

Democracy, Equality, and Redistribution*

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1 Introduction

Democratic citizens are not equal but only anonymous, indistinguishable by any traits they may possess. Democracy only places a veil over distinctions that exist in society. Even the one sense in which equality that can be said to characterize democracy – equality before the law – is derivative from anonymity: the law has to treat all citizens equally because they are indistinguishable.

This norm of anonymity was circumvented in most early representative systems by an elaborate intellectual construction that justified restrictions of suffrage. The argument held that the role of representatives is to promote the good of all, yet the intellectual capacity to recognize the common good and the moral qualities necessary to pursue it are not universal. These traits can be recognized by using some indicators, such as wealth, age, and gender. Hence, relying on such indicators to restrict suffrage does not violate democratic norms. The logic of the argument is unimpeachable, but it is easy to suspect that it rationalized interests. This is the way it was perceived by those excluded, poor males and women, as they fought for political rights.

Yet even if political rights are universal, to ignore distinctions is to not to obliterate them. Democracy was a political revolution, but not an economic

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one. Should we be surprised that democracy turned out to be compatible with economic inequality? From its inception, representative institutions were haunted by the specter of the poor using their political rights to redistribute property. Should we be surprised that democracy did not undermine property, that the democratic revolution was never "completed" by being extended to the economic realm?

These three themes are developed below.

2 Aristocracy and Democracy

How did "democracy" reappear on the historical horizon and what did it mean to its proponents and opponents?

Since the emergence of modern democracy is the topic of Palmer's (1959, 1964) monumental treatise, no more than a brief summary is necessary. Palmer's main point is that democracy was not a revolution against an existing system but a reaction against the increasing power of aristocracy. It was aristocracy that undermined monarchy; democracy outflanked it following in its footsteps. Palmer argues that (1) By the early eighteenth century, the aristocratic system of government was institutionalized in assemblies of various forms, the participation in which was reserved to legally qualified groups ("constituted bodies") that always included hereditary nobility but in different places (countries, regions, principalities, cantons, city republics) also clergy, selected categories of burgers, and in Sweden even peasants. In all cases these bodies were politically dominated by hereditary nobility. (2) In the course of the century, these estate-based bodies increased their political influence. (3) At the same time, access to nobility, however it was defined in different places, became increasingly closed: nobility turned into aristocracy. (4) The resulting aristocratic system suffered from several tensions, of which one was between birth and competence. (5) Politically crucial conflict was due to the exclusion from privilege of those who possessed all the qualifications to participate – wealth, talent, bearing – except for birth.¹ (6) "Democracy" emerged as a demand for access to these bodies, not as a movement against monarchy.

Hence, by the end of the eighteenth century, "democracy" was a slogan

¹In Sieyès's (1799 [1789]: 29) words, the people were told "Whatever are your services, whatever your talents, you will go only until here; you will not surpass others."

directed against *legal recognition of inherited distinctions of social status*. "Democrats" were those who agitated against "aristocrats" or "aristocracy." As Dunn (2003: 10) observes, democracy "was a reaction, above all, not to monarchy, let alone tyranny, but to another relatively concrete social category, initially all too well entrenched, but no longer plausibly aligned with social, economic, or even political or military, functions – the nobility or aristocracy.... *Democrat* was a label in and for political combat; and what that combat was directed against was aristocrats, or at the very least aristocracy."² Thus, in 1794 a young Englishman described himself as being "of that odious class of men called democrats" because he disapproved of "hereditary distinctions and privileged orders of every species" (Palmer 1964: 22). "Could any further proof be required of the republican complexion of this system," wrote Madison in *The Federalist* # 39, "the most decisive might be found in its absolute prohibition of titles of nobility." In France, the Constituent Assembly decided that aristocratic privilege was in conflict with the very principle of popular sovereignty (Fontana 1993: 119). The Batavian (Dutch) Republic established in 1796 required voters to swear an oath to the belief that "all hereditary offices and dignities" were illegal (Palmer 1964: 195). In Chile, General O'Higgins, the first Director of the State, abolished in 1818 all outward and visible signs of aristocracy (Collier and Sater 1006: 42).

