

6. The Bipolarity of Democracy and Authoritarianism and Its Societal Origins

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I. Individuality and Collectivity in Democratic and Authoritarian Systems

In a functionally differentiated society the political system is responsible for the societal production of collectively binding decisions. There is no other function system in society that can do something similar. If someone tries to solve societal problems and wants to claim bindingness for the solutions finally found, the respective actor will have to transfer the problem to the political system and work toward the making of binding decisions there.

In this functional description of the political system there is no preconception of either the form of government or the form of political regime implied. The idea of the polity as a system specialized on collectively binding decisions is compatible with autocracies, democracies, monarchies, aristocracies and other government and regime types as long as they reliably fulfill this function of the polity. But one must know the constitution of the collectivity that is supposed to be bound by the collective decisions. How does the collectivity come about? What does its internal social structure look like? Why and how does it accept the decisions that are produced? And what does 'acceptance' mean?

Societal modernity has one of its origins in a fundamental transformation of the collectivities on which political systems are based. A person is no longer a member of the respective political collectivity via inclusion in the estates and strata of pre-modern (European) society. It is no longer membership in social categories (nobility, peasantry, bourgeoisie, clergy) that guarantees inclusion in the political system. Instead membership is based on individuality, which means it is based on a paradoxical property: Individuality is something everyone shares with everyone else because all humans are individuals and no exceptions are imaginable; however, individuality distinguishes each individual from every other individual who realizes its individuality in a different way and who must be different as an individual in order to be an individual at all (Ghosh 2013; Simmel 1890; Simmel 1917). This paradoxical structure of individuality seems to guarantee both the

unity and the internal diversity of a political system and it generates these two effects via the same institution: the individual as a core institution of modernity (Bourricaud 1977; Dumont 1991; Durkheim 1893; Durkheim 1898; Parsons 2007b). Interpretations of individuality arise in all the other function systems of modern society (education, science, economy, religion). These function systems are all based on the inclusion of individuals. At the same time, each of the function systems has a completely different perspective on individuals.

Political systems invent new terms or redefine old ones to describe themselves as an inclusive collectivity of individuals: The 'people' and the 'nation' are the most prominent of these terms. Both concepts refer to collectivities that may include a significant number of individuals, millions of individuals or even a billion of them (in the case of the Chinese or the Indian people or nation). What distinguishes the two semantics is that 'people' is more clearly dominated by its popular origin, meaning only the simple, unrefined people who have no claim to a relevant social status. In contrast, 'nation' for centuries was an elite term, referring to the cultivated social strata. While both terms are used to describe a unified political and social community, 'people' signifies a unification from below whereas 'nation' implies a unification from above. The convergence of these movements from above and below reveals the strongly egalitarian character of the modern political community, although it can also be understood as indication of the tensions inherent in these processes of forming a unified political community.

Both terms – nation and people – are egalitarian in contemporary society and as egalitarian terms they formulate a semantics of inclusion. Everyone is part of the people and everyone is part of the nation. But both terms are not necessarily tied to democracy as a political regime. They can also be prominent and decisive terms in a monarchy or in an authoritarian system. It is possible that someone (an authoritarian populist) governs who says: This is my people, this is my nation. The prominence of these two terms is one of the many indicators that reveal the shared semantic basis of modern democracy and modern authoritarianism. Democratic and authoritarian regimes typically claim to be based on such an inclusively interpreted collectivity. *In the case of democracies this takes the form of self-government by the people, in monarchical/authoritarian systems it takes the form of government for the people, for the welfare of the people, and in the best interest of the people, and in all these authoritarian variants we observe more indirect forms of the representation of the people and the nation. The study of these forms is the study of authoritarianism in modernity.*

There is a bipolar structure inherent in all contemporary political systems: On the one hand the individualization of inclusion in the political system, on the other hand the different collectivities to which all included individuals belong. Democracies typically focus on the individual pole of this bipolar structure and must emphasize the individual exercise of participation in political processes, whereas autocracies typically accentuate the collectivities, which are the contexts

of the belongingness of the individuals, and they claim the exercise of authority in the name of the collectivity. In autocracies, there will be someone outside the collectivity who will be the bearer of authority over the collectivity (a hereditary monarch, an irreplaceable party, a charismatic personality with innate qualities, a cleric from a religious role structure, a military officer). In democracies, all leadership roles are completely derived from the self-organization of the collectivity as a collection of individuals. In a democracy there is no individual in the collectivity who could not be thought of as being potentially able to take the most powerful political roles in a political system. In sum: Both types of regimes realize a universal inclusion of all members of society in some types of participation and in participation roles in the political system ('public roles'); however, only in democracies there is a complete inclusion of everyone in the possibilities of taking even the highest political roles in government ('performance roles'). (Stichweh 2016)

It is instructive to look more closely at differences between 'people' and 'nation' as the two major terms for the modern political collectivity based on inclusion. From the point of view of a theory of inclusion, 'people' signifies an inclusion from below. People were originally the ordinary, simple people who had no claim at all for a privileged place in society. If in the current times 'people' becomes a universal term that includes everyone in 'the people', this means the inclusion of the higher strata in a collectivity to which for centuries they never would have wanted to belong. With 'nation' it is exactly the other way around. Its original usage primarily meant the higher strata of society, as in 'Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation', where clearly the 'nation' only referred to those who were part of the politically independent estates of the empire. In this case inclusion was from above. The concept of the nation expanded and ever more people from ever more social strata and stations became part of the nation, and finally the idea of the nation became a kind of political program that sought to include ever more persons.

Another dimension of the distinction is related to scope. In many cases 'nation' is a universalizing and globalizing term. Inclusion in the nation is then the inclusion of regions, provinces, and other smaller groups and units in an encompassing concept of the nation (Weber 1976). There are other cases, in which the usage of 'nation' is particularizing. In these cases, it is claimed that a smaller part of a social whole is a nation of its own. Sometimes such a claim prepares a political secession. To speak of 'the people' or simply 'people' does not point to transregional or global circumstances but is much more closely tied to locality and local circumstances.

We mention a last aspect: exclusion. The two core concepts for the modern political collectivity (or 'community'), 'people' and 'nation', are both clearly linked not only to ideas of inclusion (mainly the complete inclusion of all individuals) but also to ideas of exclusion. There is again an asymmetry. In the case of the semantics of 'people' exclusion is comparatively rare. A person can become an 'enemy' of the people or may be a 'stranger' to the people. In the latter case he or she probably

belongs to another people. From the perspective of 'nation' exclusions are much more likely. In a political system (democratic or autocratic) it may be declared that someone lacks properties that are deemed to be constitutive of the nation (ethnic, religious, linguistic). And then these persons or groups may become excluded from the respective political system.

II. Functional Differentiation

One of the major commonalities of democracies and autocracies is that both types of regimes arise in and are an adaptation to a functionally differentiated world society. Political systems cannot escape functional differentiation. It is a world structure that requires a response and an adaptation. Different political regime types differ in their responses and adaptations and these differences generate the distinction of democracy and authoritarianism.

We claim, therefore, that the most important societal circumstance that determines the careers, of both democratic and authoritarian regimes, is the functional differentiation of society, which after 1750 finally takes over as the primary differentiation of world society. In contrast, in premodern stratified societies the 'polity' or 'the state' was the instrument by which the most important stratum of society (the nobility or other elites in a structurally equivalent position) exercised its dominance over all the other societal groups. The preponderance of the state as a functional institution goes easily hand in hand with the stratification of society, as a hierarchy of groups into one of which everyone is born and that predetermine the entire life course of individuals.

