The Road to Actualized Democracy:

A Psychological Exploration

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"There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide."

John Adams (1735-1826; Ketchum, n.d.), second president of the United States

The French Revolution (1789) was followed by Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) crowning himself emperor (1804) and setting up some of his family members as kings and queens around Europe; the Russian Revolution (1917) was followed by a long succession of new 'Tsar dictators', from Stalin (1878-1953) to Putin; the Chinese communist revolution resulted in the 'new emperors' of China, beginning with Mao and leading to a country with the largest number of billionaires in the world, ruled by a dictatorship clique; the revolution in Iran resulted in a surface change from one form of dictatorship to another, 'The Turban for the Crown' as one commentator put it (Arjomand, 1988); lastly, the Arab Spring has given us turmoil and continued dictatorship, with only Tunisia showing signs of openness. This dismal trend of failed revolutions is underlined by the aftermath of revolutions in smaller countries, such as Cuba and the dictatorship of the Castro family, as well as backward movement in so many other societies, including most of South America and many former Soviet satellites, now ruled by former communist henchmen. Global connections are enabling authoritarian regimes across the globe to bolster one another in campaigns of democracy-prevention (Von Soest, 2015).

Two exceptions to this long-standing trend of revolutions failing to move major societies toward democracy are the United States and South Africa. An important reason why the

American Revolution (starting 1765) and the South African anti-apartheid 'revolution' (1994) initially succeeded to move the respective societies toward openness is because of leadership: George Washington (1732-1799) and Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) were exceptional, in that they voluntarily stepped aside from supreme power, even though they had popular support and could have continued in their all-powerful positions. Washington chose not to become 'king of America' and Mandela chose not to become 'president for life'. Almost all other major revolutionary leaders have been corrupted by power, as experimental evidence suggests they would be (a topic I return to later in this paper).

Throughout this discussion I am keenly aware of limitations imposed on me by the place and time in which I live. The American empire is suffering from what Toynbee (1965) described as the 'mirage of immortality', when global powers come to see their own way of life as the final form of human civilization. Some American politicians tout the United States as 'the greatest nation in history', and some American academics seriously argue that we have reached the 'end of history' (see Kagan's, 2009, assessment of this rash claim). Obviously we should not allow these short-sited pronouncements to distract us from the long-term goal of progressing beyond the profound limitations of the United States, countries of the European Union, and the other semi-developed democracies in the 21st century.

Despite their exceptional nature, the leadership of George Washington in America and Nelson Mandela in South Africa failed to move their societies forward to achieve what I call *actualized democracy*, where there is full, informed, equal participation in wide aspects of political, economic, and cultural decision-making independent of financial investment and resources. From Athens 2,500 years ago, to the Roman Republic half a millennium later, to modern democracies, there has been a tradition of democracies "committing suicide" (as John

Adams, quoted above, puts it), and of not achieving their full potential. There are no actualized democracies in our 21st century world. India, the 'largest democracy', and the United States, the 'superpower democracy', are far from actualized democracies. India is rife with corruption and enormous injustices; the United States has a citizenry that is largely disillusioned and distrusting of government. Even in the most important national elections, barely 50% of eligible citizens actually vote in the U.S.A., and participation in local elections is routinely below 20% (Sharp, 2012).

The weakness of American democracy is in part by design: for example, some elite groups in America invest heavily in preventing mass participation in American elections, and ensuring that only those with enormous private funding can compete as candidates in elections. Consequently, many U.S. citizens do not see their interests represented among the well-resourced candidates for political office. The Supreme Court decision equating spending in political elections with free speech (Citizens United v. Federal Election Comm'n, 558 U.S. 310, 2010) means that there is no limit to what billionaire individuals and families spend attempting to shape election results. It is hardly surprising that trust in politicians and political institutions has declined among Americans. But the idea of the United States being an open society where 'anyone can make it' continues to influence the non-elite masses, and they continue to vote for political parties that undermine their collective interests (a topic I return to in the last section of this paper).

My goal is to explore the psychological reasons for the allusive nature of actualized democracy, even after major revolutions have created dramatic macro level political and economic changes. This discussion is intended to pave the way for psychology to play a more central role in achieving movement toward actualized democracy. I begin by distinguishing

between three different types of change, at micro, meso, and macro levels. I argue that revolutions typically achieve macro change in a relatively short time but, despite sometimes using extreme violence and high levels of control, they fail to achieve the meso and micro level changes necessary for movement toward actualized democracy. Consequently, even major revolutions only change political and economic systems, often only at the surface level, without transforming styles of social relations and cognition. Second, I map out the social and psychological changes that need to take place in order to develop psychological citizens capable of achieving and sustaining actualized democracy. Third, I discuss the psychological foundations of the macro system that can sustain actualized democracy, with a focus on meritocracy.

