I've talked to many anthropologists and others who've been in such places and their accounts are surprisingly similar. The police disappear, people stop paying taxes, otherwise they pretty much carry on as they had before. Certainly they do not break into a Hobbesian "war of all against all."

As a result, we almost never hear about such places at all. When I was living in the town of Arivonimamo in 1990, and wandering about the surrounding countryside, even I had no idea at first that I was living in an area where state control had effectively disappeared (I think part of the reason for my impression was that everyone talked and acted as if state institutions were still functioning, hoping no one would notice). When I returned in 2010, the police had returned, taxes were once again being collected, but everyone also felt that violent crime had increased dramatically.

So the real question we have to ask becomes: what is it about the experience of living under a state, that is, in a society where rules

are enforced by the threat of prisons and police, and all the forms of inequality and alienation that makes possible, that makes it seem obvious to us that people, under such conditions, would behave in a way that it turns out they don't actually behave?

The anarchist answer is simple. If you treat people like children, they will tend to act like children. The only successful method anyone has ever devised to encourage others to act like adults is to treat them as if they already are. It's not infallible. Nothing is. But no other approach has any real chance of success. And the historical experience of what actually does happen in crisis situations demonstrates that even those who have not grown up in a culture of participatory democracy, if you take away their guns or ability to call their lawyers, can suddenly become extremely reasonable.[33] This is all that anarchists are really proposing to do.

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* The same is true of all thirteen of the original state constitutions created after the Revolution.

† The uprisings are known to history as Shays' Rebellion, and even more condescendingly, the Whiskey Rebellion, though the latter name was consciously invented by Alexander Hamilton to dismiss the rebels as drunken hillbillies rather than, as Terry Bouton has demonstrated, citizens calling for greater democratic control. See Bouton, *Taming Democracy: "The People," the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). There has been a wealth of recent research on the topic: notably, Woody Holton's *Unruly Americans and the Origin of the Constitution* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2007), and William Hogeland's *The Whiskey Rebellion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), and *Founding Finance: How Debt, Speculation, Foreclosures, Protests, and Crackdowns Made Us a Nation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012). The intellectual tradition goes back at least to Charles Beard's famous *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: McMillan, 1913), which pointed out the Framers were almost exclusively bond-holders, though his original conclusions have been much further refined by subsequent research.

‡ Husband had called for a relatively equal distribution of landed property as well, on the grounds that inequalities of property mitigate against democratic participation, and for voting districts small enough that representatives could regularly consult with their

constituents. It is likely he was exactly who Adams was thinking of in his remarks about the dangers of majority vote.

§ This passage is the opening epigraph of William Hogeland's *The Whiskey Rebellion*, which emphasizes the degree to which the resulting document was careful to avoid actual democracy.

‖ In the twelve collected volumes of Jefferson's work the word "democracy" appears once, and only then in a quote by Samuel von Pufendorf about the legalities of treaties! Of course, Jefferson was the closest to an advocate of direct democracy as there was among the Founders, with his famous vision of dividing the country into thousands of "wards" small enough to afford public participation, allowing citizens to maintain the same sort of popular mobilization witnessed during the Revolution—but even these he referred to as small republics.

a With a few die-hard exceptions. I should note here that the first mass use of consensus process, in the antinuclear movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s, was often quite rocky—partly out of simple lack of experience, partly out of purism (it was only later that modified consensus for larger groups came into common use)—and many who went through the experience, most famously libertarian socialist Murray Bookchin, who promoted the idea of communalism, came out strongly against consensus and for majority rule.

b One does sometimes worry that the Gouverneur Morrises of the world have ultimately been successful in preventing such knowledge from reaching most of the population.

c It wouldn't have to be based on a system of strict consensus, by the way, since, as we'll see, absolute consensus is unrealistic in large groups—let alone on a planetary scale! What I am talking about is just what I say: an approach to politics, whatever particular institutional form it takes, that similarly sees political deliberation as problem solving rather than as a struggle between fixed interests.

11

THERE NEVER WAS A WEST: OR, DEMOCRACY EMERGES FROM THE SPACES IN BETWEEN

What follows emerges largely from my own experience of the alternative globalization movement, where issues of democracy have been very much at the center of debate. Anarchists in Europe or North America and indigenous organizations in the Global South have found themselves locked in remarkably similar arguments. Is "democracy" an inherently Western concept? Does it refer a form of governance (a mode of communal self-organization), or a form of government (one particular way of organizing a state apparatus)? Does democracy necessarily imply majority rule? Is representative democracy really democracy at all? Is the word permanently tainted by its origins in Athens, a militaristic, slave-owning society founded on the systematic repression of women? Or does what we now call "democracy" have any real historical connection to Athenian democracy in the first place? Is it possible for those trying to develop decentralized forms of consensus-based direct democracy to reclaim the word? If so, how will we ever convince the majority of people in the world that "democracy" has nothing to do with electing representatives? If not, if we instead accept the standard definition and start calling direct democracy something else, how can we say we're against democracy—a word with such universally positive associations?

These are arguments about words much more than they are arguments about practices. On questions of practice, in fact, there is a surprising degree of convergence; especially within the more radical elements of the movement. Whether one is talking with members of Zapatista communities in Chiapas, unemployed *piqueteros* in Argentina, Dutch squatters, or anti-eviction activists in South African townships, almost everyone agrees on the importance of horizontal, rather than vertical structures; the need for initiatives to rise up from relatively small, self-organized, autonomous groups rather than being conveyed downwards through chains of command; the rejection of permanent, named leadership structures; and the need to maintain some

kind of mechanism—whether these be North American-style "facilitation," Zapatista-style women's and youth caucuses, or any of an endless variety of other possibilities—to ensure that the voices of those who would normally find themselves marginalized or excluded from traditional participatory mechanisms are heard. Some of the bitter conflicts of the past, for example, between partisans of majority voting versus partisans of consensus process, have been largely resolved, or perhaps more accurately seem increasingly irrelevant, as more and more social movements use full consensus only within smaller groups and adopt various forms of "modified consensus" for larger coalitions. Something is emerging. The problem is what to call it. Many of the key principles of the movement (self-organization, voluntary association, mutual aid, the refusal of state power) derive from the anarchist tradition. Still, many who embrace these ideas are reluctant, or flat-out refuse, to call themselves "anarchists." Similarly with democracy. My own approach has normally been to openly embrace both terms, to argue, in fact, that anarchism and democracy are—or should be—largely identical. However, as I say, there is no consensus on this issue, nor even a clear majority view.

It seems to me these are tactical, political questions more than anything else. The word "democracy" has meant any number of different things over the course of its history. When first coined, it referred a system in which the citizens of a community made decisions by equal vote in a collective assembly. For most of its history, it referred to political disorder, rioting, lynching, and factional violence (in fact, the word had much the same associations as "anarchy" does today). Only quite recently has it become identified with a system in which the citizens of a state elect representatives to exercise state power in their name. Clearly there is no true essence to be discovered here. About the only thing these different referents have in common, perhaps, is that they involve some sense that political questions that are normally the concerns of a narrow elite are here thrown open to everyone, and that this is either a very good, or a very bad, thing. The term has always been so morally loaded that to write a dispassionate, disinterested history of democracy would almost be a contradiction in terms. Most scholars who want to maintain an appearance of disinterest avoid the word. Those who do make generalizations about democracy inevitably have some sort of axe to grind.

I certainly do. That is why I feel it only fair to the reader to make my own axes evident from the start. It seems to me that there's a reason why the word "democracy," no matter how consistently it is abused by tyrants and demagogues, still maintains its stubborn popular appeal. For most people, democracy is still identified with some notion of ordinary people collectively managing their own affairs. It already had this connotation in the nineteenth century, and it was for this reason that nineteenth-century politicians, who

had earlier shunned the term, reluctantly began to adopt the term and refer to themselves as "democrats"—and, gradually, to patch together a history by which they could represent themselves as heirs to a tradition that traced back to ancient Athens. However, I will also assume—for no particular reason, or no particular scholarly reason, since these are not scholarly questions but moral and political ones—that the history of "democracy" should be treated as more than just the history of the word "democracy." If democracy is simply a matter of communities managing their own affairs through an open and relatively egalitarian process of public discussion, there is no reason why egalitarian forms of decision-making in rural communities in Africa or Brazil should not be at least as worthy of the name as the constitutional systems that govern most nation-states today—and, in many cases, probably a good deal more worthy.

In light of this, I will be making a series of related arguments and perhaps the best way to proceed would be to just set out them all out right away.

1) Almost everyone who writes on the subject assumes "democracy" is a "Western" concept that begins its history in ancient Athens. They also assume that what eighteenth- and nineteenth-century politicians began reviving in Western Europe and North America was essentially the same thing. Democracy is thus seen as something whose natural habitat is Western Europe and its English- or French-speaking settler colonies. Not one of these assumptions is justified. "Western civilization" is a particularly incoherent concept, but, insofar as it refers to anything, it refers to an intellectual tradition. This intellectual tradition is, overall, just as hostile to anything we would recognize as democracy as those of India, China, or Mesoamerica.
2) Democratic practices—processes of egalitarian decision-making—however, occur pretty much anywhere, and are not peculiar to any one given "civilization," culture, or tradition. They tend to crop up wherever human life goes on outside systematic structures of coercion.
3) The "democratic ideal" tends to emerge when, under certain historical circumstances, intellectuals and politicians, usually in some sense navigating their way between states and popular movements and popular practices, interrogate their own traditions—invariably, in dialogue with other ones—citing cases of past or present democratic practice to argue that their tradition has a fundamental kernel of democracy. I call these moments of "democratic refoundation." From the perspective of the intellectual traditions, they are also moments of recuperation, in which ideals and institutions that are often the product of incredibly

complicated forms of interaction between people of very different histories and traditions come to be represented as emerging from the logic of that intellectual tradition itself. Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries especially, such moments did not just occur in Europe, but almost everywhere.

4) The fact that this ideal is always founded on (at least partly) invented traditions does not mean it is inauthentic or illegitimate or, at least, more inauthentic or illegitimate than any other. The contradiction, however, is that this ideal was always based on the impossible dream of marrying democratic procedures or practices with the coercive mechanisms of the state. The result are not "Democracies" in any meaningful sense of the world but Republics with a few, usually fairly limited, democratic elements.

5) What we are experiencing today is not a crisis of democracy but rather a crisis of the state. In recent years, there has been a massive revival of interest in democratic practices and procedures within global social movements, but this has proceeded almost entirely outside of statist frameworks. The future of democracy lies precisely in this area.

Let me take these up in roughly the order I've presented them above. I'll start with the curious idea that democracy is somehow a "Western concept."

Part I: On the Incoherence Of the Notion of the "Western Tradition"

I'll begin, then, with a relatively easy target: Samuel P. Huntington's famous essay on the "Clash of Civilizations." Huntington is a professor of International Relations at Harvard, a classic Cold War intellectual, beloved of right-wing think tanks. In 1993, he published an essay arguing that, now that the Cold War was over, global conflicts would come to center on clashes between ancient cultural traditions. The argument was notable for promoting a certain notion of cultural humility. Drawing on the work of Arnold Toynbee, he urged Westerners to understand that theirs is just one civilization among many, that its values should in no way be assumed to be universal. Democracy in particular, he argued, is a distinctly Western idea and the West should abandon its efforts to impose it on the rest of the world:

> At a superficial level, much of Western culture has indeed permeated the rest of the world. At a more basic level, however, Western concepts differ fundamentally from those prevalent in other civilizations. Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights,

> equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist, or Orthodox cultures. Western efforts to propagate such ideas produce instead a reaction against "human rights imperialism" and a reaffirmation of indigenous values, as can be seen in the support for religious fundamentalism by the younger generation in non-Western cultures. The very notion that there is a "universal civilization" is a Western idea, directly at odds with the particularism of most Asian societies and their emphasis on what distinguishes one people from another (1993: 120).