Here is a puzzle. While democrats fought against aristocracy, either as a system of government (the original meaning of the word) or as a legal status (nobility), this struggle did not have to result in abolishing other distinctions. One distinction could have been replaced by another. The flagrant case is the Polish Constitution of 3 May 1791, which was directed against aristocrats defined as large landowners, *magnates*, under the slogan of equality for the gentry at large (*szlachta*, which constituted about 10 percent of the population),³ while preserving a legal distinction of the latter. More generally, social traits that could serve as basis for legal distinctions were many: property owners and laborers, burgers and peasants, inhabitants of

²For a detailed account of the reappearance of "democracy" in the modern era, see Dunn (2005: Chapter 2).

³The slogan was "*Szlachcic na zagrodzie równy wojewodzie*," loosely translated as "A gentry man in a cottage equals a lord."

different localities,⁴ clergy and army,⁵ whites and blacks. Yet democrats turned against other distinctions. "All the privileges," Sieyes (1979 [1788]: 3) declared, "are thus by the nature of things unjust, despicable and contradictory to the supreme goal of all political society." From aristocracy, the enemy became any kind of *particularity* (Rosanvallon 2004: 37 and throughout). Thus, in far away Brazil, the four mulattoes who were hanged and quartered after the failure of the *Cidade da Bahia Republicana* in 1798 were accused of desiring "the imaginary advantages of a Democratic Republic in which all should be equal ... without difference of color or condition" (Palmer 1964: 513). The French Revolution emancipated Protestants and Jews and freed slaves, not only Catholic peasants.

Rosanvallon (2004: 121) claims that "The imperative of equality, required to make everyone a subject of law and a full citizen, implies in effect considering men stripped of their particularistic determinants. All their differences and all their distinctions should be placed at a distance...." Yet where did the "imperative of equality" come from? Thinking in the "rational choice" terms of modern political science, one would suspect that democrats instrumentally turned against other social distinctions just to mobilize the masses against aristocracy: to gain support against aristocracy. Finer (1934: 85), for example, accuses Montesquieu of deliberately juxtaposing "the Citizen" to all the powers that be, either the King or the aristocracy: "it was a convenient, a striking and useful antithesis; nothing could be better calculated to win the support of every man." There are facts that support this hypothesis: Tadeusz Kościuszko in Poland made vague promises to peasants to induce them join the anti-Russian insurrection in 1794; the members of the French *Convention* flagrantly played up to the gallery filled by the ordinary people of Paris; Simon Bolivar made interracial appeals to recruit for the war against Spain. Yet it is also easy to believe that democrats truly believed that "all men are equal," as the Declaration of Independence declared or that "men are born equal," as the Declaration of the Rights of Man would have it. The idea of innate equality certainly preceded the actual political conflicts. It could be

⁴Palmer (1964) emphasizes that while the French tried to eradicate all subnational differences, Americans recognized them. Division of France into departments was intended according to Rosanvallon (2004: 35) to "create a purely functional division, which would not refer to any social, political, or cultural reality." Hence, democrats were centralizers in France; decentralizers in the US.

⁵They did enjoy special status, *fueros*, in the Cadiz Constitution of 1812 and several Latin American constitutions afterwards.

found already in Locke's *Second Treatise* (1690) as the principle "that *equal Right* that every Man hath, *to his Natural Freedom*, without being subjected to the Will or Authority of any other Man." We do not have a theory of action in which people are moved by logic, in which they do things because they cannot tolerate logical contradictions. Yet if one is willing to accept that people can be moved by ideas, democrats would have turned against other distinctions by the sheer logic of their ideology: Aristocrats are not distinct because all men are born equal; because all men are born equal, they cannot be treated differently. Abolishing other distinctions would then be a logical outcome of the struggle against aristocracy.

The fact is that democrats turned against all distinctions. The only attribute of democratic subjects is that they have none as such. The democratic citizen is simply without qualities.⁶ Not equal, not homogeneous, just anonymous.⁷ Even the one sense in which equality does apply as a democratic norm, namely, before the law, is just a consequence of the principle that democratic citizens cannot be distinguished in any way. As Rousseau (1964: 129) said, "the sovereign [the people united] knows only the body of the nation and does not distinguish any of those who compose it." Since citizens are indistinguishable, there is nothing by which law could possibly distinguish them. The democratic citizen is simply an individual outside society. One can say "an aristocrat," "a wealthy person," and "male," but not "an aristocratic citizen," "a wealthy citizen," or "a male citizen." As Sieyes (1979: 183) put it, "*On doit concevoir les nations sur terre comme des individus hors de lien social.*"

3 Democracy and Equality

In spite of its egalitarian pedigree, I am about to argue, there is no sense in which equality could or does characterize democracy. "One should not let oneself be trapped by words," Pasquino (1998: 149-150) warns, "the 'society

⁶I took this allusion to Robert Musil from Pasquino (1998: 149-50). Elsewhere, Pasquino (1996: 31) claims that this conception was introduced by Hobbes in the context of religious distinctions: "In the face of this type of conflict [religious], political order to Hobbes is founded on an *overlapping consensus* and is based on an anatomy of the city as a *society without qualities*."