Varieties of Change and the 'Micro-Macro Rule'

I begin by distinguishing between three different types of change. Of course change involves processes that are sometimes very long term, something impossible to study in the one-hour laboratory experiment that characterizes traditional psychology (Harré, & Moghaddam, 2012).

First-Order, Second-Order, and Third-Order Change

All major societies began as dictatorships, and some societies have made some progress toward actualized democracy (Moghaddam, 2013). If we imagine a continuum with 'pure dictatorship' at one extreme and 'pure democracy' at the opposite extreme (Figure 1), all major societies are located between these two ends, with some being closer to 'pure democracy' than 'pure dictatorship'. However, no major society is a 'pure dictatorship' or a 'pure democracy'.

Pure Dictatorship _____ Pure Democracy

Figure 1. The dictatorship-democracy continuum

Movement on the 'dictatorship-democracy' continuum is usefully conceptualized as involving three different types of change (Moghaddam, 2002). *First-order change* takes place without altering either the formal law or the informal normative system that justifies unequal treatment on the basis of group membership. For example, during the era of slavery in the United States, various changes took place in society (including in fashion, the economy, and in religious behaviors) without changing either formal law or the informal normative system as it pertained to slavery. *Second-order change* involves change in formal law to make illegal unequal treatment on the basis of group membership, but the informal normative system continues to allow unequal treatment on the basis of group membership. For example, race based discrimination has continued in various ways in the United States after slavery formally ended. A second example concerns social class: despite formal laws supporting 'fair competition' in access to higher education, children born in poor families are far less likely to gain access to competitive universities than children born in affluent families. Thus, first-order and second-order change constitute 'within system' change, because they do not necessarily bring about a change from one system to another. *Third-order change* involves a transformation of both the formal and informal systems: it is a change of systems, from one system to another, rather than a change only within a system.

Most revolutions throughout history have brought about first-order change, a few have resulted in second-order change, but so far third-order change has remained elusive through revolution. That is, most revolutions have, at most, changed the formal economic, political, legal

macro-structure. In most instances this represents only cosmetic, surface change. On paper, the constitutions put in place by some revolutions seem progressive. But actual behavior, regulated as it is by powerful informal normative systems, has not been changed toward actualized democracy. This pattern is clear when we examine change over historical time, which fits Pareto's (1935) model of perpetual 'elite rule' and inter-group inequalities, rather than idealist visions of Thomas More (1965/1516), Karl Marx (Marx & Engels, 1967/1848), and others, depicting egalitarian societies sometime in the future.

There was some movement earlier in the 20th century toward smaller resource inequalities between high and low status groups (such as different social classes, ethnicities, and the like), but since the 1970s group-based inequalities have accelerated. This trend is well documented (Atkinson, 2015; Dorling, 2014; Piketty, 2014), as are the detrimental physical and mental health consequences of greater resource inequalities particularly for the groups with least access to resources (Marmot, 2004). Pareto's (1935) elite theory provides a critical lens through which to evaluate these trends: we should not be distracted by the labels political systems give themselves, because elites use ideologies to mask the true nature of continued inequalities and elite rule. For example, Pareto could argue that the United States and China, the nations with the two largest economies in the world, are ostensibly very different from one another: the most powerful capitalist democracy and the most powerful communist nation. But the United States and China are similar in that in both nations, a tiny elite monopolizes wealth and power.

The Macro-Micro Rule of Change

Revolutions can topple governments and bring new regimes to power overnight. After they have come to power, revolutionaries can with the stroke of a pen change constitutions, the

rules of ownership, and even entire economic systems. For example, private ownership can be abolished by the new government. Monarchs, Shahs, and Tsars can be executed and 'representatives of the people' or 'the representative of God on earth' can gain absolute power 'on behalf of the people', taking on titles like 'supreme leader' and 'chairman' or 'president'. These macro level political, economic, and institutional changes can take place very quickly. However, micro-level changes involving the values, attitudes, motivations, needs, and relationship patterns between people, how they solve problems and interact at the everyday level, how they think and act in relation to authority figures as well as those with lower status than themselves – these all change at a relatively slow pace.