In a functionally differentiated society, the state is no longer the apex of society. The state is only the 'political system', i.e. the state becomes one function system among numerous other function systems. The conditions for inclusion in a political system are clearly different from the conditions of inclusion in a premodern state. Starting with the inclusion of elites that was characteristic of premodern states there has been a slow shift towards universal inclusion. The two premodern collectivities of 'nation' (elites) and 'people' (everyone, the 'plebs') have converged, creating a situation in which everyone is both a member of the nation and a part of the people. These two collectivities, nation and people, are now understood as political collectivities, i.e. collectivities that define one function system in society, but do not constitute 'society' and are not a 'societal community' in the understanding proposed by Talcott Parsons (Parsons 2007a). It is difficult to identify a societal community in the Parsonian understanding of this term, and society and polity have become separate from one another in global modernity, and as a consequence the political system is only one function system among a significant number of other function systems (law, economy, religion, etc.) and

has its own collectivities that differ from the communities underlying the other function systems.

It is this enormous societal transformation that finally produces the bipolarity of democracy and authoritarianism. Democracies are based on the complete breakdown of stratification as a form of political domination. They constitute an egalitarian, self-organizing democratic collectivity that includes everyone in society on the same terms and concedes to everyone the same rights of participation, first via numerous forms of participation and second by the principal possibility of acceding to the highest political offices. This principal possibility is not limited by professionalism or educational demands. There is no 'political profession' in the same way as there is 'the profession of medicine' (Freidson 1988) and there is no characteristic and indispensable education for the political system aside from being active and taking roles and thereby building a career in the respective political system.

From the perspective of the self-organizing democratic collectivity, it is easily to be seen that there are similar egalitarian communities based on universal inclusion in all the other function systems. These communities have internal social structures that differ from the internal structures of the political collectivities. Often there is a split between professionals/performers and amateurs/clients. Nonetheless, however, all the function systems are based on universal inclusion. Of course, the professional/performer statuses are not ascribed statuses, but are, in principle, accessible to everyone. There are no constraints built into the structure of society which make it impossible that a student of sociology becomes a successful opera singer.¹ In all of the function systems there are some passage-ways that may allow the amateurs to perform together with professionals or even to compete with them (the cup tournaments in soccer are one of many examples and there are many other practices and institutions of permeability in all of the sports). *If, from the perspective of the democratic collectivity of the political system, one observes the inclusion communities of the other function systems in society and their internal structures there is no reason the democratic collectivity should legitimately claim somehow to 'govern' the inclusion communities of the other function systems. From a democratic point of view it would be much more plausible to postulate that if the self-organization of the democratic collectivity is the core structure of the 'radicalism' of the democratic revolution (Wood 1998), then for the other function systems in society the idea of the self-organization of their constitutive communities should be a self-evident insight.*

1 One of the authors of this chapter was surprised by one of his students to whom after finishing his diploma thesis fifteen years ago he offered a position in a DFG research project but who declined the offer and said he was going to switch to professional singing and had already been accepted by a teacher in a 'Musikhochschule'. This former student is today a well-known performer of operas and of the German tradition of 'Lieder'.

From this argument it follows that a built-in feature of modern democracy is an inherent acceptance of both functional differentiation as the fundamental structure of society and a tendency towards the self-restriction of the decision space that a political collectivity claims as its own. Democracies do not tend toward an expansion of the political decision space. Rather, they should and do prefer self-limitations of the political domain induced by respect for the self-organization of the other function systems.

This argument highlights how authoritarian systems differ from democracies. Whereas democracies rest on the complete breakdown of the domination by ascriptive elites, most autocracies have their basis in either the continuity or the new emergence of elites who claim a stable political authority and power on the basis of their elite status. As elites, they typically perceive themselves to be irreplaceable. This irreplaceability may be postulated with respect to elite parties (fascist, communist, socialist, and other ideologies), a religious clerisy (any religion), the military, a traditional or newly emerging kinship group (Saudi-Arabia), a tribal or ethnic elite that distinguishes itself from other ethnic groups in the same country, or even an elite of socio-economic modernizers (although elite consistency and stability will be difficult in this case). The elites of authoritarian countries mostly accept, indeed must accept, an inclusive collectivity of all others (all those who are dominated by the elite). Thus, these countries often have elections, parties, parliaments and other institutional aspects characteristic of democracies. However, there are always sharply drawn boundaries that demarcate the space where the domination by the elite begins and limits the participation and potential influence of all others.

The political system of an autocracy is in some (often in many) respects a specialized function system of society, as is the case for democracies. The autocratic political system must accept its partiality resulting from functional specialization. But there are limits to this acceptance. The elites who control an autocracy have an ingrained distrust of the self-organizing autonomy of the communities of the other function systems. Therefore, one of the major differences between democracies and autocracies consists in the completely different relationships to functional differentiation. Democracies must accept the plurality of function systems because they perceive the autonomy of the other function systems as something similar to the way a democratic polity itself establishes and defends its autonomy. This could be described as a kind of solidarity among the function systems and their respective demands for autonomy. The elites of autocracies, in contrast, will observe elites in other function systems as competitors in the struggle for power and domination. Therefore, autocratic elites often try to establish an extensive political control of other function systems.

III. Values

A further way to distinguish between democracies and autocracies is by looking at values and value patterns. Values are socially institutionalized preferences. They are only preferences. They do not dictate social choices. But they point to certain directions. In an understanding proposed by Clyde Kluckhohn and Talcott Parsons, values are “conceptions of the desirable type of society” (Kluckhohn 1951; Parsons and White 2016). What are the constitutive values of contemporary world society and how do they allow observers to distinguish between democracies and authoritarian systems?

First, there is individuality, which may be called the constitutive value of modern society. It is important for functional differentiation because it allows to understand how the functional autonomy of global communication systems is based on the potential universal inclusion of every individual in the possibilities of participation in the respective system. Participations are nearly always individualized: there are individual votes in elections, individual consumer choice and individual entrepreneurs that are responsible for innovation in the economy, individual conversion as the major goal of many religions, individual evaluation in educational institutions, individual responsibility in legal systems, individual publication in science (with the strange effect that there are sometimes hundreds of individual names on scientific papers), the individual attribution of works in the art system (even films have ‘auteurs’²), individual partner choice, and individualized dying in war and even genocide (with a tendency towards a reconstruction of the circumstances of death of every single individual, and individual burying and individual honoring of the dead). This is an impressive balance sheet of the relevance of individuality as the core value of world society, although individuality is hedged by numerous countervalues in different world regions, for example the relevance of social conformity and responsibility, which seems to be an especially strong value in East Asia.

In addition to individuality, which obviously must be honored by democracies and autocracies alike – although they differ in the way they institutionalize individuality – there are human rights that are often both values and norms (because they are enforceable, which is not true of values) and are constructed as a kind of protective core around individuality. Some might argue that the system of human rights defines democracy, that democracy is somehow the exercise of human rights. But that would not be a correct interpretation. Human rights define limitations that democracies must accept. They are adopted and codified in the constitutions that most democracies and autocracies create at some point in their histories, often as a foundational act. As such constitutional rights, human rights

2 <https://indiefilmhustle.com/auteur-theroy/>.

are constraints. They circumscribe the powers of political systems. At their core, they describe the interrelations of the political system with the other function systems in society by making clear what a polity should not do in infringing on the territory of other function systems (Luhmann 1965). This can easily be studied in the 'Bill of Rights', which was ratified as the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution (in December 1791, four years after the Constitution). In the Constitution you first find a preamble to the 'Bill of Rights' (agreed in March 1789) that declares the document's intention: "A number of the states ... expressed a desire, in order to prevent ... abuse of its powers, that further declaratory and restrictive clauses should be added." (Constitution 2017, p.27) Two years after the preamble was written, the ten amendments were adopted; the first of them begins: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press ..." (op.cit. 29). Of course, the framers of the U.S. constitution had no concept of functional differentiation. But the 'Bill of Rights' focuses on (among other things) the freedoms and autonomies in which a democratic polity should not intervene – and these are the freedoms at the basis of the other function systems emerging at that time (mass media, religion, art, science, higher education, and so on).