⁷While anonymity is a more recent term, it may best capture the intent. A decision rule satisfies anonymity if the social choice remains the same when any two voters' preferences are interchanged (May 1952). In other words, it matters not who the citizen is.

without qualities' is not a society of equals; it is simply a society in which privileges do not have a juridical-institutional status or recognition." In a scathing critique of "bourgeois rights," Marx (1844: no page) characterized this duality as follows:

The state abolishes, in its own way, distinctions of birth, social rank, education, occupation, when it declares that birth, social rank, education, occupation, are non-political distinctions, when it proclaims, without regard to these distinctions, that every member of the nation is an *equal* participant in national sovereignty.... Nevertheless the state allows private property, education, occupation to *act in their way* – i.e., as private property, as education, as occupation, and to exert the influence of their *special* nature.

Why then "political emancipation is not a form of *human* emancipation," as Marx would have put it? Specifically, in what ways is the veil over distinctions compatible with various kinds of inequality?

Consider the different meanings in which "equality" appeared in democratic ideology. Why are or would be people equal? They could be because God or nature made them so, because society makes them so, or because the law makes them so. Equality can be innate or generated by spontaneous social transformations, but it can also be instituted by law or by the use of laws. Democratic equality may thus be a reflection of equality pre-existing elsewhere or it may be imposed by laws.

To return to the Declarations one last time, the point of departure of democrats was innate equality of human beings. Democratic equality is but a reflection of a pre-existing, natural, equality. Yet the implications of a pre-existing equality are indeterminate. As Schmitt (1993: 364) observed, "From the fact that all men are men it is not possible to deduce anything specific either about morality or about religion or about politics or about economics." Even if people were born equal, they may distinguish themselves by their merits and their merits may be recognized by others. More, to maintain order, some people must at each moment exercise authority over others. As Kelsen (1988 [1929]: 17) put it, "From the idea that we are all equal, ideally equal, one can deduce that no one should command another. But experience teaches that if we want to remain equal in reality, it is necessary on the contrary that we let ourselves be commanded."

Moreover, even if all human beings are born only as such, society generates differences among them. Indeed, if their parents are unequal, they become unequal at the moment they are born. To make them equal again, a recourse to laws is necessary. Montesquieu (1995: 261) would thus observe that "In the state of nature, men are born equal but they do not know how to remain so. Society makes them lose equality and they do not return to be equal other than by laws."

Yet must society make people unequal? Rosanvallon (1995: 149) documents that when the term "democracy" came into widespread usage in France after 1814, it connoted "modern egalitarian *society*, not the political regimes associated with the classical Greek or Roman republics," what Tocqueville would refer to as "equality of conditions." The tendency toward social equality was inevitable. Taking a theme of Marquis d'Argenson (1764), Tocqueville (1961, vol I: 41) observed that "The gradual development of equality of conditions ... is universal, it is durable, it escapes human intervention every day; every event, like every man, furthers its development."⁸ J.S. Mill noted the same in 1859: "There is confessedly a strong tendency in the modern world towards a democratic constitution of society, accompanied or not by popular political institutions." Note that while Tocqueville saw political equality in the United States as a natural consequence of the equality of conditions, for Mill the fact of social equality did not have unique political consequences.

Whether modern societies must become more equal is a complex question. What matters here is that not everyone was willing to rely on the spontaneous evolution of society to generate political equality. Robespierre thought that "Equality of wealth is a chimera." (Palmer 1964: 109). Madison (*Federalist* #10) listed all kinds of social differences and gradations, assuming they were there to stay. Most democrats believed against Tocqueville that citizenship creates equality, rather than equals become citizens. Pasquino (1998: 109) summarizes this belief: "Citizens are not simply equal before the law, in the sense in which the law does not recognize either special rights or privileges, but they become equal by the grace of law and by law itself."⁹

⁸In a beautiful pastiche about a fictitious visit by Tocqueville to Mexico, Aguilar Rivera (xxxx) imagines how he would have reacted to an extremely egalitarian new world society.