The list of Western concepts is fascinating from any number of angles. If taken literally, for instance, it would mean that "the West" only really took any kind of recognizable form in the nineteenth or even twentieth centuries, since in any previous one the overwhelming majority of "Westerners" would have rejected just about all these principles out of hand—if, indeed, they would have been able even to conceive of them. One can, if one likes, scratch around through the last two or three thousand years in different parts of Europe and find plausible forerunners to most of them. Many try. Fifth-century Athens usually provides a useful resource in this regard, provided one is willing to ignore, or at least skim over, almost everything that happened between then and perhaps 1215 AD, or maybe 1776. This is roughly the approach taken by most conventional textbooks. Huntington is a bit subtler. He treats Greece and Rome as a separate, "Classical civilization," which then splits off into Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) Christianity—and later, of course, Islam. When Western civilization begins, it is identical to Latin Christendom. After the upheavals of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, however, the civilization loses its religious specificity and transforms into something broader and essentially secular. The results, however, are much the same as in conventional textbooks, since Huntington also insists that the Western tradition was all along "far more" the heir of the ideas of Classical civilization than its Orthodox or Islamic rivals.

Now there are a thousands ways one could attack Huntington's position. His list of "Western concepts" seems particularly arbitrary. Any number of concepts were adrift in Western Europe over the years, and many far more widely accepted. Why choose this list rather than some other? What are the criteria? Clearly, Huntington's immediate aim was to show that many ideas widely accepted in Western Europe and North America are likely to be viewed with suspicion in other quarters. But, even on this basis, could one not equally well assemble a completely different list: say, argue that "Western culture" is premised on science, industrialism, bureaucratic rationality, na-

tionalism, racial theories, and an endless drive for geographic expansion, and then argue that the culmination of Western culture was the Third Reich? (Actually, some radical critics of the West would probably make precisely this argument.) Yet even after criticism, Huntington has been stubborn in sticking to more or less the same arbitrary list (e.g., 1996).

It seems to me the only way to understand why Huntington creates the list he does is to examine his use of the terms "culture" and "civilization." In fact, if one reads the text carefully, one finds that the phrases "Western culture" and "Western civilization" are used pretty much interchangeably. Each civilization has its own culture. Cultures, in turn, appear to consist primarily of "ideas," "concepts," and "values." In the Western case, these ideas appear to have once been tied to a particular sort of Christianity, but now have developed a basically geographic or national distribution, having set down roots in Western Europe and its English- and French-speaking settler colonies.[1] The other civilizations listed are—with the exception of Japan—not defined in geographic terms. They are still religions: the Islamic, Confucian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Orthodox Christian civilizations. This is already a bit confusing. Why should the West have stopped being primarily defined in religious terms around 1520 (despite the fact that most Westerners continue to call themselves "Christians"), while the others all remain so (despite the fact that most Chinese, for example, would certainly not call themselves "Confucians")? Presumably because, for Huntington to be consistent in this area, he would either have to exclude from the West certain groups he would prefer not to exclude (Catholics or Protestants, Jews, Deists, secular philosophers) or else provide some reason why the West can consist of a complex amalgam of faiths and philosophies while all the other civilizations cannot: despite the fact that if one examines the history of geographical units like India, or China (as opposed to made-up entities like Hinduism or Confucianism), a complex amalgam of faiths and philosophies is precisely what one finds.

It gets worse. In a later clarification called "What Makes the West Western" (1996), Huntington actually does claim that "pluralism" is one of the West's unique qualities:

> Western society historically has been highly pluralistic. What is distinctive about the West, as Karl Deutsch noted, "is the rise and persistence of diverse autonomous groups not based on blood relationship or marriage." Beginning in the sixth and seventh centuries these groups initially included monasteries, monastic orders, and guilds, but afterwards expanded in many areas of Europe to include a variety of other associations and societies (1996: 234).

He goes on to explain this diversity also included class pluralism (strong aristocracies), social pluralism (representative bodies), linguistic diversity, and so on. All this gradually set the stage, he says, for the unique complexity of Western civil society. Now, it would be easy to point out how ridiculous all this is. One could, for instance, remind the reader that China and India in fact had, for most of their histories, a great deal more religious pluralism than Western Europe;[2] that most Asian societies were marked by a dizzying variety of monastic orders, guilds, colleges, secret societies, sodalities, professional and civic groups; that none ever came up with such distinctly Western ways of enforcing uniformity as the war of extermination against heretics, the Inquisition, or the witch hunt. But the amazing thing is that what Huntington is doing here is trying to turn the very incoherence of his category into its defining feature. First, he describes Asian civilizations in such a way that they cannot, by definition, be plural; then, if one were to complain that people he lumps together as "the West" don't seem to have any common features at all—no common language, religion, philosophy, or mode of government—Huntington could simply reply that this pluralism *is* the West's defining feature. It is the perfect circular argument.

In most ways, Huntington's argument is just typical, old-fashioned Orientalism: European civilization is represented as inherently dynamic, "the East," at least tacitly, as stagnant, timeless, and monolithic. What I really want to draw attention to, however, is just how incoherent Huntington's notions of "civilization" and "culture" really are. The word "civilization," after all, can be used in two very different ways. It can be used to refer to a society in which people live in cities, in the way an archeologist might refer to the Indus Valley. Or it can mean refinement, accomplishment, cultural achievement. Culture has much the same double meaning. One can use the term in its anthropological sense, as referring to structures of feeling, symbolic codes that members of a given culture absorb in the course of growing up and which inform every aspect of their daily life: the way people talk, eat, marry, gesture, play music, and so on. To use Bourdieu's terminology, one could call this culture as habitus. Alternately, one can use the word to refer to what is also called "high culture": the best and most profound productions of some artistic, literary, or philosophical elite. Huntington's insistence on defining the West only by its most remarkable, valuable concepts—like freedom and human rights—suggests that, in either case, it's mainly the latter sense he has in mind. After all, if "culture" were to be defined in the anthropological sense, then clearly the most direct heirs to ancient Greeks would not be modern Englishmen and Frenchmen, but modern Greeks. Whereas, in Huntington's system, modern Greeks parted company with the

West over 1500 years ago, the moment they converted to the wrong form of Christianity.

In short, for the notion of "civilization," in the sense used by Huntington, to really make sense, civilizations have to be conceived basically as traditions of people reading one another's books. It is possible to say Napoleon or Disraeli are more heirs to Plato and Thucydides than a Greek shepherd of their day for one reason only: both men were more likely to have read Plato and Thucydides. Western culture is not just a collection of ideas; it is a collection of ideas that are taught in textbooks and discussed in lecture halls, cafés, or literary salons. If it were not, it would be hard to imagine how one could end up with a civilization that begins in ancient Greece, passes to ancient Rome, maintains a kind of half-life in the Medieval Catholic world, revives in the Italian renaissance, and then passes mainly to dwell in those countries bordering the North Atlantic. It would also be impossible to explain how, for most of their history, "Western concepts" like human rights and democracy existed only *in potentia*. We could say: this is a literary and philosophical tradition, a set of ideas first imagined in ancient Greece, then conveyed through books, lectures, and seminars over several thousand years, drifting as they did westward, until their liberal and democratic potential was fully realized in a small number of countries bordering the Atlantic a century or two ago. Once they became enshrined in new, democratic institutions, they began to worm their way into ordinary citizens' social and political common sense. Finally, their proponents saw them as having universal status and tried to impose them on the rest of the world. But here they hit their limits, because they cannot ultimately expand to areas where there are equally powerful, rival textual traditions—based in Koranic scholarship, or the teachings of the Buddha—that inculcate other concepts and values.

This position, at least, would be intellectually consistent. One might call it the Great Books theory of civilization. In a way, it's quite compelling. Being Western, one might say, has nothing to do with habitus. It is not about the deeply embodied understandings of the world one absorbs in childhood—that which makes certain people upper class Englishwomen, others Bavarian farm boys, or Italian kids from Brooklyn. The West is, rather, the literary-philosophical tradition into which all of them are initiated, mainly in adolescence—though, certainly, some elements of that tradition do, gradually, become part of everyone's common sense. The problem is that, if Huntington applied this model consistently, it would destroy his argument. If civilizations are not deeply embodied, why, then, should an upper class Peruvian woman or Bangladeshi farm boy not be able to take the same curriculum and become just as Western as anyone else? But this is precisely what Huntington is trying to deny.

As a result, he is forced to continually slip back and forth between the two meanings of "civilization" and the two meanings of "culture." Mostly, the West is defined by its loftiest ideals. But sometimes it's defined by its ongoing institutional structure—for example, all those early Medieval guilds and monastic orders, which do not seem to be inspired by readings of Plato and Aristotle, but cropped up all of their own accord. Sometimes Western individualism is treated as an abstract principle, usually suppressed, an idea preserved in ancient texts, but occasionally poking out its head in documents like the Magna Carta. Sometimes it is treated as a deeply embedded folk understanding, which will never make intuitive sense to those raised in a different cultural tradition.

Now, as I say, I chose Huntington largely because he's such an easy target. The argument in "The Clash of Civilizations" is unusually sloppy.[3] Critics have duly savaged most of what he's had to say about non-Western civilizations. The reader may, at this point, feel justified to wonder why I'm bothering to spend so much time on him. The reason is that, in part because they are so clumsy, Huntington's argument brings out the incoherence in assumptions that are shared by almost everyone. None of his critics, to my knowledge, have challenged the idea that there is an entity that can be referred to as "the West," that it can be treated simultaneously as a literary tradition originating in ancient Greece, and as the common sense culture of people who live in Western Europe and North America today. The assumption that concepts like individualism and democracy or are somehow peculiar to it goes similarly unchallenged. All this is simply taken for granted as the grounds of debate. Some proceed to celebrate the West as the birthplace of freedom. Others denounce it as a source of imperial violence. But it's almost impossible to find a political, or philosophical, or social thinker on the left or the right who doubts one can say meaningful things about "the Western tradition" at all. Many of the most radical, in fact, seem to feel it is impossible to say meaningful things about anything else.[4]

Parenthetical Note: On the Slipperiness of the Western Eye

What I am suggesting is that the very notion of the West is founded on a constant blurring of the line between textual traditions and forms of everyday practice. To offer a particular vivid example: In the 1920s, a French philosopher named Lucien Lévy-Bruhl wrote a series of books proposing that many of the societies studied by anthropologists evinced a "pre-logical mentality" (1926, etc). Where modern Westerners employ logico-experimental thought, he argued, primitives employ profoundly different principles. The whole argument need not be spelled out. Everything Lévy-Bruhl said about primitive

logic was attacked almost immediately and his argument is now considered entirely discredited. What his critics did not, generally speaking, point out is that Lévy-Bruhl was comparing apples and oranges. Basically, what he did was assemble the most puzzling ritual statements or surprising reactions to unusual circumstances he could cull from the observations of European missionaries and colonial officials in Africa, New Guinea, and similar places, and try to extrapolate the logic. He then compared this material, not with similar material collected in France or some other Western country, but rather, with a completely idealized conception of how Westerners ought to behave, based on philosophical and scientific texts (buttressed, no doubt, by observations about the way philosophers and other academics act while discussing and arguing about such texts). The results are manifestly absurd—we all know that ordinary people do not in fact apply Aristotelian syllogisms and experimental methods to their daily affairs—but it is the special magic of this style of writing is that one is never forced to confront this.