The institution of individuality and the supporting core of human rights determine a certain number of values that a democratic polity should not interfere with. These could be called the values of functionally differentiated world society, and the corpus of these values has evolved in sync with the emergence of world society. These values constitute a very general value system that is a highly generalized complement to the increasing internal differentiation of world society into global communication systems, many of which are organized around one of the freedoms postulated in the various catalogues of human rights that have been written since 1789.

A democratic polity is bound by these values. But otherwise it is free in defining, debating and even creating societal values. Political processes and the decisions that are their final outcomes are not only about societal problems the polity considers as part of its domain. Of course, this is what political systems do: Identifying, defining and trying to solve societal problems. But in discussing problems and developing problem solutions, the political debate is always about societal values, as well. Values change and evolve, together with societal practices, institutions and norms. Many of these value changes in society never touch the decision space of the political system. If, in society, an informalization of behavior emerges as a very general societal trend, then the polity probably will be part of this trend and will be changed by it. However, the polity will never decree about it. It is different for other values. If values regarding family, marriage, sexuality, drug use, privacy of information, the use of artificial intelligence, and the manipulation of the genome of plants, animals, and humans – and many other values – change,

political decisions will at some point ratify or condemn these value changes. However, the polity will never do it directly in decreeing about values. It will always do it indirectly, by creating institutions and norms based on these respective values.

Autocracies seem to have a wholly different relationship to values. *Whereas democracies are value-receiving and value-processing political systems and are thereby very active (although somewhat secondary) participants in societal value change, autocracies are either value-free or value-controlled.*

Value-free autocracies are those that consist of a governing group or stratum that is focused primarily on the private use and acquisition of resources that become accessible on the basis of control over governmental institutions. This type of regime has often been called a “kleptocracy”. It consists of corrupt practices that are found in all political systems, even and sometimes extensively in democracies. Identifying these practices is not easy because there is not always a sharp boundary between the privileges for elites in stratified systems – which are often seen as part of the symbols and rituals that legitimize power – and the illegal acquisition of public resources for private uses. One possible interpretation is that in democracies kleptocratic practices are a kind of deviance, tied to individual actors who over the years of officeholding grow a feeling of being entitled to take and to claim gifts.³ Kleptocratic regimes do not consist of individual deviants or criminals but rather of gangs that establish systematic control over a territory (a city, a state) and that always compete with other gangs. The endemic succession problems characteristic of autocracies are in the case of kleptocracies usually managed by a transition of power from one ‘gang’ to a different ‘gang’. This interpretation allows us to specify the ‘value-free’ character of kleptocracies. Kleptocrats possess some values, but these values are mostly ‘gang’ or ‘mob’ values.⁴

Most autocracies are probably not value-free but rather are *value-controlled*. This means that there is not only an elite group or stratum that establishes political domination over the modern inclusive community of all members of a polity. These elite groups are mostly built around value systems that guarantee the status of the elites and at the same time are incessantly renewed and stabilized by the activities of the elites. Among such value systems are political ideologies (communism, fascism), religious belief systems, ethno-historic or ethno-religious narratives, technocratic ideologies of learning and effectiveness, and ideologies of order and control. There may be other candidates for autocratic value systems.

3 One could produce a very long list of names on which Ryan Zinke and Benjamin Netanjahu might be some of the recent additions.

4 One of the fascinating aspects of the Trump government is that it shows many of the properties of a gang. And the language that comes to Trump naturally is the language of a Mob boss, interesting McCabe 2019. This interpretive perspective helps to explain why Trump as a politician is only superficially connected to political values.

Very often these value systems are based in cultural traditions which belong to one of the function systems of modern society. In this case, the autocratic polity establishes autocratic political domination for a function system other than the polity (e.g. religion, religious law, economy, science). Further, all these value systems are interpreted as consisting of non-contingent values. There is always a kind of fundamentalism implied (Stichweh 2010), there are always ideas about the purity of value systems that must not be endangered by dissenting opinions and the passing of time. This heterogenesis of values and the accompanying non-contingency of values are two major reasons that most autocratic regimes do not accept functional differentiation.

Because functional differentiation is a world structure and because autocracies cannot escape from world society, they must live with and to a certain extent affirm functional differentiation. However, there is always a tendency and a temptation to make use of the foundational value systems to control the operations of function systems other than the polity. One can study this phenomenon in looking at present-day People's Republic of China. The country seems to affirm the principles of liberal world-trade and to accept other aspects of a non-politicized world economy. But at the same time China tries to establish ever more strict mechanisms of ideological control of science (censorship of foreign publications; establishing journals in formal cooperation with Western publishers but managing these journals from China on the basis of the political acceptability of content; restricting theory building in the humanities and social sciences from an idiosyncratic, regime based interpretive perspective, called 'theory with Chinese characteristics'). Interestingly, this is not a retreat from world science. Indeed, China wants to establish its science system as a central part of world science, which means that its ideological projects, in the end, might aim for an ideological transformation of world science in the service of autocratic ideologies. Again, a refusal to accept functional differentiation underlies this strategy. For a value-controlled authoritarian political regime such as China's (the highest value of the regime is the supremacy of the Communist Party) there are two options for dealing with science. The country can opt out of science and close universities (which China did for a number of years during the Cultural Revolution) and opt out of other academic institutions. However, this option is more hypothetical than real as no country can opt out of doing and using science, in the current era. The other alternative is to accept the major institutions of science and to buy into them, but to hope to change them over the years towards conformity with the value imperatives of the Communist Party regime. The idea of seeking to change the value imperatives of science will only arise in a country like China where a presupposition that it might become the center of world science in the near future is not

completely unrealistic, but it will probably not become the center of world science as long as it is an autocracy⁵.

IV. Decisions and Time

The most important elementary communications of which political systems consist are (collectively binding) political decisions. When individual citizens vote for candidates or parties select the candidates they nominate for elections, when members of parliament or cabinet members vote after deliberating alternative courses of action, these communications and many other communications are decisions that – once they have been made and have been aggregated to a majority decision and minority vote – become binding for a certain collectivity that is part of the respective political system.

Decisions are never the final communications in a political system, and, of course, there are actually no final communications in an autopoietic system. From decisions, there always arise further questions and problems: First, are decisions consistent and compatible with earlier decisions and with other interests one pursues? Second, is the decision one has made a well-informed decision or did the deciders overlook an important piece of information or knowledge? Third, how good are the reasons to believe that the collectivity that is meant to be bound by the decision is willing to accept the bindingness and what are the motives behind this acceptance and how stable are they? Of course, these questions of acceptance are especially urgent for those who did not agree to the decision and who nonetheless as members of the respective collectivity are thought to be bound by the collective character of decision-making. Fourth, and perhaps most important, how long does bindingness last and how soon is it possible to change decisions? The consistency problem, the information problem, and the social acceptance problem related to binding decisions can probably best be addressed when political systems have the liberty to change decisions as soon as reasons for doing so become visible and have been communicated by participants. This question of the principal reversibility of all decisions seems to be of strategic relevance especially in democratic systems. Participants can accept defeat in a political deliberation and subsequent vote if they know they will get a second chance at some point. These attitudes of acceptance are further supported by time limits and term limits. Participants know there will be new elections at regular intervals and know that some of the powerful persons will have to leave office anyway after a certain time, which in a modern political system normally is specified in advance.