⁹According to Hanson (1989: 71) this was the meaning of the Greek term *isonomia*, which referred both to equality before the law and, in a more directly political sense, equality through law

Democrats adhered to what Beitz (1989: 4) calls a "simple conception of political equality," namely, "the requirement that democratic institutions should provide citizens with equal procedural opportunities to influence political decisions (or, more briefly, with *equal power over outcomes*)." Criticizing this notion, he points out that equality of the abstract leverage that procedures provide to each participant does not imply equality of the actual influence over the outcomes: the latter depends also on the distribution of the preferences and of the enabling resources. This disjunction between formal and effective political equality was a central concern in the United States and continues to be debated today. The social palliative to this divergence between formal and real influence is pluralism. The political answer, at least for Madison, was large districts.

As Mill would remark several decades later, "without decent wages and universal reading, no government of public opinion is possible." Education was one instrument that would equip people to exercise their citizenship rights. Several early constitutions (of the Italian republics between 1796 and 1799, the Cádiz Constitutions of 1812) established systems of universal and free, although not compulsory, education. In the meantime, most solved the problem by restricting political rights to those who were in condition to exercise them. Yet when suffrage became universal and democracy found roots in poorer countries, the problem reappeared with a vengeance: masses of people acquired equal procedural opportunities without enjoying the conditions necessary to exploit them. Citizenship without the conditions to exercise it is a monster that haunts contemporary democracies. The absence of the effective capacity to exercise formal political rights remains at the heart of criticisms of the "really existing" democracy. To return to Marx, can people be politically equal if they are socially unequal?

But political equality is vulnerable not just to social inequality but also to specifically political distinctions. Democracy, according to Schmitt (1993: 372), is "the identity of the dominating and the dominated, of the government and the governed, of he who commands and he who obeys." But the issue is whether the very faculty of governing does not create a distinction, a political class. "Political aristocracy" was seen as much of a danger as social aristocracy. The Anti-Federalists feared that if the rulers were other than the ruled, "Corruption and tyranny would be rampant as they have always been when those who exercised power felt little connection with the people. This would be true, moreover, for elected representatives, as well as for kings

and nobles and bishops...” (Ketcham 1986: 18). Hence, democrats were preoccupied with duration of terms, as short as six months in New Jersey at one time, term limits, restrictions on representatives to determine their own salaries, and censuring procedures.

Yet these are palliatives. The distinction between the representatives and the represented is inherent in the representative system: parliaments seat representatives, not the people. And the very method of choosing representatives through elections, rather than by lot, is based on the belief that all people are not equally qualified to rule. Elections, Manin (1997) argues, are based on the assumption that the qualities necessary to govern are not universally shared and that people want to be governed by their betters. These qualities need not be associated with distinctions of birth, so that elections are not "aristocratic" in the eighteenth century sense. But elections are a method for selecting one's betters and, as Manin amply documents, they are and were seen as a way of recognizing a natural aristocracy of talent, reason, or whatever else voters would see as the index of the ability to govern.

Moreover, to be represented people must be organized and organization demands a permanent apparatus, a salaried bureaucracy, a propaganda machine. Hence, Michels (1962: 270) bemoaned, some militants become parliamentarians, party bureaucrats, newspaper editors, managers of the party's insurance companies, directors of the party's funeral parlors, and even *Parteibudiger* – party bar keepers. As a disillusioned French communist would write many years later, "The working class is lost in administering its imaginary bastions. Comrades disguised as notables occupy themselves with municipal garbage dumps and school cafeterias. Or are these notables disguised as comrades? I no longer know" (Konopnicki 1979: 53).

To summarize, the idea that political equality reflects some pre-existing state, either of nature or society, is untenable on both logical and empirical grounds. Logically, equality pre-existing in other realms does not imply political equality. Empirically, even if all human beings were born equal, they become unequal in society, and even if societies experienced an inevitable tendency toward equality, the existing inequalities were and are sufficient to call for political remedies. In turn, political equality instituted by law is effectively undermined by social inequality. Political equality is equality in the eyes of a third party, the state, but not in the direct relation between any two persons. In no meaning then is equality the correct way to characterize democracy. If the founders used the languages of equality, it was to justify

something else, better described as anonymity, generality,¹⁰ or oblivion to social distinctions.