Because, in fact, this style of writing is also extremely common. How does this magic work? Largely, by causing the reader to identify with a human being of unspecified qualities who's trying to solve a puzzle. One sees it in the Western philosophical tradition, especially starting with the works of Aristotle that, especially compared with similar works in other philosophical traditions (which rarely start from such decontextualized thinkers), give us the impression the universe was created yesterday, suggesting no prior knowledge is necessary. Even more, there is the tendency to show a commonsense narrator confronted with some kind of exotic practices—this is what makes it possible, for example for a contemporary German to read Tacitus' *Germania* and automatically identify with the perspective of the Italian narrator, rather than with his own ancestor,[5] or an Italian atheist to read an Anglican missionary's account of some ritual in Zimbabwe without ever having to think about that observer's dedication to bizarre tea rituals or the doctrine of transubstantiation. Hence, the entire history of the West can be framed as a story of "inventions" and "discoveries." Most of all, there is the fact that it is precisely when one actually begins to write a text to address these issues, as I am doing now, that one effectively becomes part of the canon and the tradition most comes to seem overwhelmingly inescapable.

More than anything else, the "Western individual" in Lévy-Bruhl, or for that matter most contemporary anthropologists, is more than anything else, precisely that featureless, rational observer, a disembodied eye, carefully scrubbed of any individual or social content, that we are supposed to pretend to be when writing in certain genres of prose. It has little relation to any human being who has ever existed, grown up, had loves and hatreds and commitments. It's a pure abstraction. Recognizing all of this creates a terrible

problem for anthropologists: if the "Western individual" doesn't exist, then what precisely is our point of comparison?

It seems to me, though, it creates an even worse problem for anyone who wishes to see this figure as the bearer of "democracy," as well. If democracy is communal self-governance, the Western individual is an actor already purged of any ties to a community. While it is possible to imagine this relatively featureless, rational, observer as the protagonist of certain forms of market economics, to make him (and he is, unless otherwise specified, presumed to be male) a democrat seems possible only if one defines democracy as itself a kind of market that actors enter with little more than a set of economic interests to pursue. This is, of course, the approach promoted by rational-choice theory, and, in a way, you could say it is already implicit in the predominant approach to democratic decision-making in the literature since Rousseau, which tends to see "deliberation" merely as the balancing of interests rather than a process through which subjects themselves are constituted, or even shaped (Manin 1994).[6] It is very difficult to see such an abstraction, divorced from any concrete community, entering into the kind of conversation and compromise required by anything but the most abstract form of democratic process, such as the periodic participation in elections.

World-Systems Reconfigured

The reader may feel entitled to ask: if "the West" is a meaningless category, how can we talk about such matters? It seems to me we need an entirely new set of categories. While this is hardly the place to develop them, I've suggested elsewhere (Graeber 2004) that there are a whole series of terms—starting with the West, but also including terms like "modernity"—that effectively substitute for thought. If one looks either at concentrations of urbanism, or literary-philosophical traditions, it becomes hard to avoid the impression that Eurasia was for most of its history divided into three main centers: an Eastern system centered on China, a South Asian one centered on what's now India, and a Western civilization which centered on what we now called "the Middle East," extending sometimes further, sometimes less, into the Mediterranean.[7] In world-system terms, for most of the Middle Ages Europe and Africa both seem to have almost precisely the same relation with the core states of Mesopotamia and the Levant: they were classic economic peripheries, importing manufactures and supplying raw materials like gold and silver, and, significantly, large numbers of slaves. (After the revolt of African slaves in Basra from 868–883 CE, the Abbasid Caliphate seem to have began importing Europeans instead, as they were considered more docile.) Europe and Africa were, for most of this period, cultural peripheries as

well. Islam resembles what was later to be called "the Western tradition" in so many ways—the intellectual efforts to fuse Judeo-Christian scripture with the categories of Greek philosophy, the literary emphasis on courtly love, the scientific rationalism, the legalism, puritanical monotheism, missionary impulse, the expansionist mercantile capitalism—even the periodic waves of fascination with "Eastern mysticism"—that only the deepest historical prejudice could have blinded European historians to the conclusion that, in fact, this *is* the Western tradition; that Islamicization was and continues to be a form of Westernization; that those who lived in the barbarian kingdoms of the European Middle Ages only came to resemble what we now call "the West" when they themselves became more like Islam.

If so, what we are used to calling "the rise of the West" is probably better thought of, in world-system terms, as the emergence of what Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) has called the "North Atlantic system," which gradually replaced the Mediterranean semi-periphery, and emerged as a world economy of its own, rivaling, and then gradually, slowly, painfully, incorporating the older world economy that had centered on the cosmopolitan societies of the Indian Ocean. This North Atlantic world-system was created through almost unimaginable catastrophe: the destruction of entire civilizations, mass enslavement, the death of at least a hundred million human beings. It also produced its own forms of cosmopolitanism, with endless fusions of African, Native American, and European traditions. Much of the history of the seaborne, North Atlantic proletariat is only beginning to be reconstructed (Gilroy 1993; Sakolsky & Koehnline 1993; Rediker 1981, 1990; Linebaugh and Rediker 2001; etc), a history of mutinies, pirates, rebellions, defections, experimental communities, and every sort of Antinomian and populist idea, largely squelched in conventional accounts, much of it permanently lost, but which seems to have played a key role in many of the radical ideas that came to be referred to as "democracy." This is jumping ahead. For now, I just want to emphasize that rather than a history of "civilizations" developing through some Herderian or Hegelian process of internal unfolding, we are dealing with societies that are thoroughly entangled.

Part II: Democracy Was Not Invented

I began this essay by suggesting that one can write the history of democracy in two very different ways. Either one can write a history of the word "democracy," beginning with ancient Athens, or one can write a history of the sort of egalitarian decision-making procedures that in Athens came to be referred to as "democratic."

Normally, we tend to assume the two are effectively identical because common wisdom has it that democracy—much like, say, science, or philosophy—was invented in ancient Greece. On the face of it this seems an odd assertion. Egalitarian communities have existed throughout human history—many of them far more egalitarian than fifth-century Athens—and they each had some kind of procedure for coming to decisions in matters of collective importance. Often, this involved assembling everyone for discussions in which all members of the community, at least in theory, had equal say. Yet somehow, it is always assumed that these procedures could not have been, properly speaking, "democratic."

The main reason this argument seems to make intuitive sense is because in these other assemblies, things rarely actually came to a vote. Almost invariably, they used some form of consensus-finding. Now this is interesting in itself. If we accept the idea that a show of hands, or having everyone who supports a proposition stand on one side of the plaza and everyone against stand on the other, are not really such incredibly sophisticated ideas that some ancient genius had to "invent" them, then why are they so rarely employed? Why, instead, did communities invariably prefer the apparently much more difficult task of coming to unanimous decisions?

The explanation I would propose is this: it is much easier, in a face-to-face community, to figure out what most members of that community want to do, than to figure out how to change the minds of those who don't want to do it. Consensus decision-making is typical of societies where there would be no way to compel a minority to agree with a majority decision; either because there is no state with a monopoly of coercive force, or because the state has no interest in or does not tend to intervene in local decision-making. If there is no way to compel those who find a majority decision distasteful to go along with it, then the last thing one would want to do is to hold a vote: a public contest which someone will be seen to lose. Voting would be the most likely means to guarantee the sort of humiliations, resentments, and hatreds that ultimately lead the destruction of communities. As any activist who has gone through a facilitation training for a contemporary direct action group can tell you, consensus process is not the same as parliamentary debate and finding consensus in no way resembles voting. Rather, we are dealing with a process of compromise and synthesis meant to produces decisions that no one finds so violently objectionable that they are not willing to at least assent. That is to say two levels we are used to distinguishing—decision-making, and enforcement—are effectively collapsed here. It is not that everyone has to agree. Most forms of consensus include a variety of graded forms of disagreement. The point is to ensure that no one walks away feeling that their

views have been totally ignored and, therefore, that even those who think the group came to a bad decision are willing to offer their passive acquiescence.

Majority democracy, we might say, can only emerge when two factors coincide:

(1) a feeling that people should have equal say in making group decisions, and
(2) a coercive apparatus capable of enforcing those decisions.

For most of human history, it has been extremely unusual to have both at the same time. Where egalitarian societies exist, it is also usually considered wrong to impose systematic coercion. Where a machinery of coercion did exist, it did not even occur to those wielding it that they were enforcing any sort of popular will.

It is of obvious relevance that Ancient Greece was one of the most competitive societies known to history. It was a society that tended to make everything into a public contest, from athletics to philosophy or tragic drama or just about anything else. So it might not seem entirely surprising they made political decision-making into a public contest as well. Even more crucial, though, was the fact that decisions were made by a populace in arms. Aristotle, in his *Politics*, remarks that the constitution of a Greek city-state will normally depend on the chief arm of its military: if this is cavalry, it will be an aristocracy, since horses are expensive. If hoplite infantry, it will be oligarchic, as all could not afford the armor and training. If its power was based in the navy or light infantry, one can expect a democracy, as anyone can row, or use a sling. In other words, if a man is armed, then one pretty much has to take his opinions into account. One can see how this worked at its starkest in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, which tells the story of an army of Greek mercenaries who suddenly find themselves leaderless and lost in the middle of Persia. They elect new officers, and then hold a collective vote to decide what to do next. In a case like this, even if the vote was 60/40, everyone could see the balance of forces and what would happen if things actually came to blows. Every vote was, in a real sense, a conquest.

In other words, here too decision-making and the means of enforcement were effectively collapsed (or could be), but in a rather different way.

Roman legions could be similarly democratic; this was the main reason they were never allowed to enter the city of Rome. And, when Machiavelli revived the notion of a democratic republic at the dawn of the "modern" era, he immediately reverted to the notion of a populace in arms.

This in turn might help explain the term "democracy" itself, which appears to have been coined as something of a slur by its elitist opponents: it

literally means the "force" or even "violence" of the people. *Kratos,* not *archos*. The elitists who coined the term always considered democracy not too far from simple rioting or mob rule; though, of course, their solution was the permanent conquest of the people by someone else. Ironically, when they did manage to suppress democracy for this reason, which was usually, the result was that the only way the general populace's will was known was precisely through rioting, a practice that became quite institutionalized in, say, imperial Rome or eighteenth-century England.

One question that bears historical investigation is the degree to which such phenomena were in fact encouraged by the state. Here, I'm not referring to literal rioting, of course, but to what I would call the "ugly mirrors": institutions promoted or supported by elites that reinforced the sense that popular decision-making could only be violent, chaotic, and arbitrary "mob rule." I suspect that these are quite common to authoritarian regimes. Consider, for example, that while the defining public event in democratic Athens was the *agora*, the defining public event in authoritarian Rome was the circus, assemblies in which the plebs gathered to witness races, gladiatorial contests, and mass executions. Such games were sponsored either directly by the state, or more often, by particular members of the elite (Veyne 1976; Kyle 1998; Lomar and Cornell 2003). The fascinating thing about gladiatorial contests in particular, is that they did involve a kind of popular decision-making: lives would be taken, or spared, by popular acclaim. However, where the procedures of the Athenian *agora* were designed to maximize the dignity of the *demos* and the thoughtfulness of its deliberations—despite the underlying element of coercion, and its occasional capability of making terrifyingly bloodthirsty decisions—the Roman circus was almost exactly the opposite. It had more the air of regular, state-sponsored lynchings. Almost every quality normally ascribed to "the mob" by later writers hostile to democracy—the capriciousness, overt cruelty, factionalism (supporters of rival chariot teams would regularly do battle in the streets), hero worship, mad passions—all were not only tolerated, but actually encouraged, in the Roman amphitheatre. It was as if an authoritarian elite was trying to provide the public with constant nightmare images of the chaos that would ensue if they were to take power into their own hands.