5 Cf. on this the recently established research group “China in the global system of science” at the MPIWG and “The Merton Project” as a part of this research group: <https://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/research/departments/lise-meitner-research-group>.

The relevance of the reversibility of decisions has been impressively made clear by the Brexit drama that has been playing out in the UK for years and has been intensifying since the beginning of 2019. Even before the referendum of 2016, there was a fear that a decision by a narrow majority might suffer from insufficient legitimacy, and there existed at that time a motion by Brexiters demanding a second vote if the first vote was not supported by a majority of at least 60:40. Further, there were problems with (intentionally) false information being used as propaganda in the referendum campaign.⁶ In 2019, three years later, the legitimacy of a second vote, either confirming or reversing the first vote, became ever more hotly debated. Some pleaded for irreversibility, interpreting it as the respect for a decision once made by the people, while others pointed to the Brexit process and the information that had been generated in it since 2016 and to the incessant change in the composition of the voter base (more than two million new young voters since 2016). In March/April 2019 the Brexit process went on by ever new votes in Parliament and in debates in the parties and in the form of petitions to the UK Government that tested decision alternatives: Recall the prime minister; revoke article 50 and remain in the EU; leave the EU without a deal; organize a second referendum – and so on. In July 2019 the UK got a new prime minister (Boris Johnson) whose instauration was not based on procedures one would call ‘inclusive’ and whose agenda was mostly focused on the postulated ‘irreversibility’ of the Brexit referendum of 2016. With the very simple position “Get Brexit done” Johnson finally won the parliamentary election in December 2019, and on this basis the UK has left the EU on January 31, 2020. Of course, the result could have been different, if the supporters of a second referendum had been better organized and had been able to communicate their pro-reversibility arguments in a more plausible way. A split in the Labour Party and a temporary hybris of the Liberals, who proposed to voters to annul the referendum result without a second vote, made this impossible.

What is never in doubt, in principle, in all these processes is that a democracy is a political regime that makes decisions that are reversible. Members can change laws, replace the government, and reverse a popular vote, at least after some time and on the basis of new information. Therefore, the combination of decisions (1) being binding even for opponents and (2) being reversible after some time is one of the core institutions of democracy.

Authoritarian political systems do not differ with respect to the fundamental relevance of collectively binding political decisions. In this regard, it is difficult to observe differences. However, autocracies differ regarding the reversibility of decisions. Whereas in democracies there is nearly always a mechanism to replace

6 This is considered a fundamental problem in other contexts: On April 10, 2019, the Swiss Federal Court cancelled a referendum result from 2016 because voters had received wrong and insufficient information at the time of the vote.

the personnel in all performance roles (resignations, dismissals, motions of no confidence, impeachment), to renew parliaments (dissolving the parliament), and to change or cancel laws (constitutional law review, amendments), few of these mechanisms exist in autocracies. In an authoritarian system, reversing important decisions is usually seen as a significant crisis. Therefore, autocrats try to prevent such reversals, or they make every effort to frame them as a sort of sophisticated adjustment to altered, exogenous circumstances – without conceding that they came to see their earlier decision as inadequate or ineffective. One of the most critical questions in autocracies is succession. Most autocracies never succeed in establishing a relatively well-ordered mode of succession for the core performance roles. Even China, a country which seemed to have managed this, because the party is so much more important than any person representing it, now seems to be retreating from ordered succession rules.

Regarding policy programs and legislation there is an interesting alternative to reversibility that can currently be observed in China (cf. Ahlers 2014). This alternative consists in adopting laws and political programs that are formulated in a highly generalized language. When these generalized programs and laws are implemented in the many regions and provinces of China there emerge numerous local and regional specifications, which can legitimately be interpreted as concretizations or specifications. This legislative strategy can meaningfully be interpreted as experimental or evolutionary policy-making, and therefore as a policy process that demonstrates flexibilities and possibilities of learning from multiple experiences, which are not available in the policy processes of democratic countries.

V. Social Control by Law

In political systems it is possible to reverse political decisions by deciding the same question a second time. Another possibility is to control political decisions by law. Control by law is a way of examining the consistency of decisions by comparing them to the corpus of other decisions that have been made at earlier times in the same or other relevant political systems. Currently, systems can often control decisions not only by comparing them to national law, but also by comparing them to rules and statutes in international law and then appealing to international courts to right wrongs.

In democracies, this practice of controlling decisions and normative structures by law has expanded in the last few decades. The practice is no longer used only by political institutions and legal specialists and constitutional and other courts as a mechanism of control. Instead, the practice is increasingly used by individual citizens and NGOs who, as activists, fight for political changes, and who make use of law as one instrument among others to effect sociopolitical change. In many countries – the United States perhaps more than others – litigation has

become a strategy for trying to effect political change in fields (e.g. arms control) where legislative reform strategies have often failed.

The possibility of making use of the law as an instrument to control the legal exercise of political power demands the establishment of a judiciary that is an autonomous institution in itself and is no longer a political institution. The increasing autonomy of the judiciary was an important part of the democratic revolution which began late in the eighteenth century (Wood 2009 Ch. 11). The genesis of an autonomous judiciary is compatible with the political selection of judges, but after having been selected these judges should be able to serve for life and there should be no possibility of recalling them (besides impeachment). This is a very sensitive point and it is easily observed that in most recent cases of authoritarian populists trying to restrict the legal control of the exercise of political power, the respective regimes have tampered with the selection and the terms of office of judges (cf. numerous examples in Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

Authoritarian regimes mostly differ in regard to the point made above. In the relevant respects (selection procedures, terms of office, appellate procedures), they do not have an autonomous judiciary. Instead the judiciary becomes a part of the power of the executive. The law and the judiciary are still an instrument of social control (cf. Hurst 2018). But they do not primarily control the legality of the use of power, they are an instrument for controlling citizens, distinguishing between law-abiding and non-law-abiding citizen members. This kind of control is clearly used everywhere and the question of citizens following the law is an important aspect of democratic orders, too. However, in autocratic regimes the control of citizens often becomes the primary function of law and establishes asymmetries between those actions routinely controlled by law and actions that are nearly uncontrollable, asymmetries that shape the autocratic character of authoritarian orders.

VI. Variants of Democracy

1. What is Democracy and what are its Eigenvalues?

A democracy is an autonomous political sphere founded on its Eigenvalues and based on individual political inclusion more than on collective political inclusion. In addition to having Eigenvalues, a democracy tolerates and even adapts to extra-political or non-political values (e.g. economic values, religious values) located in the other function systems of society. We discussed this topic earlier (part III of this chapter): A democracy is a cognitively open, value-receiving and value-processing system. It is a system observing society, with a tendency towards non-intervention in the diversity and conflicts in other function systems (e.g. religion, education), but otherwise formulating problems perceived as political and

political tasks and creating legal norms on the basis of changes in other function systems (e.g. intimate relations, families).