The 'Opportunity Bubble' After a Revolution

This relatively slower pace of change at the micro social and psychological level is particularly important in the highly sensitive period immediately after a revolution, when a dictatorship has just collapsed. There is usually a brief period of jubilation and opportunity; the chains of dictatorial control have been broken and it is possible to move toward a more open society. The door seems to be open for a change of systems. All major revolutions have a brief window, an 'opportunity bubble', during which this change from one system to another is feasible.

I experienced such a momentous 'opportunity bubble' when I was in Iran immediately after the 1979 revolution. The Shah had fled Iran and his regime had collapsed. We had an opportunity to move from dictatorship to democracy. The excitement was palpable in the cities and villages in Iran. People talked enthusiastically about the opportunities ahead: the dictator Shah had fled and there seemed to be a real chance to move from dictatorship to democracy, to

experience a more open society, with free speech and political and social freedoms for all. However, we learned the hard way that such third-order change, a change from one system to another, can only come about when certain pre-requisites are met.

First, there must be leadership in support of movement toward democracy. This is a tall order; as I explained, George Washington and Nelson Mandela stand out as exceptions among the leaders at times of major revolutions. In terms of personality characteristics, the kind of leader who is able to win power and control through and after a major revolution is typically not likely to reach out to opposition groups and attempt to develop dialogue and compromise.

Most leaders who come to power through revolutions are motivated to achieve power monopoly: the behavior patterns of Stalin, Mao, Khomeini, Castro, and Putin represent the norm. Washington and Mandela are the anomalies. Unfortunately, in terms of personality characteristics, the kinds of leaders who are ruthless enough to come to power through revolution, and who often have the charisma and ability to rabble-rouse and mobilize the masses, are less inclined to share power and democratize decision-making after they have come to leadership positions. In the terminology of traditional personality research, leaders who come to power through revolutions tend to be high on Machiavellianism, authoritarianism, and need for power, but low on tolerance for ambiguity, openness, and conscientiousness. From Napoleon to Stalin to Khomeini, the behavior pattern of these leaders is characterized by dogmatic, ruthless, relentless pursuit of power, not compromise and reaching out to opposition groups in order to achieve consensus. As I witnessed in Iran in the case of Khomeini, these leaders are inclined to smash the opposition with iron fists, rather than engage the opposition in dialogue with open arms.

Second, there must be political opportunity to create institutional support for movement toward democracy. Such political opportunity is often thwarted by elites within society, such as military, religious, and business elites determined to protect their resources, high status positions, and domains of influence. Another important source of opposition to democracy can be foreign powers, including world powers, who might see continued dictatorship as the best means of protecting their own interests. Unfortunately the post- World-War two era is littered with examples of American, European, Russian and (most recently) Chinese interventions in nations around the world is support of dictatorship rather than democracy. Thus, it is seldom the case that elites, foreign powers, and other forces are in support of building institutions to move toward openness and democracy.

 But there is a third, far less researched and discussed, pre-requisite for third-order change: the general population has to acquire in a timely manner the social and psychological skills needed to become *democratic citizens*. This change has to take place at two levels: first at the collective level and second at the individual level; it is collective level changes that make widespread individual level changes possible (Moghaddam, 2006). Some exceptional individuals are able to achieve the characteristics of democratic citizenship without support from the collective, but as lone individuals their influence will always remain very limited.

Unfortunately this third condition is very difficult to achieve, because of the slow pace of change in styles of cognition and action. One can change governments overnight, but changing the way people think and act takes far longer. This proves to be a huge stumbling block confronting pro-democracy movements immediately after they have toppled a dictatorship. There is very little time, sometimes not more than a few months, in order to socialize the

population to think and act in ways that will nurture and support democracy, rather than return the country back to dictatorship.

Political Plasticity

Although the issue of change has been neglected by social and cultural psychologists (for an example of the research that has been done, see de la Sabblonnière, Taylor, Perozzo & Sadykova, 2009), neuroscience research on plasticity gives center stage to change (Huttenlocher, 2002). Some attention has been given to 'social plasticity', such as exploring how human limits can be extended through drugs (Collins, 2015), and behavioral change in animals (Redriguez, Rebar & Fowler-Fin, 2013). The relationship between neural and cultural plasticity has also been examined (Takagi, Silverstein & Crimmins, 2007). However, in this discussion I want to focus more specifically on *political plasticity*, the extent to which change is feasible in political behavior in a given time period.