My emphasis on the military origins of direct democracy is not meant to imply that popular assemblies in, say, Medieval cities or New England town meetings were not normally orderly and dignified procedures; though one suspects this was in part due to the fact that here, too, in actual practice, there was a certain baseline of consensus-seeking going on. Still, they seem to have done little to disabuse members of political elites of the idea that popular rule would more resemble the circuses and riots of imperial Rome

and Byzantium. The authors of the Federalist Papers, like almost all other literate men of their day, took it for granted that what they called "democracy"—by which they meant, direct democracy, "pure democracy" as they sometimes put it—was in its nature the most unstable, tumultuous form of government, not to mention one which endangers the rights of minorities (the specific minority they had in mind in this case being the rich). It was only once the term "democracy" could be almost completely transformed to incorporate the principle of representation—a term which itself has a very curious history, since as Cornelius Castoriadis liked to point out (1991; Godbout 2005), it originally referred to representatives of the people before the *king*, internal ambassadors in fact, rather than those who wielded power in any sense themselves—that it was rehabilitated, in the eyes of well-born political theorists, and took on the meaning it has today. In the next section let me pass, however briefly, to how this came about.

Part III: On the Emergence of the "Democratic Ideal"

The remarkable thing is just how long it took. For the first three hundred years of the North Atlantic system, democracy continued to mean "the mob." This was true even in the "Age of Revolutions." In almost every case, the founders of what are now considered the first democratic constitutions in England, France, and the United States, rejected any suggestion that they were trying to introduce "democracy." As Francis Dupuis-Deris (1999, 2004) has observed:

> The founders of the modern electoral systems in the United States and France were overtly anti-democratic. This anti-democratism can be explained in part by their vast knowledge of the literary, philosophical and historical texts of Greco-Roman antiquity. Regarding political history, it was common for American and French political figures to see themselves as direct heirs to classical civilization and to believe that all through history, from Athens and Rome to Boston and Paris, the same political forces have faced off in eternal struggles. The founders sided with the historical republican forces against the aristocratic and democratic ones, and the Roman republic was the political model for both the Americans and the French, whereas Athenian democracy was a despised counter-model (Dupuis-Deri 2004: 120).

In the English-speaking world, for example, most educated people in the late eighteenth century were familiar with Athenian democracy largely through a translation of Thucydides by Thomas Hobbes. Their conclusion,

that democracy was unstable, tumultuous, prone to factionalism and demagoguery, and marked by a strong tendency to turn into despotism, was hardly surprising.

Most politicians, then, were hostile to anything that smacked of democracy precisely *because* they saw themselves as heirs to what we now call "the Western tradition." The ideal of the Roman republic was enshrined, for example, in the American constitution, whose framers were quite consciously trying to imitate Rome's "mixed constitution," balancing monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic elements. John Adams, for example, in his *Defense of the Constitution* (1797) argued that truly egalitarian societies do not exist; that every known human society has a supreme leader, an aristocracy (whether of wealth or a "natural aristocracy" of virtue), and a public, and that the Roman Constitution was the most perfect in balancing the powers of each. The American constitution was meant to reproduce this balance by creating a powerful presidency, a senate to represent the wealthy, and a congress to represent the people—though the powers of the latter were largely limited to ensuring popular control over the distribution of tax money. This republican ideal lies at the basis of all "democratic" constitutions and to this day many conservative thinkers in America like to point out that "America is not a democracy: it's a republic."

On the other hand, as John Markoff notes, "those who called themselves democrats at the tail end of the eighteenth century were likely to be very suspicious of parliaments, downright hostile to competitive political parties, critical of secret ballots, uninterested or even opposed to women's suffrage, and sometimes tolerant of slavery" (1999: 661)—again, hardly surprising, for those who wished to revive something along the lines of ancient Athens.

At the time, outright democrats of this sort—men like Tom Paine, for instance—were considered a tiny minority of rabble-rousers even within revolutionary regimes. Things only began to change over the course of the next century. In the United States, as the franchise widened in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and politicians were increasingly forced to seek the votes of small farmers and urban laborers, some began to adopt the term. Andrew Jackson led the way. He started referring to himself as a democrat in the 1820s. Within twenty years, almost all political parties, not just populists but even the most conservative, began to follow suit. In France, socialists began calling for "democracy" in the 1830s, with similar results: within ten or fifteen years, the term was being used by even moderate and conservative republicans forced to compete with them for the popular vote (Dupuis-Deris 1999, 2004). The same period saw a dramatic reappraisal of Athens, which—again starting in the 1820s—began to be represented as embodying a noble ideal of public participation, rather than a nightmare of

violent crowd psychology (Saxonhouse 1993). This is not, however, because anyone, at this point, was endorsing Athenian-style direct democracy, even on the local level (in fact, one rather imagines it was precisely this fact that made the rehabilitation of Athens possible). For the most part, politicians simply began substituting the word "democracy" for "republic," without any change in meaning. I suspect the new positive appraisal of Athens had more to do with popular fascination with events in Greece at the time than anything else: specifically, the war of independence against the Ottoman Empire between 1821 and 1829. It was hard not see it as modern replay of the clash between the Persian Empire and Greek city states narrated by Herodotus, a kind of founding text of the opposition between freedom-loving Europe and the despotic East; and, of course, changing one's frame of reference from Thucydides to Herodotus could only do Athens' image good.

When novelists like Victor Hugo and poets like Walt Whitman began touting democracy as a beautiful ideal—as they soon began to do—they were not, however, referring to word-games on the part of elites, but to the broader popular sentiment that had caused small farmers and urban laborers to look with favor on the term to begin with, even when the political elite was still largely using it as a term of abuse. The "democratic ideal," in other words, did not emerge from the Western literary-philosophical tradition. It was, rather, imposed on it. In fact, the notion that democracy was a distinctly "Western" ideal only came much later. For most of the nineteenth century, when Europeans defined themselves against "the East" or "the Orient," they did so precisely as "Europeans," not "Westerners."[8] With few exceptions, "the West" referred to the Americas. It was only in the 1890s, when Europeans began to see the United States as part of the same, coequal civilization, that many started using the term in its current sense (GoGwilt 1995; Martin & Wigan 1997: 49–62). Huntington's "Western civilization" comes even later: this notion was first developed in American universities in the years following World War I (Federici 1995: 67), at a time when German intellectuals were already locked in debate about whether they were part of the West at all. Over the course of the twentieth century, the concept of "Western civilization" proved perfectly tailored for an age that saw the gradual dissolution of colonial empires, since it managed to lump together the former colonial metropoles with their wealthiest and most powerful settler colonies, at the same time insisting on their shared moral and intellectual superiority, and abandoning any notion that they necessarily had a responsibility to "civilize" anybody else. The peculiar tension evident in phrases like "Western science," "Western freedoms" or "Western consumer goods"—do these reflect universal truths that all human beings should recognize? or are they the products of one tradition among many?—would appear to stem directly from the

ambiguities of the historical moment. The resulting formulation is, as I've noted, so riddled with contradictions that it's hard to see how it could have arisen except to fill a very particular historical need.

If you examine these terms more closely, however, it becomes obvious that all these "Western" objects are the products of endless entanglements. "Western science" was patched together out of discoveries made on many continents, and is now largely produced by non-Westerners. "Western consumer goods" were always drawn from materials taken from all over the world, many explicitly imitated Asian products, and nowadays, are all produced in China. Can we say the same of "Western freedoms"?

The reader can probably guess what my answer will be.

Part IV: Recuperation

In debates about the origins of capitalism, one of the main bones of contention is whether capitalism—or, alternately, industrial capitalism—emerged primarily within European societies, or whether it can only be understood in the context of a larger world-system connecting Europe and its overseas possessions, markets and sources of labor overseas. It is possible to have the argument, I think, because so many capitalist forms began so early—many could be said to already be present, at least in embryonic form, at the very dawn of European expansion. This can hardly be said for democracy. Even if one is willing to follow by-now accepted convention and identify republican forms of government with that word, democracy only emerges within centers of empire like England and France, and colonies like the United States, after the Atlantic system had existed for almost three hundred years.

Giovanni Arrighi, Iftikhar Ahmad and Min-wen Shih (1997) have produced what's to my mind one of the more interesting responses to Huntington: a world-systemic analysis of European expansion, particularly in Asia, over the last several centuries. One of the most fascinating elements in their account is how, at exactly the same time as European powers came to start thinking themselves as "democratic"—in the 1830s, '40s, and '50s—those same powers began pursuing an intentional policy of supporting reactionary elites against those pushing for anything remotely resembling democratic reforms overseas. Great Britain was particularly flagrant in this regard: whether in its support for the Ottoman Empire against the rebellion of Egyptian governor Muhammed Ali after the Balta Limani Treaty of 1838, or in its support for the Qing imperial forces against the Taiping rebellion after the Nanjing Treaty of 1842. In either case, Britain first found some excuse to launch a military attack on one of the great Asian *ancien regimes*,

defeated it militarily, imposed a commercially advantageous treaty, and then, almost immediately upon doing so, swung around to prop that same regime up against political rebels who clearly were closer to their own supposed "Western" values than the regime itself: in the first case a rebellion aiming to turn Egypt into something more like a modern nation-state, in the second, an egalitarian Christian movement calling for universal brotherhood. After the Great Rebellion of 1857 in India, Britain began employing the same strategy in her own colonies, self-consciously propping up "landed magnates and the petty rulers of 'native states' within its own Indian empire" (1997: 34). All of this was buttressed on the intellectual level by the development around the same time of Orientalist theories that argued that, in Asia, such authoritarian regimes were inevitable, and democratizing movements were unnatural or did not exist.[9]

> In sum, Huntington's claim that Western civilization is the bearer of a heritage of liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, and other similarly attractive ideals—all of which are said to have permeated other civilizations only superficially—rings false to anyone familiar with the Western record in Asia in the so-called age of nation-states. In this long list of ideals, it is hard to find a single one that was not denied in part or full by the leading Western powers of the epoch in their dealings either with the peoples they subjected to direct colonial rule or with the governments over which they sought to establish suzerainty. And conversely, it is just as hard to find a single one of those ideals that was not upheld by movements of national liberation in their struggle against the Western powers. In upholding these ideals, however, non-Western peoples and governments invariably combined them with ideals derived from their own civilizations in those spheres in which they had little to learn from the West (Arrighi, Ahmad and Shih 1997: 25).

Actually, I think one could go much further. Opposition to European expansion in much of the world, even quite early on, appears to have been carried out in the name of "Western values" that the Europeans in question did not yet even have. Engseng Ho (2004: 222–24) for example draws our attention to the first known articulation of the notion of jihad against Europeans in the Indian Ocean, a book called *Gift of the Jihad Warriors in Matters Regarding the Portuguese*, written in 1574 by an Arab jurist named Zayn al-Din al Malibari and addressed to the Muslim sultan of the Deccan state of Bijapur. In it, the author makes a case that it is justified to wage war again the Portuguese specifically because they destroyed a tolerant, plural-

istic society in which Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Jews had always managed to coexist.