But what are the democratic Eigenvalues? We know from the history of other function systems, such as art and science, self-referential and tautological value formulas such as *'l'art pour l'art'* (first use by Benjamin Constant in 1804, cf. Wilcox 1953) or "science for science's sake" or "pure science" (Stichweh 2007). These tautological Eigenvalues have always been controversial because many observers interpreted them as celebrating self-sufficiency without societal relevance. However, these value statements often established and affirmed the functional autonomy of a societal sphere at the historical beginning of functional differentiation in the late 18th and early 19th century society. As far as we are aware, no similar tautological Eigenvalue (but cf. Sen 1999 on democracy as value principle) has been in use in the history of democratic political systems. Since the beginning of modernity, being actively involved in politics has not typically been understood as an inherent value in itself (the situation was different in the aristocratic systems of premodern Europe, Pocock 1975). This understanding likely exists because the tautological self-affirmations of emerging function systems mostly formulate elite values. But a democratic polity is not an elite system. The democratic polity is completely derived from the self-organization and self-determination of the democratic political collectivity, which is based on the universal inclusion of all the members of the people/nation. These terms are probably the central political Eigenvalues and it is this claim of social universality that dominates politics instead of the self-absorbed immersion into political life as a total way of life. Total immersion into political life is a pre-modern social value and is not compatible with the diversity of engagements in a functionally differentiated society.

There is a certain tension between this diversity of engagements under conditions of functional differentiation and universal inclusion in a democratic polity. For the polity, universal inclusion must be 'real'. It is not sufficient for this inclusion to be a hypothetical or distant possibility that is rarely realized. Nor can inclusion be an obligation. People, on the other hand, must be free to trust a democracy and to do so without casting their vote in an election. Democratic order is a liberal order that is not supposed to discriminate against those who have other priorities at this moment.

2. Practicing Democracy

Members are not obliged to participate in the institutions and processes of a democracy but can opt in and decide to participate at any time. This is what is meant by 'practicing democracy' – that besides the Eigenvalues and permanent institutions and processes, there is always the possibility of switching from passive citizenship to active involvement (cf. Anderson 2000). In some respects, there is

no 'cumulative advantage' for those who have been participants for a long time (on 'cumulative advantage' see DiPrete and Eirich 2006). In practical respects, advantages based on experience and the number of 'social ties' an individual has collected undoubtedly exist. However, these advantages are not supported by norms, and the history of populist newcomers demonstrates how fast individuals can enter a democratic system and gain influence under certain circumstances. In addition to these social and temporal aspects that demand that anyone can enter and intervene in a political system at any time, there is the substantial or material aspect implying that any subject or matter or social problem can become the object of democratic practice. This condition concurs with the argument that there are no societal problems that are inherently political, but rather there is a situational-historical logic which incessantly transfers social problems to the political system and parallel to these expansions depoliticizes other themata that are left to other organizations and function systems in contemporary society. There is, finally, a learning aspect to the practice of democracy. Individuals learn what democracy is by doing democracy. They must be creative, not only with regard to policies and suggested solutions, but also with regard to working and arguing for points of view for which they want to mobilize influence. Democracy is an experimental undertaking, and it is experimental with respect to initiating new political processes as much as with respect to substantial matters that are dealt with in processes.

3. Contingency and Democracy

One of the most unequivocal identifiers of democracy is contingency. In a democracy (nearly) everything can be changed. All decisions on structures are contingent, including even the very basic structures of a democracy (e.g. the change from a parliamentary to a presidential regime). In addition, one can change norms and values and it is possible to replace persons in elite positions. Only the Eigenvalues (self-organization, self-determination, universal inclusion) must remain the same. This radical contingency of democracy is the reason democracies are always at risk. In both historical as well as contemporary situations, it is normal for democracies to coexist with perhaps 20-30% of the electorate being aligned with movements and parties which are radically anti-democratic (very interesting Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Further, in a democracy one must always be cooperative, has to accept compromises, and work with parties one does not like, and at the same time one has to know intuitively where to draw the demarcation line by saying: "We will never compromise and cooperate with the political party XYZ because XYZ is a party that endangers democracy itself." There is no absolute certainty about these decisions, only the knowledge acquired by having been a practitioner of democracy for a long time and having learned by this participation where

to draw the demarcation line, where to be unwavering even though one must so often be willing to compromise.⁷

4. The Space of Social Systems – the Space of the Polity

To explore the varieties of democratic and authoritarian political regimes in the early 21st century world, we will use an analytical tool from the AGIL paradigm of Talcott Parsons (Parsons 1967; Parsons 1977; Parsons 1978; Parsons and Platt 1974). We do not intend or need to make strong claims for the universality of AGIL as the underlying logic of all social systems. Rather, we introduce this analytical tool as a heuristic instrument to help us structure and understand the varieties of and alternatives in contemporary democratic and authoritarian regimes.

Latent Pattern Maintenance – the Culture of the System L	Integration of the Collectivities I
Active Adaptation to Environmental Demands A	Goal Attainment – Selection and Mediation Among Diverse Interests G

Figure 1: Four Functional Demands in Political Systems

For any political system and the institutions and processes that constitute it, there are at least four functional demands that invariably must be met. First, the system must *adapt* to environmental demands (A-function). This is, as has always been pointed out by Talcott Parsons, about an active mastery of the environment that presupposes a problem-defining capacity in the respective political system. ‘Environment’ is a generalized concept that includes societal environments of the polity, such as the economy, as well as non-social natural environments. When a political system is defined by ‘responsiveness’, this concept primarily refers to a focus on the A-function.

⁷ A good illustration of such a decision occurred on April 25, 2019, when, in announcing his candidacy for the U.S. presidency, Joe Biden, explained his motivation by pointing to the day in 2017 (August 27) when Donald Trump defended a demonstration of white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The second function, for which Parsons coined the term '*goal-attainment*' (G), is somewhat in the center of what is understood as 'politics'. There are plural interests and plural interest articulations, and as a G-system a polity selects among these plural possibilities articulated by participants and moves from deliberating about alternative possibilities to making collective decisions. The classical political concept of 'representation' is closely related to this understanding of the G-function.

In a third respect, in every country there is a plurality of linguistic, ethnic, religious, regional or status (e.g. castes in the Indian case) communities. The coordination and integration of these diverse and often conflicting communities cohabitating in the same country can, in one respect, be seen as a core task of the political system. Parsons called this function '*integration*' (I), and this is a third potential focus of the institution building and processes in a political system.

Fourth, there is the question of values and culture functioning as highly generalized patterns that instruct and shape the genesis of more concrete norms and institutions. These values and cultural semantics likely have a different life cycle than the more fluid elements of social structure. They may even continue and survive when one might have the general impression that they are no longer visible in the daily occurrences of a political system. This persistence is the reason why Parsons spoke of *latency* and *latent patterns* (L). For the polity (as for other function systems), values and culture normally function as a background that may not be easily identifiable in everyday events.⁸ However, there are obviously other cases of political systems in which the maintenance of these latent patterns is somehow the focus of political actions and institution building. As long as this is the case we can speak of the primacy of the L-function in the respective political system.

Our interpretation of this four-function paradigm follows Parsons in postulating that all of these functions are relevant at any time in any political system. The substantial respects formulated by the four functions are so fundamental that they will never completely lose relevance in any political system. However, there are changing primacies among these four functions and these shifting primacies are a good instrument for studying the differentiation of types of democratic regimes and the differentiation of types of autocratic regimes.

8 The concept of 'truth' in science, rarely mentioned in everyday communications today, is a good example of a latent pattern and value.

5. Variants of Democratic Regimes

When one applies the Parsonian paradigm presented above to democratic regimes in the contemporary world, a pattern of four variants emerges that, at a first approximation, seems sufficiently heterogeneous with some clear-cut boundaries becoming visible.