An example of political plasticity that becomes highly important in attempts to move from dictatorship to democracy is leader-follower relations. In dictatorships, the leader has absolute power and his word is not to be disputed by followers. Whatever the dictator leader says becomes sacrosanct. When Khomeini crushed all opposition groups and gained absolute control in Iran after the 1979 revolution, his speeches were treated as law. If anyone dared to publicly argue against Khomeini's ideas, he or she would be severely punished, sometimes by death - a tradition that has continued with Khomeini's successor, the most recent 'Supreme Leader'. This leader-follower relationship did not start with Khomeini, but had evolved over thousands of years through dictatorial rule by numerous Shahs in Iran.

The last Shah's flight from Iran in 1979 gave the Iranian population an opportunity to escape from this long established dictatorial leader-follower style of relationship. But in order for such a change to take place successfully, both leader and followers would need to develop a different style of behavior within a supportive cultural and legal context. For a start, it would have to become culturally correct for followers to critically and openly question the views and decisions of leaders; as well as for leaders to accept criticism and still be seen as legitimate. This requires a level of political plasticity that was not present in Iran after the revolution, and has not been present after most major revolutions. Consequently, revolutions have generally involved a jolt forward, but then a sharp reversal to the style of leader-follower relationship previously dominant in a society.

What are the characteristics of the psychological citizen we need to achieve, in order to support movement toward democracy? This is the question I turn to next.

Developing the Democratic Psychological Citizen in Support of Actualized Democracy

What are the key foundational characteristics that the citizen needs to have in order to be capable of supporting, and participating in, a democracy? These ten characteristics (depicted in Figure 2), are first and foremost psychological.
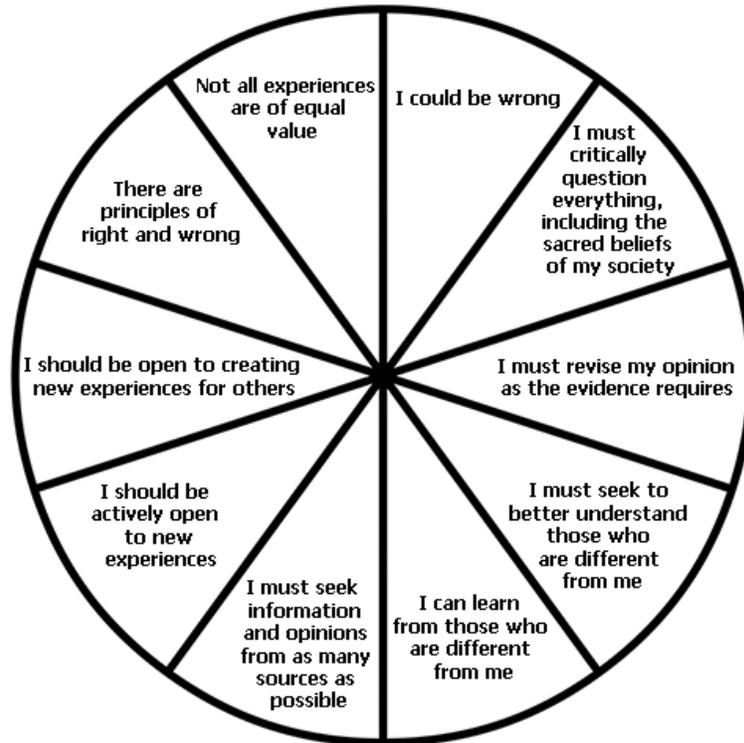
Figure 2: The psychological characteristics of the democratic citizen.

Self Doubt: Democratic citizens experience self-doubt in a constructive way, in the sense that they leave open the possibility that they could be wrong. However, this does not mean that they are crippled by self-doubt and unable to take action. Rather, they are accepting of the possibility that their beliefs and actions are not the optimal. They experience constructive self-doubt; the kind associated with creative, positive action.

Questioning Sacred Beliefs: In addition to leaving open the possibility that 'I could be wrong', democratic citizens seriously question the sacred beliefs of their own societies. This can be extremely difficult to do, because often it involves going against the norms and beliefs seen as 'natural' and even 'sacred' by one's family, community, and nation. However, such questioning is necessary because it opens the path for societal growth.

Revising Opinions in Light of Evidence: Democratic citizens develop high tolerance for ambiguity and openness to change. They seek new information and are capable of changing their opinions, guided by new information as it arises. This means that their opinions are less likely to be guided by dogma and irrational factors, and more in line with the latest evidence from objective research.