In the Muslim trading ecumene of the Indian Ocean, some of Huntington's values—a certain notion of liberty, a certain notion of equality, some very explicit ideas about freedom of trade and the rule of law—had long been considered important; others, such as religious tolerance, might well have become values as a result of Europeans coming onto the scene—if only by point of contrast. My real point is that one simply cannot lay any of these values down to the one particular moral, intellectual or cultural tradition. They arise, for better or worse, from exactly this sort of interaction.

I also want to make another point, though. We are dealing with the work of a Muslim jurist, writing a book addressed to a South Indian king. The values of tolerance and mutual accommodation he wishes to defend—actually, these are our terms; he himself speaks of "kindness"—might have emerged from a complex intercultural space, outside the authority of any overarching state power, and they might have only crystallized, as values, in the face of those who wished to destroy that space. Yet, in order to write about them, to justify their defense, he was forced to deal with states and frame his argument in terms of a single literary-philosophical tradition: in this case, the legal tradition of Sunni Islam. There was an act of reincorporation. There inevitably must be, once one reenters the world of state power and textual authority. And, when later authors write about such ideas, they tend to represent matters as if the ideals emerged from that tradition, rather than from the spaces in between

So do historians. In a way, it's almost inevitable that they should do so, considering the nature of their source material. They are, after all, primarily students of textual traditions, and information about the spaces in between is often very difficult to come by. What's more, they are—at least when dealing with the "Western tradition"—writing, in large part, within the same literary tradition as their sources. This is what makes the real origins of democratic ideals—especially that popular enthusiasm for ideas of liberty and popular sovereignty that obliged politicians to adopt the term to begin with—so difficult to reconstruct. Recall here what I said earlier about the "slipperiness of the Western eye." The tradition has long had a tendency to describe alien societies as puzzles to be deciphered by a rational observer. As a result, descriptions of alien societies were often used, around this time, as a way of making a political point: whether contrasting European societies with the relative freedom of Native Americans, or the relative order of China. But they did not tend to acknowledge the degree to which they were themselves entangled with those societies and to which their own institutions were influenced by them. In fact, as any student of early anthropology knows, even

authors who were themselves part Native American or part Chinese, or who had never set foot in Europe, would tend to write this way. As men or women of action, they would negotiate their way between worlds. When it came time to write about their experiences, they would become featureless abstractions. When it came time to write institutional histories, they referred back, almost invariably, to the Classical world.

The "Influence Debate"

In 1977, an historian of the Iroquois confederacy (himself a Native American and member of AIM, the American Indian Movement) wrote an essay proposing that certain elements of the US constitution—particularly its federal structure—were inspired in part by the League of Six Nations. He expanded on the argument in the 1980s with another historian, David Johansen (1982; Grinde and Johansen 1990), suggesting that, in a larger sense, what we now would consider America's democratic spirit was partly inspired by the example of Native Americans.

Some of the specific evidence they assembled was quite compelling. The idea of forming some sort of federation of colonies was indeed proposed by an Onondaga ambassador named Canassatego, exhausted by having to negotiate with so many separate colonies during negotiations over the Lancaster Treaty in 1744. The image he used to demonstrate the strength of union, a bundle of six arrows, still appears on the Seal of the Union of the United States (the number later increased to thirteen). Ben Franklin, present at the event, took up the idea and promoted it widely through his printing house over the next decade, and, in 1754, his efforts came to fruition with a conference in Albany, New York—with representatives of the Six Nations in attendance—that drew up what came to be known as the Albany Plan of Union. The plan was ultimately rejected both by British authorities and colonial parliaments, but it was clearly an important first step. More importantly, perhaps, proponents of what has come to be called the "influence theory" argued that the values of egalitarianism and personal freedom that marked so many Eastern Woodlands societies served as a broader inspiration for the equality and liberty promoted by colonial rebels. When Boston patriots triggered their revolution by dressing up as Mohawks and dumping British tea into the harbor, they were making a self-conscious statement of their model for individual liberty.

That Iroquois federal institutions might have had some influence on the US constitution was considered a completely unremarkable notion, when it was occasionally proposed in the nineteenth century. When it was proposed again in the 1980s it set off a political maelstrom. Many Native Americans

strongly endorsed the idea, Congress passed a bill acknowledging it and all sorts of right-wing commentators immediately pounced on it as an example of the worst sort of political correctness. At the same time, though, the argument met immediate and quite virulent opposition both from most professional historians considered authorities on the constitution and from anthropological experts on the Iroquois.

The actual debate ended up turning almost entirely on whether one could prove a direct relation between Iroquois institutions and the thinking of the framers of the constitution. Payne (1999), for example, noted that some New England colonists were discussing federal schemes before they were even aware of the League's existence; in a larger sense, they argued that proponents of the "influence theory" had essentially cooked the books by picking out every existing passage in the writings of colonial politicians that praised Iroquoian institutions, while ignoring hundreds of texts in which those same politicians denounced the Iroquois, and Indians in general, as ignorant murdering savages. Their opponents, they said, left the reader with the impression that explicit, textual proof of an Iroquoian influence on the constitution existed, and this was simply not the case. Even the Indians present at constitutional conventions appear to have been there to state grievances, not to offer advice. Invariably, when colonial politicians discussed the origins of their ideas, they looked to Classical, Biblical, or European examples: the book of Judges, the Achaean League, the Swiss Confederacy, the United Provinces of the Netherlands. Proponents of the influence theory, in turn, replied that this kind of linear thinking was simplistic: no one was claiming the Six Nations were the only or even primary model for American federalism, just one of many elements that went into the mix—and considering that it was the only functioning example of a federal system of which the colonists had any direct experience, to insist it had no influence whatever was simply bizarre. Indeed, some of the objections raised by anthropologists seem so odd—for example, Elisabeth Tooker's objection (1998) that, since the League worked by consensus and reserved an important place for women, and the US constitution used a majority system and only allowed men to vote, one could not possibly have served as inspiration for the other, or Dean Snow's remark (1994: 154) that such claims "muddle and denigrate the subtle and remarkable features of Iroquois government"—one can only conclude that Native American activist Vine Deloria probably did have a point in suggesting much of this was simply an effort by scholars to protect what they considered their turf—a matter of intellectual property rights (in Johansen 1998: 82).

The proprietary reaction is much clearer in some quarters. "This myth isn't just silly, it's destructive," wrote one contributor to *The New Republic*.

"Obviously Western civilization, beginning in Greece, had provided models of government much closer to the hearts of the Founding Fathers than this one. There was nothing to be gained by looking to the New World for inspiration" (Newman 1998: 18). If one is speaking of the immediate perceptions of many of the United States' "founding fathers," this may well be true; but if we are trying to understand the Iroquois influence on American *democracy*, then matters look quite different. As we've seen, the Constitution's framers did indeed identify with the classical tradition, but they were hostile to democracy for that very reason. They identified democracy with untrammeled liberty, equality, and, insofar as they were aware of Indian customs at all, they were likely to see them as objectionable for precisely the same reasons.

If one reexamines some of the mooted passages, this is precisely what one finds. John Adams, remember, had argued in his *Defense of the Constitution* that egalitarian societies do not exist; political power in every human society is divided between the monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic principles. He saw the Indians as resembling the ancient Germans in that "the democratical branch, in particular, is so determined, that real sovereignty resided in the body of the people," which, he said, worked well enough when one was dealing with populations scattered over a wide territory with no real concentrations of wealth, but, as the Goths found when they conquered the Roman empire, could only lead to confusion, instability, and strife as soon as such populations became more settled and have significant resources to administer (Adams: 296; see Levy 1999: 598; Payne 1999: 618). His observations are typical. Madison, even Jefferson, tended to describe Indians much as did John Locke, as exemplars of an individual liberty untrammeled by any form of state or systematic coercion—a condition made possible by the fact that Indian societies were not marked by significant divisions of property. They considered Native institutions obviously inappropriate for a society such as their own, which did.

Still, Enlightenment theory to the contrary, nations are not really created by the acts of wise lawgivers. Neither is democracy invented in texts; even if we are forced to rely on texts to divine its history. Actually, the men who wrote the Constitution were not only for the most part wealthy landowners, few had a great deal of experience in sitting down with a group of equals—at least, until they became involved in colonial congresses. Democratic practices tend to first get hammered out in places far from the purview of such men, and, if one sets out in search for which of their contemporaries had the most hands-on experience in such matters, the results are sometimes startling. One of the leading contemporary historians of European democracy, John Markoff, in an essay called "Where and When Was Democracy Invented?," remarks, at one point, very much in passing:

> that leadership could derive from the consent of the led, rather than be bestowed by higher authority, would have been a likely experience of the crews of pirate vessels in the early modern Atlantic world. Pirate crews not only elected their captains, but were familiar with countervailing power (in the forms of the quartermaster and ship's council) and contractual relations of individual and collectivity (in the form of written ship's articles specifying shares of booty and rates of compensation for on-the-job injury) (Markoff 1999: 673n62).

As a matter of fact, the typical organization of eighteenth-century pirate ships, as reconstructed by historians like Marcus Rediker (2004: 60–82), appears to have been remarkably democratic. Captains were not only elected, they usually functioned much like Native American war chiefs: granted total power during chase or combat, they were otherwise were treated like ordinary crewmen. Those ships whose captains were granted more general powers also insisted on the crew's right to remove them at any time for cowardice, cruelty, or any other reason. In every case, ultimate power rested in a general assembly that often ruled on even the most minor matters, always, apparently, by majority show of hands.

All this might seem less surprising if one considers the pirates' origins. Pirates were generally mutineers, sailors often originally pressed into service against their will in port towns across the Atlantic, who had mutinied against tyrannical captains and "declared war against the whole world." They often became classic social bandits, wreaking vengeance against captains who abused their crews, and releasing or even rewarding those against whom they found no complaints. The make-up of crews was often extraordinarily heterogeneous. "Black Sam Bellamy's crew of 1717 was 'a Mix'd Multitude of all Country's,' including British, French, Dutch, Spanish, Swedish, Native American, African American, and two dozen Africans who had been liberated from a slave ship" (Rediker 2004: 53). In other words, we are dealing with a collection of people in which there was likely to be at least some first-hand knowledge of a very wide range of directly democratic institutions, ranging from Swedish *tings* to African village assemblies to Native American councils such as those from which the League of Six Nations itself developed, suddenly finding themselves forced to improvise some mode of self-government in the complete absence of any state. It was the perfect intercultural space of experiment. In fact, there was likely to be no more conducive ground for the development of new democratic institutions anywhere in the Atlantic world at the time.

I bring this up for two reasons. One is obvious. We have no evidence that democratic practices developed on Atlantic pirate ships in the early part of

the eighteenth century had any influence, direct or indirect, on the evolution of democratic constitutions sixty or seventy years later. Nor could we. While accounts of pirates and their adventures circulated widely, having much the same popular appeal as they do today (and presumably, at the time, were likely to be at least a little more accurate than contemporary Hollywood versions), this would be about the very last influence a French, English, or colonial gentleman would ever have been willing to acknowledge. This is not to say that pirate practices were likely to have influenced democratic constitutions. Only that we would not know if they did. One can hardly imagine things would be too different with those they ordinarily referred to as "the American savages."