4 Do Suffrage Restrictions Violate Democratic Ideology?

Yet there is one fact that appears to undermine anonymity: restrictions of suffrage. Indeed, the French Declaration qualified its recognition of equality in the sentence that immediately followed: "Men are born equal and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be founded only upon the general good." While some early constitutions made male suffrage nearly universal, during most of the nineteenth century the right to vote and the right to be elected was confined to adult men who owned property, earned some amount of income, or paid some amount of taxes.

The prevalence of *suffrage censitaire* may appear to contradict the norm of suppressing all distinctions in society and to be incompatible with the principle of political equality. Yet, even if the arguments were convoluted, franchise restrictions were not portrayed as such by their proponents.

Consider first the justification by Montesquieu (1995: 155), who starts from the principle that "All inequality under democracy should be derived from the nature of democracy and from the very principle of democracy." His example is that people who must continually work to live are not prepared for public office or would neglect their functions. As barristers of Paris put it on the eve of the Revolution, "Whatever respect one might wish to show for the rights of humanity in general, there is no denying the existence of a class of men who, by virtue of their education and the type of work to which their poverty had condemned them, is ... incapable at the moment of participating fully in public affairs" (cited in Crook 1996: 13). "In such cases," Montesquieu goes on, "equality among citizens can be lifted in a democracy for the good of democracy. But it is only apparent equality which is lifted...." The generic argument, to be found in slightly different versions, is

¹⁰I am persuaded by Rosanvallon's (2004) insistence that the enemy of democrats was particularity of any kind, but I do not find the antonym he invokes, generality ("*A l'esprit particulier ils opposent donc l'esprit de généralité*", p. 37), enlightening. Generality entails the idea that there are some attributes to be generalized, while anti-particularity is just a veil over all attributes.

that: (1) Representation is acting in the best interest of all. (2) To determine the best interest of all one needs reason. (3) Reason has sociological determinants: not having to work for a living ("disinterest"), or not being employed or otherwise dependent on others ("independence"). As a Chilean statesman put it in 1865, to exercise political rights it is necessary "to have the intelligence to recognize the truth and the good, the will to want it, and the freedom to execute it." (A speech by Senador Abdón Cifuentes, cited in Maza Valenzuela 1995: 153). In turn, the claim that only apparent equality is being violated was built in three steps: (1) Acting in the best common interest considers everyone equally, so that everyone is equally represented. (2) The only quality that is being distinguished is the capacity to recognize the common good. (3) No one is barred from acquiring this quality, so that suffrage is potentially open to all.

The last two points are crucial. Legal distinctions of social status are valid only as indicators of the ability to govern and there are no barriers of any kind to prevent people from acquiring this ability and being relevantly indicated.

The Polish Constitution of 3 May 1791 illuminates the distinction between the democratic *regime censitaire* and non-democratic regime of legal distinctions. The Constitution asserts in Paragraph VI that "deputies to the local parliaments ... should be considered as *representatives of the entire nation*" (italics in the original). Yet to become a deputy to the local parliaments (*sejmiki*, which, in turn elect deputies to the national legislature, the *sejm*) one had to be a member of a legally defined group, the gentry (*szlachta*). In turn, only members of the hereditary gentry could own land entitling to political rights.¹¹ Hence, this was not a *regime censitaire* in the sense defined above: (1) it barred access to politics to everyone who was not a member of a legally recognized group, the landed gentry, and (2) it barred access to the landed gentry.

In fact, the Polish justification for privileging gentry was not reason but "Respect for the memory of our forefathers as founders of free government...." (Article II). Simon Bolivar used the same principle in 1819 when he offered positions of hereditary senators to the "liberators of Venezuela, ... to whom

¹¹While according to the law on towns of 18 April 1791 burgers in all cities were to enjoy all the protections of the gentry (most importantly habeas corpus, which dated in Poland to 1433), could occupy public positions (except for Bishops), and could own and buy land adjacent to cities, they could not participate in the local parliaments.