L democracy based on Eigenvalues, direct democracy, democracy based on constitutional order (rule of law and constitutional court)	I multicultural democracy (mutual integration of the collectivities that are part of the political system)
democracies oriented toward policies and toward efficiency in pursuing policies (responsiveness and expert cultures) A	liberal democracy (representation of multiple diverging interests, organization of selectivity that prepares collectively binding decisions) G

Figure 2: The Four-Function Paradigm for Types of Democratic Regimes

Policies are a very prominent feature of the contemporary political world, and the preference for policies over ideologies often extends across the boundary that separates democratic from authoritarian regimes. Policies are adaptive. They attempt to solve a problem that politicians perceive as being related to environmental demands and necessities. One can work on policies one after another without needing an encompassing vision. Policies and the diagnoses on which they are based can be particulate. Policies need experts and policy-intense regimes are typically steeped in expert cultures. On the democratic side, the Scandinavian polities can be understood as being near to this adaptive quadrant of the space of political variants (Sejersted 2011).

An alternative understanding of the primary task of a political system is that it is a kind of decision machine. There is an immense diversity of interests in a modern political system in which every individual and group is free to articulate its interests. Then the major task of the political institutions is to function as a selector by identifying the options and then making decisions and finally sequences of decisions that command the broadest support and satisfy a majority of inclusion addresses in the respective political system. In a political system that operates in this way, a key question will always be: How are the interests of the minorities taken

care of? In a sufficiently diverse society, the answer should normally be that one is part of a minority only for certain questions and that in respect to other policy questions one will belong to a majority whose demands are satisfied. Another possibility is that the interests of minorities are somehow protected. However, there are limits to doing this. A decision will always privilege some participants and groups, even if aspects of compromise are built into it. There is no solution that is equally satisfying to all sides. The fatal Brexit decision has been made in looking at the form of participation of the UK in the EU as a majority/minority-decision (and not as the choice of ever new policies). Under such premises there will always be winners and losers – these are the inherent costs of a democratic political system that opts for the primacy of the G-function.

The third democratic option is multicultural democracy (primacy of the I-function). If one prefers the I-function, one will understand the political collectivity (nation, people) as consisting of a plurality of sub-communities (religious, ethnic, etc.) and one will create institutions that integrate the separate communities with one another. This integration does not dissolve differences and boundaries – and does not want to do so – but rather seeks integrative ideas and structures. Integration normally means that one accepts a certain reduction in the space of the behavioral alternatives one claims in order to make one's own alternatives compatible with the behavioral spaces of the other communities/participants (Luhmann 1987). An I-democracy does not necessarily produce 'losers' in the way the primacy of the G-function does. However, one of its disadvantages is, that – to a certain extent – it confines or even locks up participants in communities that they would probably prefer not to be exclusively connected to. Therefore, this option is not entirely in step with the individualistic culture of modern democracy. Instead, there is a certain collectivism inherent to this option, and with collectivism comes an affinity to authoritarianism. Therefore, as is true in different ways for each of the four alternatives, there is a probability of transitioning from a multicultural democracy to an autocracy located in the same quadrant (in this case, the I-quadrant).

The last type we propose is an L-democracy. The constitutive values or Eigenvalues of a democracy are of paramount importance for this type. There are several variants of an L-democracy. One is 'direct democracy' which prioritizes the individual right of participation in every decision and the 'self-organization of the democratic collectivity' and thus binds nearly every decision of some significance to the possibility of a popular vote. The political system of Switzerland is the paradigmatic example in our days. A certain anti-legalism may arise in a direct democracy that seeks to base every decision on the will of the people (often documented via a popular vote). The popular vote is allowed and considered valid even if it overrides human rights or the law of nations. There are Swiss examples for this (e.g. the popular vote on minarets which conflicts with the freedom of religion).

In addition, direct democracy may further right-wing or left-wing populism and the authoritarian tendencies inherent in populism. The rise of the SVP (a right-wing populist party that approaches a 30% share of votes in national elections) in Switzerland is a good example of this effect.

The other variant of an L-democracy is based in the legal or constitutional interpretation of the constitutive principles/Eigenvalues of a democracy. In this case the foundational principle that is taken to the extreme is not the direct will of the people but rather the legal thinking behind the constitutive principles. Countries that have very strong constitutional courts, such as the United States and Germany, can potentially tend toward this direction. In the United States there have been remarkably intense fights for the chance to nominate Supreme Court judges for the past 200 years. This began in 1801 when, after the election of Thomas Jefferson as the first ‘Republican’ president of the United States, the Federalist majority in Congress reduced the number of Supreme Court judges from six to five to deny the incoming President the chance to nominate a judge of his choice (Wood 2009).⁹ A similar episode occurred in 2016 when the Republican majority in Congress refused to begin the process of examining Merrick Garland, who was nominated for a free Supreme Court position by Barack Obama at a time when Obama had only ten more months in office (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). In some respects, a Supreme Court judge who is called for life has a stronger power position than the president, who serves a maximum of eight years, although this argument can only be true when there is a strong claim for the foundational relevance of the interpretation of the US constitution. However, exactly this claim is shared by a number of observers who sometimes define the presidency as the right to select Supreme Court judges. Behind this argument is a kind of value fundamentalism. Such a fundamentalism, however, is real in terms of a definition of a situation.

VII. Populism, Personalism, and the Transition to Authoritarianism

In all democratic regimes – we have made this abundantly clear – there is the implied risk of a transition to an authoritarian variant. There is an authoritarianism of effectiveness that has no respect for those who are not knowledge elites; there is an authoritarianism of political majorities who no longer want to compromise with the divergent preferences of minorities; there is an authoritarianism of dominant groups who no longer seek balances in a multicultural situation; and there is an authoritarianism of democratic value principles that are interpreted in

⁹ The other Federalist strategy was to claim the Common Law as the valid federal law of the United States although US Congress had never legislated on it. If this Federalist claim had been ruled valid, the status of law would have been independent from political institutions, and it is not by accident that the Jefferson Republicans called the Federalists ‘Monocrats’ and ‘Autocrats’.

a fundamentalist manner. One democratic principle that is often interpreted in a fundamentalist manner is the concept of the 'people'.

One political ideology that introduces a fundamentalist interpretation of the concept of the people is 'populism'. If the distinction between 'the individual' and 'the people' is a core distinction of modern political systems, populism is clearly based on a preference for the people and for a specific concept of the 'people'. The 'people' of the populist is not a population of individuals with different and divergent interests and opinions. It is not the richness of the diversity of opinions that inspires the populist to find a convincing synthesis that balances this multiplicity. Instead, populists understand the people as having spoken with one voice and perceive it as a homogeneous people with no significant internal diversity. In addition to the people, there are elites who, at some point, will be left behind. They are, in a polemical formulation to be heard in German politics, "die Altparteien" ("the old parties"). The elites are not part of the people. Indeed, populists often see the elites as traitors who operate against the interests of the people.

The strong belief in a kind of primary unity and truthfulness of the people that does not need education or information but has a spontaneous and adequate consciousness of what it wants and needs is well articulated in a passage from Simon Bolivar that Hugo Chavez cited frequently, among other occasions in his inaugural address from 2007:

"All individuals are subject to error and seduction, but not the people, which possesses to an eminent degree the consciousness of its own good and the measure of its independence. Because of this its judgment is pure, its will is strong, and none can corrupt or ever threaten it." (Hawkins 2010, 60)

In addition to the people, which populism understands in an essentialist manner, there is a necessary complement: the populist party or populist leader who articulates the will of the people. There is a certain logic to the populist leader not being a party with diverse interests and tendencies but rather being a single person who represents the presumed unity of the people in the unity of his/her consciousness. The leader may nonetheless be a leader of a party. However, in most cases, the leader is not chosen in a pluralist competition within the respective party but is the only person considered as a possible leader of the party. The leader is often a newcomer with no anterior political career or a convert from a different party whose claims for the status of the leader are based in a conversion experience. The absence of political experience and a political career does not count against the leader. In fact, it is often considered an asset. The newness of the leader guarantees that he/she is not weighed down by the failures of the old parties. The leader is often a member of the societal elites but likely the elites of other function systems (e.g. economy, education, religion) rather than politics.