Seeking to Understand Those Who Are Different from Us: Ethnocentrism, keeping within and favoring the ingroup, and shunning outgroups, are trends common to most human groups. This pattern of behavior is functional in some ways, but is in line with the political system of dictatorship, which until very recently was pervasive in all major societies (Moghaddam, 2013). The political system of democracy requires a different pattern of behavior: seeking out and being inclusive toward those who are different from us, and seeking to understand them.

Learning From Those Who Are Different: A vitally important psychological characteristic developed in democratic citizens is not only openness toward, but also a strong motivation to learn from, those who are different. This is a very difficult characteristic to acquire, because the 'natural' tendency for humans is to be attracted toward similar rather than dissimilar others, in line with the tendency to be ethnocentric. But these are tendencies learned in the context of dictatorial systems, and democratic societies require a different set of psychological skills.

Seeking Information and Opinions from Different Sources: A central feature of education for democratic citizenship is that it teaches people from a young age to seek information from different sources. This is not difficult to achieve when it is carried out systematically, and becomes central to the educational mission from the start of schooling. In many cases teaching the young to seek information from different and sometimes contradictory sources goes against the traditions in their families, where political and religious biases strictly narrow down the sources of information. However, when carried out correctly, teaching the young to seek diverse sources of information will also feed back into the family, helping the parents to also become more open-minded.

Openness to New Experiences: Democratic citizens go beyond 'tolerating' diversity; they actively seek out new experiences through engagement with those outside their ingroups. This is not limited to abstract learning, but includes behavioral engagement and interactions with outgroups on the basis of openness and the ever-present question: what can I learn from these other people?

Creating New Experiences for Others: Complementary to the process of gaining from the new experiences that others open up for the self, is the often more difficult process of opening up new experiences for others to benefit from. Actively sharing ingroup experiences with outsiders can feel threatening. This 'opening up to others' is often far very difficult, because it means allowing outgroup members to enter as trusted partners into the life of the ingroup. However, such 'opening up' is made possible through trust and priority being given to basic human commonalities, in line with omniculturalism (Moghaddam, 2012), rather than giving priority to intergroup differences.

Principles of Right and Wrong: All that I have said so far about the psychological requirements for democratic citizenship may mistakenly lead to the assumption that I am endorsing a relativist position, and rejecting principles of right and wrong. Nothing could be further from the truth. Democratic citizenship is based on principles of right and wrong; principles underlying democratic governance, in which basic freedoms and just treatment are guaranteed. It is strong adherence to basic democratic principles that enable the democratic citizen to gain the confidence needed to be open to new experiences, and acquire all the other characteristics I outline above.

Actively Seeking Experiences of Higher Value: Guided by basic principles of right and wrong, as reflected in the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and other such foundational documents, the democratic citizen seeks out experiences of higher value and rejects less valuable experiences.

The Psychological Basis of Third-Order Change

"The beggars have changed places, but the lash goes on."

William Butler Yeats (1962, p. 190)

I have argued that a lack of political plasticity make it very difficult to achieve third-order change, a change from one system to another, particularly when the change involves moving from dictatorship to democracy. Because of the influence of psychological obstacles, history often seems to follow a cyclical path, with each revolution resulting in a change of who is 'on top' and who is 'at the bottom', but no change in the deeper nature of relationships. The poet Yeats (1865-1939) captured this cycle in his poem 'The great day' (quoted above), with the image of two beggars changing places, so one now rides on horseback and the other is on foot, but the fixed feature of their relationship is the lash, which goes on. This is in line with Pareto's (1935) vision of elites always ruling in all major societies, but using different ideologies to manage their rule over the non-elite. This pattern is clearly visible when one considers the move from the Tsar to Stalin and his successors, the Shah to the mullahs in Iran, the Arab Spring and what followed in Egypt and most other Arab societies, to consider just a few examples.

While I have identified the very difficult psychological changes that the masses need to achieve in order to evolve into democratic citizens and move society toward actualized democracy, the elite theory tradition highlights the perhaps equally difficult transformations the elites need to achieve for democratic change. According to elite theorists, when a society becomes too closed and social mobility diminishes, so that talented individuals are unable to climb up the status hierarchy, a counter-elite forms to lead the masses against the current rulers. However, after a revolution has succeeded, the elite who led the masses to overthrow the old regime, gradually change their own behavior until they resemble the former elite they replaced. As Mosca (1939, p. 417) argued, every time

"…the democratic movement has triumphed, in part or in full, we have invariably seen
the aristocratic tendency come to life again through the efforts of the very men who had
fought it…Everywhere, those who have reached the top rung on the social ladder have set
up defenses for themselves and their children against those who wished to climb."