The other reason is that frontier societies in the Americas were probably more similar to pirate ships than we would be given to imagine. They might not have been as densely populated as pirate ships, or in as immediate need of constant cooperation, but they were spaces of intercultural improvisation, largely outside of the purview of states. Colin Calloway (1997; cf. Axtell 1985), has documented just how entangled the societies of settlers and natives often were, with settlers adopting Indian crops, clothes, medicines, customs, and styles of warfare; trading with them, often living side by side, sometimes intermarrying, and most of all, inspiring endless fears among the leaders of colonial communities and military units that their subordinates were absorbing Indian attitudes of equality and individual liberty. At the same time, as New England Puritan minister Cotton Mather, for example, was inveighing against pirates as a blaspheming scourge of mankind, he was also complaining that fellow colonists had begun to imitate Indian customs of child-rearing (for example, by abandoning corporal punishment), and increasingly forgetting the principles of proper discipline and "severity" in the governance of families for the "foolish indulgence" typical of Indians, whether in relations between masters and servants, men and women, or young and old (Calloway 1997: 192).[10] This was true most of all in communities, often made up of escaped slaves and servants who "became Indians," outside the control of colonial governments entirely (Sakolsky & Koehnline 1993), or island enclaves of what Linebaugh and Rediker (1991) have called "the Atlantic proletariat," the motley collection of freedmen, sailors, ships whores, renegades, Antinomians, and rebels that developed in the port cities of the North Atlantic world before the emergence of modern racism, and from whom much of the democratic impulse of the American—and other—revolutions seems to have first emerged. But it was true for ordinary settlers as well. The irony is that this was the real argument of Bruce Johansen's book *Forgotten Founders* (1982), which first kicked off the "influence debate"—an argument that largely ended up getting lost in all the sound and fury about

the constitution: that ordinary Englishmen and Frenchmen settled in the colonies only began to think of themselves as "Americans," as a new sort of freedom-loving people, when they began to see themselves as more like Indians. And that this sense was inspired not primarily by the sort of romanticization at a distance one might encounter in texts by Jefferson or Adam Smith, but rather, by the actual experience of living in frontier societies that were essentially, as Calloway puts it, "amalgams." The colonists who came to America, in fact, found themselves in a unique situation: having largely fled the hierarchy and conformism of Europe, they found themselves confronted with an indigenous population far more dedicated to principles of equality and individualism than they had hitherto been able to imagine; and then proceeded to largely exterminate them, even while adopting many of their customs, habits, and attitudes.

I might add that during this period the Five Nations were something of an amalgam as well. Originally a collection of groups that had made a kind of contractual agreement with one another to create a way of mediating disputes and making peace, they became, during their period of expansion in the seventeenth century, an extraordinary jumble of peoples, with large proportions of the population war captives adopted into Iroquois families to replace family members who were dead. Missionaries in those days often complained that it was difficult to preach to Seneca in their own languages, because a majority were not completely fluent in it (Quain 1937). Even during the eighteenth century, for instance, while Canassatoga was an Onondaga sachem, the other main negotiator with the colonists, Swatane (called Schickallemy) was actually French—or, at least, born to French parents in what's now Canada. On all sides, then, borders were blurred. We are dealing with a graded succession of spaces of democratic improvisation, from the Puritan communities of New England with their town councils, to frontier communities, to the Iroquois themselves.

Traditions as Acts of Endless Refoundation

Let me try to pull some of the pieces together now.

Throughout this essay, I've been arguing that democratic *practice*, whether defined as procedures of egalitarian decision-making, or government by public discussion, tends to emerge from situations in which communities of one sort or another manage their own affairs outside the purview of the state. The absence of state power means the absence of any systematic mechanism of coercion to enforce decisions; this tends to result either in some form of consensus process, or, in the case of essentially military formations like Greek hoplites or pirate ships, sometimes a system of majority

voting (since, in such cases, the results, if it did come down to a contest of force, are readily apparent). Democratic innovation, and the emergence of what might be called democratic values, has a tendency to spring from what I've called zones of cultural improvisation, usually also outside of the control of states, in which diverse sorts of people with different traditions and experiences are obliged to figure out some way to deal with one another. Frontier communities whether in Madagascar or Medieval Iceland, pirate ships, Indian Ocean trading communities, Native American confederations on the edge of European expansion, are all examples here.

All of this has very little to do with the great literary-philosophical traditions that tend to be seen as the pillars of great civilizations: indeed, with few exceptions, those traditions are overall explicitly hostile to democratic procedures and the sort of people that employ them.[11] Governing elites, in turn, have tended either to ignore these forms, or to try to stomp them out.[12]

At a certain point in time, however, first in the core states of the Atlantic system—notably England and France, the two that had the largest colonies in North America—this began to change. The creation of that system had been heralded by such unprecedented destruction that it allowed endless new improvisational spaces for the emerging "Atlantic proletariat." States, under pressure from social movements, began to institute reforms; eventually, those working in the elite literary tradition started seeking precedents for them. The result was the creation of representative systems modeled on the Roman Republic that then were later redubbed, under popular pressure, "democracies" and traced to Athens.

Actually, I would suggest that this process of democratic recuperation and refoundation was typical of a broader process that probably marks any civilizational tradition, but was then entering a phase of critical intensity. As European states expanded and the Atlantic system came to encompass the world, all sorts of global influences appear to have coalesced in European capitals, and to have been reabsorbed within the tradition that eventually came to be known as "Western." The actual genealogy of the elements that came together in the modern state, for example, is probably impossible to reconstruct—if only because the very process of recuperation tends to scrub away the more exotic elements in written accounts, or if not, integrate them into familiar topoi of invention and discovery. Historians, who tend to rely almost exclusively on texts and pride themselves on exacting standards of evidence, therefore, often end up, as they did with the Iroquois influence theory, feeling it their professional responsibility to act as if new ideas do emerge from within textual traditions. Let me throw out two examples:

African fetishism and the idea of the social contract. The Atlantic system, of course, began to take form in West Africa even before Columbus

sailed to America. In a fascinating series of essays, William Pietz (1985, 1987, 1988) has described the life of the resulting coastal enclaves where Venetian, Dutch, Portuguese, and every other variety of European merchant and adventurer cohabited with African merchants and adventurers speaking dozens of different languages, a mix of Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, and a variety of ancestral religions. Trade, within these enclaves, was regulated by objects the Europeans came to refer to as "fetishes," and Pietz does much to elaborate the European merchants' theories of value and materiality to which this notion ultimately gave rise. More interesting, perhaps, is the African perspective. Insofar as it can be reconstructed, it appears strikingly similar to the kind of social contract theories developed by men like Thomas Hobbes in Europe at the same time (MacGaffey 1994, Graeber 2005). Essentially, fetishes were created by a series of contracting parties who wished to enter into ongoing economic relations with one another, and were accompanied by agreements on property rights and the rules of exchange; those violating them were to be destroyed by the objects' power. In other words, just as in Hobbes, social relations are created when a group of men agreed to create a sovereign power to threaten them with violence if they failed to respect their property rights and contractual obligations. Later, African texts even praised the fetish as preventing a war of all against all. Unfortunately, it's completely impossible to find evidence that Hobbes was aware of any of this: he lived most of his life in a port town and very likely had met traders familiar with such customs; but his political works contain no references to the African continent whatever.

China and the European nation-state. Over the course of the early Modern period, European elites gradually conceived the ideal of governments that ruled over uniform populations, speaking the same language, under a uniform system of law and administration; and eventually that this system also should be administered by a meritocratic elite whose training should consist largely in the study of literary classics in that nation's vernacular language. The odd thing is nothing approaching a precedent for a state of this sort existed anywhere in previous European history, though it almost exactly corresponded to the system Europeans believed to hold sway (and which to a large extent, did hold sway) in Imperial China.[13] Is there evidence for a Chinese "influence theory"? In this case, there is a little. The prestige of the Chinese government evidently being higher, in the eyes of European philosophers, than African merchants, such influences would not be entirely ignored. From Leibniz's famous remark that the Chinese should really be send-

> ing missionaries to Europe rather than the other way around, to the work of Montesquieu and Voltaire, one sees a succession of political philosophers extolling Chinese institutions—as well as a popular fascination with Chinese art, gardens, fashions, and moral philosophy (Lovejoy 1955)—at exactly the time that Absolutism took form; only to fade away in the nineteenth century once China had become the object of European imperial expansion. Obviously none of this constitutes proof that the modern nation-state is in any way of Chinese inspiration. But considering the nature of the literary traditions we're dealing with, even if it were true, this would be about as much proof as we could ever expect to get.

So, is the modern nation-state really a Chinese model of administration, adopted to channel and control democratic impulses derived largely from the influence of Native American societies and the pressures of the Atlantic proletariat, that ultimately came to be justified by a social contract theory derived from Africa? Probably not. At least, this would no doubt be wildly overstating things. But neither do I think it a coincidence either that democratic ideals of statecraft first emerged during a period in which the Atlantic powers were at the center of vast global empires, and an endless confluence of knowledge and influences, or that they eventually developed the theory that those ideals sprang instead exclusively from their own "Western" civilization—despite the fact that, during the period in which Europeans had not been at the center of global empires, they had developed nothing of the kind.

Finally, I think it's important to emphasize that this process of recuperation is by no means limited to Europe. In fact, one of the striking things is how quickly almost everyone else in the world began playing the same game. To some degree, as the example of al Malibari suggests, it was probably happening in other parts of the world even before it began happening in Europe. Of course, overseas movements only started using the word "democracy" much later—but even in the Atlantic world, that term only came into common usage around the middle of the nineteenth century. It was also around the middle of the nineteenth century—just as European powers began recuperating notions of democracy for their own tradition—when Britain led the way in a very self-conscious policy of suppressing anything that looked like it might even have the potential to become a democratic, popular, movement overseas. The ultimate response, in much of the colonial world, was to begin playing the exact same game. Opponents to colonial rule scoured their own literary-philosophical traditions for parallels to ancient Athens, along with examining traditional communal decision-making forms in their

hinterlands. As Steve Muhlenberger and Phil Payne (1993; Baechler 1985), for example, have documented, if one simply defines it as decision-making by public discussion, "democracy" is a fairly common phenomenon; examples can be found even under states and empires, if only, usually, in those places or domains of human activity in which the rulers of states and empires took little interest. Greek historians writing about India, for example, witnessed any number of polities they considered worthy of the name. Between 1911 and 1918, a number of Indian historians (K.P. Jayaswal, D.R. Bhandarkar, R.C. Majumdar)[14] began examining some of these sources, not only Greek accounts of Alexander's campaigns but also early Buddhist documents in Pali and early Hindu vocabularies and works of political theory. They discovered dozens of local equivalents to fifth-century Athens on South Asian soil: cities and political confederations in which all men formally classified as a warriors—which in some cases meant a very large proportion of adult males—were expected to make important decisions collectively, through public deliberation in communal assemblies. The literary sources of the time were mostly just as hostile to popular rule as Greek ones,[15] but, at least until around 400 AD, such polities definitely existed, and the deliberative mechanisms they employed continue to be employed, in everything from the governance of Buddhist monasteries to craft guilds, until the present day. It was possible, then, to say that the Indian, or even Hindu, tradition was always inherently democratic; and this became a strong argument for those seeking independence.