For the reasons just mentioned, populism is often coupled with personalism. The best populist leader is a charismatic personality whose extraordinary qualities consist of experiencing and representing the unitary will of the people. The role-interpretations for the leader vacillate between sacrificing him-/herself for the people and at the same time being a political actor of extraordinary effectiveness and capability. Both qualities can be combined in the same person.

What is the structure of the social space between the populist leader and the people? Perhaps the best term to describe this structure is 'disintermediation' (on the concept of disintermediation, see Berghel 2000). This means that there are almost no 'media' or 'mediators' between the people and the populist leader: Populists are not in favor of parliaments, they are against experts, they fight against traditional media and the news communicated by the media, they prefer unitary interests to 'interest groups', they favor referenda over other forms of decision-making, and usually do not like administrations and autonomous expert organizations. However, they often have a strong affinity for digital media because the format allows direct, unmediated contact between the populist leader(s) and the people. Donald J. Trump is the best illustration of this modern type of populism – he has a direct, disintermediated relationship to his 76.3 million followers on Twitter (on April 10, 2020). His style of government and campaigning is to a significant degree government and campaigning by Twitter (Shear et al. 2019).

The hypothesis of disintermediation makes a clear path from populism to authoritarianism visible. Populist regimes and their followers have strong motives to weaken and sometimes abolish intermediary institutions. These motives are easily observed in the Trump administration. In this case, there has been a hollowing out of administrations, a weakening of expert organizations such as the EPA or the FBI, a denigration of science, a disrespect for diplomatic competencies, a contestation of the legitimacy of democratic elections, and a massive fight against critical news media.

These events and transformations that occur within individual democracies are small steps. The transition from democracy to populism to authoritarianism is, in most cases, a slow process in which the first events and impressions of observers may point in directions that are not pursued in the end. In a long-term perspective, the reversal of these developments may be the most probable outcome. The United States are – one may hope – a good candidate for this optimistic hypothesis. The personalism of most populist regimes makes it probable that the succession problem for the populist leader will result in the disestablishment of the populist regime. There is a very big difference between the transformative steps that lead to a populist regime and the demands that have to be met for the long-time stability of an authoritarian regime. We explore this gap in the next step of our argument.

VIII. Variants of Authoritarianism

1. What is Authoritarianism?

Authoritarianism mostly means the prevalence of institutions and values that are non-negotiable. Such institutions and values exist in democracies, too. But in democracies they are primarily procedural – which means they are open in the results they produce – whereas in autocracies, system-defining institutions and values close spaces of possibility. Democracy could be defined as the daily exploratory practice of its institutions and values; in contrast, authoritarianism is about the affirmation and stabilization of its underlying principles tied to institutions and values. This does not exclude the possibility that an autocracy can be much more flexible in continuing current policies and introducing new policies than many democracies are able to do. The reason for this is that autocracies may succeed in decoupling their institutions and values from their policies whereas democracies must find and establish policies under the premises defined by their institutions and values.

We have discussed five major points important for the comparison of authoritarian systems and democracies: In autocracies, inclusion is (1) realized much more than in democracies via collectivities and the position of individuals partially given to them by their collectivities. The political community of an autocratic system (including all the collectivities and individuals) has a tendency (2) either to claim the subordination of the constitutive communities of other function systems or alternatively to act in service of another function system that is considered even more important than the polity. Authoritarianism has an inherent tendency to postulate asymmetrical, hierarchical relationships between function systems. There are (3) often values in authoritarian systems that are non-contingent and non-negotiable and they very much define the respective system. In a democracy, this position of central values is mostly claimed by the procedural values of democracy and by human rights that are the rights of inclusion in function systems and the rights of compatibility between and non-intervention in the different function systems. In an authoritarian system, (4) the decisions made have a tendency to be irreversible (otherwise the reputation of the decider might be weakened), whereas in a democracy the possibility of reversibility is always implied and is a proof of an incessant search process. The possibility of reversibility extends to decisions about the selection of persons for performance roles. Anyone can be revoked in a democracy. In authoritarian systems, (5) the law is seen as a tool polities use to control individuals and collectivities. In contrast, democracies accept the autonomy of law (as well as the autonomy of other function systems) and thus law is perceived as a welcome mechanism for controlling the exercise

of power. Law is not primarily an instrument of power, but rather a limitation of power.

2. Variants of Authoritarian Regimes

The general picture of an authoritarian system that we have painted thus far becomes much more differentiated and probably more interesting when we introduce the Parsonian AGIL-paradigm into the analysis of authoritarianism, too. The analysis of authoritarian regimes is based on the same four functional alternatives we have used to analyze democracy. This decision seems plausible. In both cases, we must consider the same global function system, which we call ‘World Polity’ (cf. Meyer 2010). The world polity is differentiated into national states that are characterized by either democratic or authoritarian regimes. Functional differentiation is the macrostructure for both democratic and authoritarian polities. The functional characterization of the two types of regimes – the polity as a system that specializes on making collectively binding decisions and uses power as its symbolically generalized medium of communication – does not differ between the two regime types. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that the two types move in similar spaces with regard to the organization of differences.

L precedence of ultimate value statements pointing to (quasi-)religions (religion and other teleological world interpretations) – Theocracy, Environmental Authoritarianism –	I precedence of one community over all other communities that are part of the same polity (precedence of an ethnic group, but also precedence of collectivity over individual)
A prevalence of knowledge types that are supposed to be decisive for the adaptive capacities of a polity – Expertocracy, Technocracy, Meritocracy, Bureaucracy –	G prevalence of a special competence for taking decisions: ascriptive (Absolute Monarchy, Aristocracy), or based on presumptive will of the people (Authoritarian Populism/Personalism), or on structures of military command

Figure 3: The Four-Function Paradigm for Types of Authoritarian Regimes

Many of the authoritarian regimes we observe are based on the prevalence of values. This is a general difference between authoritarian and democratic regimes that authoritarian systems, which – besides some of them being value-free sys-

tems – mostly are value-controlled systems, can more consistently be characterized by the differences in the values that are of foundational relevance for them.

There are first A-autocracies, i.e. adaptive authoritarian systems that build their foundation on knowledge systems that they believe are decisive for their adaptive capacity. The belief that they possess a superior learning capacity or adaptive capacity is, to a significant degree, defining for these authoritarian systems and instills in them a feeling of superiority relative to democratic systems – China and Singapore are good examples of these aggressively self-confident authoritarianisms – whereas democratic polities are forced to give the same relative weight to all democratic systems, independent of the kind of knowledge available in them. The knowledge systems favored by adaptive autocracies are diverse but there is a certain preference for forms of scholarship/learning and science, especially for the knowledge systems of engineers and economists. This adaptive quadrant of the political space is almost never claimed by sociopolitical ideologies. On the other hand, the preference for knowledge systems and knowledge elites has a more ideological bent in authoritarian systems than it will likely ever have in democracies. Democracies focus – as we argued above – on policies and on the multiplicity of policies and have a more pragmatic attitude toward the knowledge needed to invent and realize the respective policies.