In practice, the counter-elite change their behavior when they themselves gain power and
become the new elite. The proposition that people behave one way when they are out of power,
and another way when they achieve power, is not new. It underlies the ancient Latin phrase *quis
custodiet ipsos custodes*? (who will guard the guards themselves?), and the more recent idea that
'Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely'.

But we should not assume that 'power corrupts' only in relatively closed societies such as
Russia and Iran. The connection between political power, corruption, and hypocrisy is evident in
Western societies (Runciman, 2008). Empirical research in Western societies suggests that
power can lead people not only to cheat more, but also to overlook their own moral
transgressions (Lammers, Stapel & Galinsky, 2010). Evidence also shows that power can lead
people to act and perceive the world in self-serving ways (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson,
2003; Whitson, Loljenquist, Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld & Cadena, 2013; Overbeck &
Droutman, 2013; Overbeck, Neale & Govan, 2010) and to become blind to the perceptions and
interests of others (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi & Gruenfeld, 2006; Lammers, Gordijn & Otten,
2008). Influencing those in power to sense the illegitimacy of their own position can result in
some constraints (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn & Otten, 2008), but this is difficult for the
powerless to do.

Thus, one of the psychological obstacles to democratization is the tendency for leaders to become corrupted by power. In order to limit the possibility of this happening and society more broadly being protected against corruption, a number of contextual conditions have to be met. These conditions include measures to ensure leaders are responsive to the wishes of citizens and are removable through popular will; other conditions are rule of law, freedom of speech, minority rights, independent judiciary, universal suffrage, some measure of procedural and equitable justice, and meritocracy. The legal and 'formal law' conditions in areas such as rule of law can only be adequately met when the population collectively acquires certain psychological characteristics. I have discussed these psychological characteristics in depth elsewhere (Moghaddam, 2016); here I focus only on meritocracy, as an illustrative example of the power of psychological factors in influencing the larger society, and particularly progress toward democracy. The reason I focus specifically on meritocracy is because, first, belief in meritocracy and the ideology of meritocracy plays an extraordinarily important role in contemporary societies; second, the role of psychology in meritocracy is both complex and central.

Meritocracy and Democracy

"…despite the pervasive rhetoric of meritocracy in America, merit is in reality only one factor among many that influence who ends up with what. Nonmerit factors are also at work. These nonmerit factors not only coexist with merit, blunting its effects, but also act to suppress merit…"

McNamee & Miller (2014, p. 215)

"…believing in meritocracy can make members of low-status groups more likely to accept inequality…rejecting meritocracy can make people more likely to…identify with their ethnic ingroup and to support efforts to change its position in society."

Wiley, Deaux & Hagelskamp (2012, p. 177)

"…there is a prophecy that the state will be ruined when it has Guardians of silver and bronze."

Plato (Book III, 415d)

In actualized democracy, individuals are selected for positions based on their personal merit, independent of their group memberships, affiliations, wealth, and connections. This is very far from the situation in the 21st century, including in the United States and other Western societies where individual merit is only one of many factors, and often not the most important one, determining the rise of individuals in the status hierarchy. As argued by McNamee and Miller (2014), quoted above, in practice American society is far from being a meritocracy. This view contradicts the influential research of Herrnstein and Murray (1994), who propose that American society is functioning as a meritocracy, with IQ being the most important factor that determines the position of an individual in the social hierarchy. They propose that IQ is largely inherited, and because people now tend to marry others who are similar to them in IQ, there is stratification based on IQ: more intelligent people move to the top taking their super-intelligent children with them, and less intelligent people get stuck at the bottom with their less-intelligent children accompanying them. Moreover, Hernnstein and Murray (1994) argue that because women with lower IQ have more children than women with higher IQ, the general U.S. population experiences a decline in IQ. As these authors put it, "… higher fertility and a faster

generational cycle among the less intelligent and an immigrant population that is probably somewhat below the native-born average – the case is strong that something worth worrying about is happening to the cognitive capital of the country" (Hernnstein and Murray, 1994, p. 364).