These early historians clearly overstated their case. After independence came the inevitable backlash. Historians began to point out that these "clan republics" were very limited democracies at best, that the overwhelming majority of the population—women, slaves, those defined as outsiders—were completely disenfranchized. Of course, all this was true of Athens as well, and historians have pointed that out at length. But it seems to me questions of authenticity are of at best secondary importance. Such traditions are always largely fabrications. To some degree, that's what traditions are: the continual process of their own fabrication. The point is that, in every case, what we have are political elites—or would-be political elites—identifying with a tradition of democracy in order to validate essentially republican forms of government. Also, not only was democracy not the special invention of "the West," neither was this process of recuperation and refoundation. True, elites in India started playing the game some sixty years later than those in England and France, but, historically, this is not a particularly long period of time. Rather than seeing Indian, or Malagasy, or Tswana, or Maya claims to being part of an inherently democratic tradition as an attempt to ape the West, it seems to me we are looking at different aspects of the same planetary

process: a crystallization of longstanding democratic practices in the formation of a global system, in which ideas were flying back and forth in all directions, and the gradual, usually grudging adoption of some by ruling elites

The temptation to trace democracy to some particular cultural "origins," though, seems almost irresistible. Even serious scholars continue to indulge it. Let me return to Harvard to provide one final, to my mind particularly ironic, example: a collection of essays called *The Breakout: The Origins of Civilization* (M. Lamberg-Karlovsky 2000), put together by leading American symbolic archeologists.[16] The line of argument sets out from a suggestion by archeologist K. C. Chang, that early Chinese civilization was based on a fundamentally different sort of ideology than Egypt or Mesopotamia. It was essentially a continuation of the cosmos of earlier hunting societies, in which the monarch replaced the shaman as having an exclusive and personal connection with divine powers. The result was absolute authority. Chang was fascinated by the similarities between early China and the Classic Maya, as reconstructed through recently translated inscriptions: the "stratified universe with bird-perched cosmic tree and religious personnel interlinking the Upper, Middle, and Under Worlds," animal messengers, use of writing mainly for politics and ritual, veneration of ancestors, and so on (1988, 2000: 7). The states that emerged in the third millennium in the Middle East, in contrast, represented a kind of breakthrough to an alternate, more pluralistic model, that began when gods and their priesthoods came to be seen as independent from the state. Most of the resulting volume consists of speculations as to what this breakthrough really involved. C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky argued that the key was the first appearance of notions of freedom and equality in ancient Mesopotamia, in royal doctrines which saw a social contract between the rulers of individual city states and their subjects—which he calls a "breakout," and which most contributors agreed should be seen as "pointing the way towards Western Democracy" (122). In fact, the main topic of debate soon became who, or what, deserved the credit. Mason Hammond argued for "The Indo-European Origins of the Concept of a Democratic Society," saying that notions of democracy "did not reach Greece from contact with the Near East or Mesopotamia—where equity and justice were the gift of the ruler—but stemmed from an Indo-European concept of a social organization in which sovereignty might be said to rest not with the chief but with the council of elders and the assembly of arms-bearing males" (59). Gordon Willey, on the other hand, sees democratic urges as arising from the free market, which he thinks was more developed in Mesopotamia than China, and largely absent under Maya kingdoms, where rulers ruled by divine right "and there is no evidence of any counterbalancing power within the chiefdom or state that could have held him in check"

(29).[17] Linda Schele, the foremost authority on the Classic Maya, concurs, adding that this shamanic cosmos "is still alive and functioning today" in "modern Maya communities" (54). Other scholars try to put in a good word for their own parts of the ancient world: Egypt, Israel, the Harappan civilization.

At times, these arguments seem almost comical parodies of the kind of logic I've been criticizing in historians: most obviously, the line of reasoning assumes that, if there is no direct evidence for something, it can be treated as if it does not exist. This seems especially inappropriate when dealing with early antiquity, an enormous landscape on which archeology and linguistics can at best throw open a few tiny windows. For example: the fact that "primitive Celts and Germans" met in communal assemblies does not in itself prove that communal assemblies have an Indo-European origin—unless, that is, one can demonstrate that stateless societies speaking non-Indo-European languages at the time did not. In fact, the argument seems almost circular, since by "primitive," the author seems to mean "stateless" or "relatively egalitarian," and such societies almost by definition cannot be ruled autocratically, no matter what language they speak. Similarly, when characterizing the Classic Maya as lacking any form of "countervailing institutions" (Willey describes even the bloodthirsty Aztecs as less authoritarian, owing to their more developed markets), it doesn't seem to occur to any of the authors to wonder what ancient Rome or Medieval England would look like if it had to be reconstructed exclusively through ruined buildings and official statements the government had carved in stone.

In fact, if my argument is right, what these authors are doing is searching for the origins of democracy precisely where they are least likely to find it: in the proclamations of the states that largely suppressed local forms of self-governance and collective deliberation, and the literary-philosophical traditions that justified their doing so. (This, at least, would help explain why, in Italy, Greece, and India alike, sovereign assemblies appear at the beginnings of written history and disappear shortly thereafter.) The fate of the Mayas is instructive here. Sometime in the late first millennium, Classic Maya civilization collapsed. Archeologists argue about the reasons; presumably they always will; but most theories assume popular rebellions played at least some role. By the time the Spaniards arrived six hundred years later, Mayan societies were thoroughly decentralized, with an endless variety of tiny city-states, some apparently with elected leaders. Conquest took much longer than it did in Peru and Mexico, and Maya communities have proved so consistently rebellious that, over the last five hundred years, there has been virtually no point during which at least some have not been in a state of armed insurrection. Most ironic of all, the current wave of the global justice movement was

largely kicked off by the EZLN, or Zapatista Army of National Liberation, a group of largely Maya-speaking rebels in Chiapas, mostly drawn from campesinos who had resettled in new communities in the Lacandon rain forest. Their insurrection in 1994 was carried out explicitly in the name of democracy, by which they meant something much more like Athenian-style direct democracy than the republican forms of government that have since appropriated the name. The Zapatistas developed an elaborate system in which communal assemblies, operating on consensus, supplemented by women and youth caucuses to counterbalance the traditional dominance of adult males, are knitted together by councils with recallable delegates. They claim it to be rooted in, but a radicalization of, the way that Maya-speaking communities have governed themselves for thousands of years. We do know that most highland Maya communities have been governed by some kind of consensus system since we have records: that is, for at least five hundred years. While it's possible that nothing of the sort existed in rural communities during the Classic Maya heyday a little over thousand years ago, it seems rather unlikely.

Certainly, modern rebels make their own views on the Classic Maya clear enough. As a Chol-speaking Zapatista remarked to a friend of mine recently, pointing to the ruins of Palenque, "we managed to get rid of those guys. I don't suppose the Mexican government could be all that much of a challenge in comparison."

Part V: The Crisis of the State

We're finally back, then, where we began, with the rise of global movements calling for new forms of democracy. In a way, the main point of this piece has been to demonstrate that the Zapatistas are nothing unusual. They are speakers of a variety of Maya languages—Tzeltal, Tojalobal, Ch'ol, Tzotzil, Mam—originally from communities traditionally allowed a certain degree of self-governance (largely so they could function as indigenous labor reserves for ranches and plantations located elsewhere), who had formed new largely multi-ethnic communities in newly opened lands in the Lacandon (Collier 1999; Ross 2000; Rus, Hernandez & Mattiace 2003). In other words, they inhabit a classic example of what I've been calling spaces of democratic improvisation, in which a jumbled amalgam of people, most with at least some initial experience of methods of communal self-governance, find themselves in new communities outside the immediate supervision of the state. Neither is there anything particularly new about the fact that they are at the fulcrum of a global play of influences: absorbing ideas from everywhere, and their own example having an enormous impact on social move-

ments across the planet. The first Zapatista encuentro in 1996, for example, eventually led to the formation of an international network (People's Global Action), based on principles of autonomy, horizontality, and direct democracy, that included such disparate groups as the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Brazil; the Karnataka State Farmer's Association (KRSS), a Gandhian socialist direct action group in India; the Canadian Postal Workers' Union; and a whole host of anarchist collectives in Europe and the Americas, along with indigenous organizations on every continent. It was PGA, for instance, that put out the original call to action against the WTO meetings in Seattle in November 1999. Even more, the principles of Zapatismo, the rejection of vanguardism, the emphasis on creating viable alternatives in one's own community as a way of subverting the logic of global capital, has had an enormous influence on participants in social movements that, in some cases, are at best vaguely aware of the Zapatistas themselves and have certainly never heard of PGA. No doubt the growth of the Internet and global communications have allowed the process to proceed much faster than ever before, and allowed for more formal, explicit alliances; but this does not mean we are dealing with an entirely unprecedented phenomenon.

One might gauge the importance of the point by considering what happens when it's not born constantly in mind. Let me turn here to an author whose position is actually quite close to my own. In a book called *Cosmopolitanism* (2002), literary theorist Walter Mignolo provides a beautiful summary of just how much Kant's cosmopolitanism, or the UN discourse on human rights, was developed within a context of conquest and imperialism; then invokes Zapatista calls for democracy to counter an argument by Slavoj Žižek that Leftists need to temper their critiques of Eurocentrism in order to embrace democracy as "the true European legacy from ancient Greece onward" (1998: 1009). Mignolo writes:

> The Zapatistas have used the word democracy, although it has a different meaning for them than it has for the Mexican government. Democracy for the Zapatistas is not conceptualized in terms of European political philosophy but in terms of Maya social organization based on reciprocity, communal (instead of individual) values, the value of wisdom rather than epistemology, and so forth… The Zapatistas have no choice but to use the word that political hegemony imposed, though using that word does not mean bending to its mono-logic interpretation. Once democracy is singled out by the Zapatistas, it becomes a connector through which liberal concepts of democracy and indigenous concepts of reciprocity and community social organization for the common good must come to terms (Mignolo 2002: 180)

This is a nice idea. Mignolo calls it "border thinking." He proposes it as a model for how to come up with a healthy, "critical cosmopolitanism," as opposed to the Eurocentric variety represented by Kant or Žižek. The problem though, it seems to me, is that in doing so, Mignolo himself ends up falling into a more modest version of the very essentializing discourse he's trying to escape.

First of all, to say "the Zapatistas have no choice but to use the word" democracy is simply untrue. Of course they have a choice. Other indigenous-based groups have made very different ones. The Aymara movement in Bolivia, to select one fairly random example, chose to reject the word "democracy" entirely, on the grounds that, in their people's historical experience, the name has only been used for systems imposed on them through violence.[18] They therefore see their own traditions of egalitarian decision-making as having nothing to do with democracy. The Zapatista decision to embrace the term, it seems to me, was more than anything else a decision to reject anything that smacked of a politics of identity, and to appeal for allies, in Mexico and elsewhere, among those interested in a broader conversation about forms of self-organization—in much the same way as they also sought to begin a conversation with those interested in reexamining the meaning of words like "revolution." Second, Mignolo, not entirely unlike Lévy-Bruhl, ends up producing yet another confrontation between apples and oranges. He ends up contrasting Western theory and indigenous practice. In fact, Zapatismo is not simply an emanation of traditional Maya practices: its origins have to be sought in a prolonged confrontation between those practices and, among other things, the ideas of local Maya intellectuals (many, presumably, not entirely unfamiliar with the work of Kant), liberation theologists (who drew inspiration from prophetic texts written in ancient Palestine), and mestizo revolutionaries (who drew inspiration from the works of Chairman Mao, who lived in China). Democracy, in turn, did not emerge from anybody's discourse. It is as if simply taking the Western literary tradition as one's starting point—even for purposes of critique—means authors like Mignolo always somehow end up trapped within it.