Whereas a G-democracy is a system that does not primarily seek well-founded policies but always attempts to find majorities and minorities and then makes decisions that are supported by a majority, G-authoritarianism is a system built around strong positions and roles, and the competence to make collectively binding decisions is entrusted to those in these positions and roles. There are no shifting majorities that change from policy question to policy question and from one election to the next, but there are strongly established positions for deciders who possess the right to make collectively binding decisions as their exclusive privilege. The ultimate decider may be an absolute monarch or quasi-monarch (Saudi-Arabia, North Korea), a populist leader basing his/her decisions on the presumptive will of the people (Venezuela, Philippines, Turkey), the head of a party in a monopolistic situation (China, Cuba, Vietnam), a military leader who grabs or receives the power from civil institutions (Egypt, in earlier decades Latin America and Turkey), a person in a core performance role of another function system, a function system that is seen as so important that the final decision competence in the polity is given to a representative from this other function system (Iran).

A G-authoritarianism can clearly be coupled to an A-authoritarianism (China). An important implication of the Parsonian paradigm is that the orientations of the regimes/systems in the four-function space are only primacies. That is, the characterizations of political systems in this paper are about primacies. Any political system necessarily involves all four functions. However, there are historical

tendencies in political systems that in most cases allow them to gravitate toward one (or sometimes two) of the functional orientations.

The I-function creates the structural possibility of a third type of authoritarianism. We noted earlier that an I-democracy is a system that integrates a plurality of communities in a single multicultural democratic polity. Even in democracies this implies a certain tendency to move toward collectivism (and the weakening of individualism) and therefore a slight affinity to authoritarianism. This tendency is strengthened significantly as soon as the interrelationships between the (ethnic, religious, regional, linguistic) communities shift toward a hierarchical and discriminating interpretation in which one or several of these communities are perceived as nearer to core values of the polity than the other communities. This type of hierarchical interpretation leads to significant political inequalities among communities that are not compatible with universal and equal inclusion in public roles and performance roles and, in turn, foster a strong movement toward an authoritarian regime. In our days, this scenario raises a very important question: What consequences will result from the tendency of well-established democracies such as India and Israel to reinterpret their respective political communities in an ethno-religious understanding?

The last type of regime to consider is an L-authoritarianism. Whereas a L-democracy seems not to be very probable because the ultimate dominance of a value complex or ideology has limited compatibility with the pragmatic and experimental spirit that can be considered characteristic of the democratic tradition, the situation is different on the authoritarian side. There are religions and ideologies that serve as teleological interpretations of the world. If these thought systems are understood as ultimate value statements and become influential and even dominant in societal and political communication, and institutions are built around these thought systems, an autocracy controlled by ultimate value statements may emerge.

Of course, the development of such ideologically controlled autocracies (ideocracies, see Backes and Kailitz 2015) may follow very different trajectories. In some cases the dynamics has ideological origins, while in other cases authoritarian systems are built on other foundations (for example, a communist party and a family dynasty as is the case in North Korea), and the ideology (Juche in the North Korean case, Fifield 2019) is then appended as a strategic instrument of the stabilization of the regime.

IX. The Future of Democracy and Authoritarianism in World Society

In the current world situation, the distribution of autocracies and democracies is nearly balanced. The number of states that can be seen as democracies is approximately the same as the number of states that can be called autocratic, and the

share of the world population governed by each regime type is around 50%. Looking at the two most populous countries in the world, one is a stable autocracy (China), and the other has been seen for a long time as a successful democracy (India). However, the Indian democracy seems to be endangered by Hindu nationalism, which could push this I-democracy toward becoming an I-autocracy.

The present-day distribution of democracies and autocracies does not reveal any trends or tendencies. There is no longer a democratic wave to be identified, there are no more Springs or Color Revolutions. However, there is an ascendancy that is not obvious in the distribution of democracies and autocracies: *the ascendancy of right-wing nationalist populisms*. Not all of these are anti-democratic, not all will succeed and become stable autocracies. Nonetheless, as long as this is the significant trend in the present-day world polity, one prognosis seems plausible. Some of these right-wing populisms will succeed and some of those that succeed will undergo a transition to authoritarianism. Therefore, at this moment it is somehow plausible to predict a shift toward more autocracies.

What is driving this trend? A review of the current collection of urgent and unsolved world problems offers an idea as to why authoritarianism seems ascendant. There are three world problems that might be considered the most urgent world problems of the current era: Climate change, inequality, and migration. All three potentially increase the tendency of countries to move toward right-wing nationalism. Climate change policies are costly and demand sacrifices, including calls for a regulation of individual consumption and mobility preferences. They are world policies and only have a chance of succeeding if all countries consistently handle them as such. However, they clearly provoke nationalistic backlashes that propose to discontinue national participation in global climate policies and seek national advantages. The governments of Trump (in the United States) and Bolsonaro (in Brazil) are obvious examples.

The growth of inequality in many nations across the world since the 1970s and 1980s is a second important trend (Atkinson 2015; Milanovic 2016; Piketty 2014). This shift has induced political polarization between those whose lives and economic situations consistently improve and those who have been losing ground for decades in relative economic terms and often in absolute terms as well. The disfavored groups can be expected to shy away from policies that require national sacrifices to achieve climate change goals.

Third, world migration, induced in part by economic inequality and the oppression of social groups by autocratic regimes, is currently a major issue. If migrants arrive in countries that are already experiencing rising inequality and increasingly strict climate change policies, their arrival will further strengthen populist, nationalist, and autocratic trends.

There are other world problems that do not have the same universality but are also genuine world problems that are relevant in many countries and regions of

the world. These include religious fundamentalism, which breeds religious intolerance and enmity and motivates the persecution of religious minorities. This situation induces autocratic tendencies in countries that privilege a specific religion and then put at a disadvantage and exclude members of other religions.

Yet another world problem is the cycle of drug uses, the rise of gangs and terrorist groups whose economic success rests on drugs, and the strong tendency toward physical violence among drug-related groups. Countries with society-wide drug problems experience one of two scenarios: 1) the rise of political regimes that are neither democratic nor autocratic but are better described as big gangs, – or 2) the emergence of law and order autocracies that derive their autocratic legitimacy from the fight against drugs, gangs, and drug related terrorist groups.

There are also some potentially benign social forces in present-day world society that can contribute to a strengthening of democracies. We would like to point to three of them. First, there is the classical circumstance underlying the rise of democracies, namely economic growth. Even if inequality persists, economic growth allows for the improvement of the situation of even disfavored social groups. A second potentially benign force is the combined influence of education and technology. Technology encourages economic growth and, in the 20th century, consistently produced ever-new occupational groups and sectors and thus offered the possibility of participating in occupational transformations and gaining income from these new sectors. However, technology demands the incessant expansion of education (Goldin and Katz 2008). Otherwise people will not be able to participate actively in the technological transformation of society. The third benign force is the potential worldwide rise of gender equality, especially the participation of women. Gender equality can be a strong force towards democratization. At the same time, resistance to gender equality is often a strong factor in the rise of right-wing populism. Thus, these benign forces can be a source of sociological ambivalence (Merton 1976). The same sociological ambivalence affects education, which can and will contribute to political polarization and economic inequality if there are significant groups who do not participate in educational expansion.

These concluding remarks are far from an exhaustive analysis. But even they may already make visible how demanding political action in 21st century world society is. Political action has to deal with all these problems, and if democracies are preferred, there is no easy answer how to advance this agenda. But there is at least one answer obviously suggested by this incomplete list of problems and tendencies: One will have to work on all the world problems (from climate change to drugs) listed above and there are some benign, although ambivalent, forces and strategies of which one can make use, hoping that they may contribute to solving world problems and at the same time will make the survival and efflorescence of democracy more probable.

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