Although merit is only one of many factors that determine the progress individuals make up the social hierarchy in the United States and other major societies, this does not prevent people from believing that meritocracy is taking place. Indeed, widespread belief that society is meritocratic is a foundation for the stability of the social and political system as it exists, particularly in capitalist 'democracies'. In this sense, there is a foundational difference between the mechanisms of political stability in capitalist 'democracies' as opposed to dictatorships. This difference has to do with the different role of ideology in societies that are closer to dictatorships than to democracies (Moghaddam, 2013).

The Role of Ideology in Dictatorships

In dictatorships such as Iran, North Korea, Russia, and China, the main mechanism of mass control is brute force. The masses are keenly aware that if they attempt to oppose or topple the ruling regime, they will be arrested, tortured, and possibly killed. They are sure of this, just as they are sure that they do not have freedom of speech, rule of law, and all the other rights associated with democracy. The masses are also aware of a ruling ideology, but it is brute force rather than ideology that keeps them in their subordinate position and perpetuates their powerlessness. Anyone who has researched or lived in dictatorships and developed relationships of trust with ordinary people comes to recognize that most people are well aware of the corrupt and despotic nature of their societies. They are not fooled by the ruling ideology. However, the

dominant ideology is used by the rulers as another mechanism to force conformity, obedience, and subjugation. For example, the fact that the young have to pass school examinations to demonstrate they 'know' the ideology is an important mechanism of regime control.

But we must keep in mind that 'knowing' enough to pass a school exam on ideology is very different from believing in an ideology. The young can 'pass' tests on Marxism in China and other communist states, just as they can 'pass' tests on Islam in Iran and other such dictatorships with religious fronts, but that does not guarantee that the young actually believe in these ideologies.

The crucially important role of ideology in dictatorships become clear when we consider how cohesion is achieved among the rulers: ideology serves to bind together the ruling elite. Through ideological commitment, the ruling elite in dictatorships achieve the justification they need to use brute force to keep the masses under control and to silence opposition voices. Because of the key role played by ideology in achieving and keeping cohesion among the elite in dictatorships, any deviation from the accepted ideology among any of the elite is very harshly punished. Dictators know that dis-unity at the top of the regime is the surest path to the collapse of the entire regime.

A familiar pattern in dictatorships is for 'deviant thinkers' among the elite to be treated extremely harshly. The case of Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) follows a familiar pattern. He was one of the leaders of the communist movement in Russia at the time of the 1917 revolution, the founder of the Red Army, and a member of the first Politburo in the Soviet Union. But Trotsky deviated from Stalinism, the ruling ideology from the 1920s until Stalin's death in 1953, and for this 'crime' Stalin first exiled him, then ordered his murder in 1940 in Mexico. During my time

in post-revolution Iran, I witnessed a succession of imprisonments and executions of individuals who had been part of Khomeini's inner circle, but became his victims because they deviated from the strict ideological line he had set. This list included former presidents and cabinet members. The same pattern was followed by the next 'Supreme Leader', Khamenei, who in 2009 imprisoned the former president Hossein Mousavi and his associates, and killed many others who took part in the Green Revolution, as part of a crackdown against ideological 'deviations'.

The Role of Ideology in Capitalist Democracies

The role of ideology is very different in capitalist democracies, where the elite often do have open disagreements. Freedom of speech and other basic freedoms mean that individuals and groups with resources can compete for power in capitalist democracies, and also put forward competing political ideas. However, unlike in dictatorships, in more open societies ideology does play a vitally important role in directly shaping mass behavior.

This is well documented even in 'popular' books, such as *What's the matter with Kansas?* In which Frank, T. (2004) discussed how people in Kansas repeatedly vote for politicians who support policies that favor the rich, rather than most people in Kansas. Belief in the American Dream and the idea that 'anyone can make it', that the system is meritocratic and individuals 'find their place' based on personal merit, in part explains continued support for the current system with its huge and growing inequalities in capitalist democracies (Ledgerwood, Mandisodza, Jost, & Pohl, 2011). From this perspective, the research of Hernnstein and Murray (1994) and the entire psychological testing movement can and has been used to support the idea that the 'American Dream' is alive and well, and the most talented individuals are reaching the top status and power positions in society.

Experimental research in the North American context demonstrates that as long as there is even a slim chance of individuals moving up the status hierarchy by themselves, they are very reluctant to take collective action to improve their situation, even when they are treated unjustly (Wright, Taylor & Moghaddam, 1990). This is in line with the results of 'social loafing' research, showing that in the Western context, at least, individuals put in less effort and 'loaf' when they work as part of a group and their efforts are assessed as part of a collective output, as opposed to when they are assessed on the basis of their individual efforts (Latané, Williams, & Harkins, 1979). The collapse of economies based on 'collective ownership' and 'collective effort', and particularly the failure of the Soviet Union, would seem to provide a 'real life' endorsement and illustration of this experimental evidence. Human beings, it could be argued, are naturally pre-wired to seek personal profits and will make less effort when they work as part of a group for collectively shared rewards. 'Greed is good', we might conclude – because it ensures higher profits and it guarantees that the 'brightest' individuals reach the top (Hernnstein and Murray, 1994).