In reality, the "word that political hegemony imposed" is in this case itself a fractured compromise. If it weren't, we would not have a Greek word originally coined to describe a form of communal self-governance applied to representative republics to begin with. It's exactly this contradiction the Zapatistas were seizing on. In fact, it seems impossible to get rid of. Liberal theorists (e.g., Sartori 1987: 279) do occasionally evince a desire to simply brush aside Athenian democracy entirely, to declare it irrelevant and be done with it, but for ideological purposes, such a move would be simply inadmis-

sible. After all, without Athens, there would be no way to claim that "the Western tradition" had anything inherently democratic about it. We would be left tracing back our political ideals to the totalitarian musings of Plato, or if not, perhaps, to admit there's really no such thing as "the West." In effect, liberal theorists have boxed themselves into a corner. Obviously, the Zapatistas are hardly the first revolutionaries to have seized on this contradiction; but their doing so has found an unusually powerful resonance, this time—in part, because this is a moment of a profound crisis of the state.

The Impossible Marriage

In its essence, I think, the contradiction is not simply one of language. It reflects something deeper. For the last two hundred years, democrats have been trying to graft ideals of popular self-governance onto the coercive apparatus of the state. In the end, the project is simply unworkable. States cannot, by their nature, ever truly be democratized. They are, after all, basically ways of organizing violence. The American Federalists were being quite realistic when they argued that democracy is inconsistent with a society based on inequalities of wealth; since, in order to protect wealth, one needs an apparatus of coercion to keep down the very "mob" that democracy would empower. Athens was a unique case in this respect because it was, in effect, transitional: there were certainly inequalities of wealth, even, arguably, a ruling class, but there was virtually no formal apparatus of coercion. Hence there's no consensus among scholars whether it can really be considered a state at all.

It's precisely when one considers the problem of the modern state's monopoly of coercive force that the whole pretence of democracy dissolves into a welter of contradictions. For example: while modern elites have largely put aside the earlier discourse of the "mob" as a murderous "great beast," the same imagery still pops back, in almost exactly the form it had in the sixteenth century, the moment anyone proposes democratizing some aspect of the apparatus of coercion. In the US, for example, advocates of the "fully informed jury movement," who point out that the Constitution actually allows juries to decide on questions of law, not just of evidence, are regularly denounced in the media as wishing to go back to the days of lynchings and "mob rule." It's no coincidence that the United States, a country that still prides itself on its democratic spirit, has also led the world in mythologizing, even deifying, its police.

Francis Dupuis-Deri (2002) has coined the term "political agoraphobia" to refer to the suspicion of public deliberation and decision-making that runs through the Western tradition, just as much in the works of Constant, Sieyés, or Madison as in Plato or Aristotle. I would add that even the most

impressive accomplishments of the liberal state, its most genuinely democratic elements—for instance, its guarantees on freedom of speech and freedom of assembly—are premised on such agoraphobia. It is only once it becomes absolutely clear that public speech and assembly is no longer itself the medium of political decision-making, but at best an attempt to criticize, influence, or make suggestions to political decision-makers, that they can be treated as sacrosanct. Critically, this agorophobia is not just shared by politicians and professional journalists, but in large measure by the public itself. The reasons, I think, are not far to seek. While liberal democracies lack anything resembling the Athenian *agora*, they certainly do not lack equivalents to Roman circuses. The ugly mirror phenomenon, by which ruling elites encourage forms of popular participation that continually remind the public just how much they are unfit to rule, seems, in many modern states, to have been brought to a condition of unprecedented perfection. Consider here, for example, the view of human nature one might derive generalizing from the experience of driving to work on the highway, as opposed to the view one might derive from the experience of public transportation. Yet the American—or German—love affair with the car was the result of conscious policy decisions by political and corporate elites beginning in the 1930s. One could write a similar history of the television, or consumerism, or, as Polanyi long ago noted, "the market."

Jurists, meanwhile, have long been aware that the coercive nature of the state ensures that democratic constitutions are founded on a fundamental contradiction. Walter Benjamin (1978) summed it up nicely by pointing out that any legal order that claims a monopoly of the use of violence has to be founded by some power other than itself, which inevitably means by acts that were illegal according to whatever system of law came before. The legitimacy of a system of law, thus, necessarily rests on acts of criminal violence. American and French revolutionaries were, after all, by the law under which they grew up, guilty of high treason. Of course, sacred kings from Africa to Nepal have managed to solve this logical conundrum by placing themselves, like God, outside the system. But as political theorists from Agamben to Negri remind us, there is no obvious way for "the people" to exercise sovereignty in the same way. Both the right-wing solution (constitutional orders are founded by, and can be set aside by, inspired leaders—whether Founding Fathers, or Führers—who embody the popular will), and the left-wing solution (constitutional orders usually gain their legitimacy through violent popular revolutions) lead to endless practical contradictions. In fact, as sociologist Michael Mann has hinted (1999), much of the slaughter of the twentieth century derives from some version of this contradiction. The demand to simultaneously create a uniform apparatus of coercion within every piece

of land on the surface of the planet, and to maintain the pretense that the legitimacy of that apparatus derives from "the people," has led to an endless need to determine who, precisely, "the people" are supposed to be.

> In all the varied German law courts of the last eighty years—from Weimar to Nazi to communist DDR to the Bundesrepublik—the judges have used the same opening formula: "In Namen des Volkes," "In the Name of the People." American courts prefer the formula "The Case of the People versus X" (Mann 1999: 19)

In other words, "the people" must be evoked as the authority behind the allocation of violence, despite the fact that any suggestion that the proceedings be in any way democratized is likely to be greeted with horror by all concerned. Mann suggests that pragmatic efforts to work out this contradiction, to use the apparatus of violence to identify and constitute a "people" that those maintaining that apparatus feel are worthy of being the source of their authority, has been responsible for at least sixty million murders in the twentieth century alone.

It is in this context that I might suggest that the anarchist solution—that there really is no resolution to this paradox—is really not all that unreasonable. The democratic state was always a contradiction. Globalization has simply exposed the rotten underpinnings, by creating the need for decision-making structures on a planetary scale where any attempt to maintain the pretense of popular sovereignty, let alone participation, would be obviously absurd. The neo-liberal solution, of course, is to declare the market the only form of public deliberation one really needs, and to restrict the state almost exclusively to its coercive function. In this context, the Zapatista response—to abandon the notion that revolution is a matter of seizing control over the coercive apparatus of the state, and instead proposing to refound democracy in the self-organization of autonomous communities—makes perfect sense. This is the reason an otherwise obscure insurrection in southern Mexico caused such a sensation in radical circles to begin with. Democracy, then, is for the moment returning to the spaces in which it originated: the spaces in between. Whether it can then proceed to engulf the world depends perhaps less on what kind of theories we make about it, but on whether we honestly believe that ordinary human beings, sitting down together in deliberative bodies, would be capable of managing their own affairs as well as elites, whose decisions are backed up by the power of weapons, are of managing it for them—or even whether, even if they wouldn't, they have the right to be allowed to try. For most of human history, faced with such questions, professional intellectuals have almost universally taken the side of the elites.

It is rather my impression that, if it really comes down to it, the overwhelming majority are still seduced by the various ugly mirrors and have no real faith in the possibilities of popular democracy. But perhaps this too could change.

Endnotes

1 But not those that speak Spanish or Portuguese. It is not clear if Huntington has passed judgment on the Boers.

2 It was utterly unremarkable, for example, for a Ming court official to be a Taoist in his youth, become a Confucian in his middle years, and a Buddhist on retirement. It is hard to find parallels in the West even today.

3 Some of his statements are so outrageous (for example, the apparent claim that, unlike the West, traditions like Islam, Buddhism, and Confucianism do not claim universal truths, or that, unlike Islam, the Western tradition is based on an obsession with law) that one wonders how any serious scholar could possibly make them.

4 Actually, one often finds some of the authors who would otherwise be most hostile to Huntington going even further, and arguing that love, for example, is a "Western concept" and therefore cannot be used when speaking of people in Indonesia or Brazil.

5 Or a French person to read Posidonius' account of ancient Gaul and identify with the perspective of an ancient Greek (a person, who if he had actually met him, he would probably first think was some sort of Arab).

6 This is why Classical Greek philosophers are so suspicious of democracy, incidentally: because, they claimed, it doesn't teach goodness.

7 This conclusion is in world-systems terms hardly unprecedented: what I am describing corresponds to what David Wilkinson (1987) for example calls the "Central Civilization."

8 One reason this is often overlooked is that Hegel was among the first to use "the West" in its modern sense, and Marx often followed him in this. However, this usage was, at the time, extremely unusual.

9 One should probably throw in a small proviso here: Orientalism allowed colonial powers to make a distinction between rival civilizations, which were seen as hopelessly decadent and corrupt, and "savages," who insofar as they were not seen as hopelessly racially inferior, could be considered possible objects of a "civilizing mission." Hence Britain might have largely abandoned attempts to reform Indian institutions in the 1860s, but it took up the exact same rhetoric later in Africa. Africa was thus in some ways relegated to the "savage slot" that had been the place

of the West—that is, had been before Europeans decided they were themselves "Westerners."

10 "Though the first English planters in this country had usually a government and a discipline in their families and had a sufficient severity in it, yet, as if the climate had taught us to Indianize, the relaxation of it is now such that it is wholly laid aside, and a foolish indulgence to children is become an epidemical miscarriage of the country, and like to be attended with many evil consequences" (op. cit.).

11 Usually, one can pick out pro-democratic voices here and there, but they tend to be in a distinct minority. In ancient Greece, for instance, there would appear to be precisely three known authors who considered themselves democrats: Hippodamus, Protagoras, and Democritus. None of their works, however, have survived so their views are only known by citations in anti-democratic sources.

12 It's interesting to think about Athens itself in this regard. The results are admittedly a bit confusing: it was by far the most cosmopolitan of Greek cities (though foreigners were not allowed to vote), and historians have yet to come to consensus over whether it can be considered a state. The latter largely depends on whether one takes a Marxian or Weberian perspective: there was clearly a ruling class, if a very large one, but there was almost nothing in the way of an administrative apparatus.

13 Obviously the Chinese state was profoundly different in some ways as well: first of all it was a universalistic empire. But, Tooker to the contrary, one can borrow an idea without embracing every element.

14 Rather than pretend to be an expert on early twentieth century Indian scholarship, I'll just reproduce Muhlenberger's footnote: "K.P. Jayaswal, Hindu Polity: A Constitutional History of India in Hindu Times 2nd and enl. edn. (Bangalore, 1943), published first in article form in 1911–13; D.R. Bhandarkar, Lectures on the Ancient History of India on the Period from 650 to 325 B.C., The Carmichael Lectures, 1918 (Calcutta, 1919); R.C. Majumdar. Corporate Life in Ancient India, (orig. written in 1918; cited here from the 3rd ed., Calcutta, 1969, as Corporate Life)."

15 I say "almost." Early Buddhism was quite sympathetic: particularly the Buddha himself. The Brahamanical tradition however is as one might expect uniformly hostile.

16 Most were in fact published in a journal called *Symbols*.

17 One is tempted to say this leaves us to choose between two theories for the origin of Huntington's "Western civilization," one neoliberal, one crypto-fascist. But this would probably be unfair. At least the authors here do treat the broad zone that later includes Islam as part of a "Western" bloc to which they attribute the origin of Western ideas of freedom: though it is hard to do otherwise, since virtually nothing is known of what was happening in Europe during this early period. Probably the most fascinating contribution is Gregory Possehl's essay on Harappan civiliza-

tion, the first urban civilizaion in India, which, as far as is presently known, seems to have lacked kingship and any sort of centralized state. The obvious question is what this has to say about the existence of early Indian "democracies" or "republics." Could it be, for instance, that the first two thousand years of South Asian history was really the story of the gradual erosion of more egalitarian political forms?

18 I am drawing here on a conversation with Nolasco Mamani, who, among other things, was the Aymara representative at the UN, in London during the European Social Forum 2004.

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