Need for a Balanced Approach

Both experimental evidence and real life experiences suggest there are also serious limitations to how well 'greed is good' works as a basis for social organization. First, let us re-consider Hernnstein and Murray's (1994) proposition that the IQ level of American society is in decline, but that meritocracy means that those at the top are the most intelligent. The first part of their argument has been demonstrated as factually incorrect by research on the *Flynn effect*, which shows that IQ scores in the United States and many other countries is rising, not falling (Flynn, 2007). The second part of Hernnstein and Murray's (1994) argument is also clearly wrong, because the research demonstrates that merit is only one of many factors, and often not

even the most important factor, in determining individual advancement in society (McNamee &

Miller, 2014).

Second, the social loafing studies have been conducted with young people who have no

time in a one-hour experiment to build group cohesion and loyalty. In real life, many groups

develop strong work ethics and 'team spirit', resulting not in social loafing but 'social laboring',

where personal effort is even greater as part of a collective effort (Haslam, 2004; Van Dick,

Tissington, & Hertel, 2009). The economist Hirschman (1984) has discussed national

development projects where collective efforts rather than individual 'greed is good' mentality

achieves success. Whether we are rowing as part of a crew team, or working on a group project

at school or work, we know that in many contexts being part of a collective effort motivates us to

try even harder.

Thus, the ideal of meritocracy is worth striving for, but at present we are far away from

this ideal in the United States and other major societies. The assumption that we have achieved a

meritocracy in the United States and other capitalist democracies, and that the 'brightest' reach

the highest levels of power and influence is clearly invalid. Second, the ideal of meritocracy

should not lead us to assume that we must adopt a 'greed is good' mentality and focus

exclusively on individual effort and individual rewards. There are many contexts in which we

work best as part of a collective, and rewards should be on the basis of collective effort. The

members of the team that wins the baseball or soccer league title all receive medals, although

individual players also receive special payments that are different to some degree.

The challenge in social organization is to achieve a balance between individual and

collective incentives. Too much emphasis on 'greed is good' leads to financial crashes, as

occurred in 2008-2009; too much emphasis on collective ownership and group incentives results in the kind of lackluster economic performance as witnessed in many communist states. A balanced approach requires sufficient social mobility: as Plato (quoted above) argued, talent must be allowed to circulate to a minimum degree, otherwise society will collapse. From this perspective, the growing concentration of wealth in fewer hands (Atkinson, 2015; Dorling, 2014; Piketty, 2014), and the stagnation of social mobility are warning signs for capitalist democracies (Moghaddam, 2016).

Concluding Comment

The 21st century is characterized by competition and conflict between forces attempting to move human societies toward less and more openness. China and Russia, supported by lesser dictatorships such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and North Korea, are leading the efforts to move us away from openness. Capitalist democracies, including those of North America and the European Union, continue to be relatively open. However, it is not clear what the situation will be by the end of the 21st century. Globalization is associated with radicalization of different types and the strengthening of anti-democratic forces (Moghaddam, 2008), and it may be that by the end of the present century the world has moved further toward dictatorship rather than democracy. Psychological science has a vitally important role to play in helping human societies move toward greater openness.

The achievement of actualized democracy requires greater political plasticity, involving psychological changes in cognitive and behavioral styles. The psychological citizen can become capable of constructively participating in, and supporting, a democracy through acquiring a variety of cognitive and behavioral skills and practices. I discussed a number of such psychological characteristics needed at the individual level. A challenge is that such

psychological characteristics cannot be acquired quickly; they are acquired far more slowly than the time it takes to topple a government or write a new constitution. Political plasticity has severer limitations, particularly when it is not supported by educational and cultural programs. In practice, this means that even major revolutions only manage to achieve first- and second-order change; they fail to achieve third-order change, a change of systems. The struggle for open societies that began about 2,500 years ago in Athens continues today, but now psychological science can put into effect more powerful tools in favor of the pro-democracy forces. This requires that psychology itself first becomes more open and pro-democracy.

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