the Republic owns its existence” (1969: 109). His celebrated speech, known as the *Discurso de Angostura*, merits attention because its combination of appeals to reason with an acceptance of inequality became the hallmark of anti-democratic postures in Spanish America. Bolivar observed that most people do not know their true interests and went on to argue that ”Everything cannot be left to the adventure of elections: the People errs easily...” His solution was the institution of a hereditary Senate: future Senators ”Would learn the arts, sciences, and letters which adorn the spirit of a public man; from infancy would know to what Providence destined them...” And he had the gumption to claim that ”The creation of a hereditary Senate would in no way violate political equality.”¹²

Restrictions of political rights based on religion were also couched in a universalistic language, but the appeal was not to reason but to common values. From Rousseau and Kant to J.S. Mill, everyone believed that a polity can function only if it is based on common interests, norms, or values. In Latin America (indeed, also in the Spanish Constitution of 1812), the cement holding societies together was to be Catholicism: of the 103 Latin American constitutions studied by Loveman (1993: 371), 83 proclaimed Catholicism as the official religion and 55 prohibited worship of other religions. While many arguments for restricting political rights to Catholics were openly directed against the principle of popular sovereignty – ”it is not for people to change what God willed” – quite a few were pragmatic. For example, the Mexican thinker Lucas Alamán maintained in 1853 that Catholic religion deserves support by the state, ”even if we do not consider it as divine,” because it constitutes ”the only common tie that connects all Mexicans, when all others are broken” (cited after Gargarella 2005: 93, who provides other examples).

Restrictions on female suffrage present the most difficult issue. While early proponents of female suffrage observed that reason is not distributed along gender lines – after all, some rulers had been queens (Sieyes according to Pasquino 1998: 71) – the main argument against giving the right to vote to women was that, like children, they were not independent, had no will of their own. Women were already represented by the males in their households and their interests were to be represented through a tutelary, rather than an electoral, connection. Thus the justifying criterion was dependence, not sex. Indeed, when a study in England in the 1880s discovered that almost one half

¹²I put it this way because Bolivar’s motives were suspect: he was trying to soften the future senators for granting him a hereditary presidency.

of adult women lived in households in which there was no adult male, this justification collapsed, and only pure prejudice retarded extending suffrage to women.

Yet why were women not independent in the same way as some men were? If women could not own property, they were legally barred from qualifying for suffrage, so this would violate the democratic ideology. But where they could and did own property in their own name, why would property ownership not be a sufficient indicator? Condorcet (1986 [1788]: 293), who defended property qualifications, thought it should be: "The reason for which it is believed that they [women] should be excluded from public function, reasons that albeit are easy to destroy, cannot be a motive for depriving them of a right which would be so simple to exercise [voting], and which men have not because of their sex, but because of their quality of being reasonable and sensible, which they have in common with women." And Chilean suffragettes claimed that "Wives and mothers, widows and daughters, we all have time and money to devote to the happiness of Chile." (An article in *El Eco*, 3 August 1865, cited in Maza Valenzuela 1995: 156).

Since this is an issue about which it is easy to fall into anachronisms, let me process it through an example. Suppose that it is in the best interest of each and all people to evacuate a coastal town if a hurricane is impending and not to evacuate it if the danger is remote. A correct decision is good for everyone: all men, women, and children. The correct decision can be reached only by people who can interpret weather forecasts. This excludes children, so that the decision should be made by parents in the best interest of children. I suspect that – with some quibbles about where to draw the age line – most people today would accept this reasoning: all contemporary democratic constitutions do. But why should only men participate in making this decision? If the reason is that women are barred from taking meteorology courses in school, then we are back to the 1791 Poland. But suppose they do take such courses. Now the argument must be that even if they had the same capacity to exercise reason, women would always follow the views of their male protectors, independently of their own opinions. This is then another sociological assumption, in addition to those that tied reason to property, income, or education.¹³

¹³The assumption that women are not capable of exercising political rights was sometimes so self-evident – Kant (1881 [1793]: 38) refers to it as "natural" – that the 1776 Constitution of New Jersey, "through an error in wording," admitted as voters "all in-

Now, Schumpeter (1942: 244) argued that if any distinction is accepted, then the principle of making such distinctions must be as well: "The salient point is that, given appropriate views on those and similar subjects, disqualifications on ground of economic status, religion and sex will enter into the same class with disqualifications which all of us consider compatible with democracy." Yet each distinction is based on a specific assumption – for example, that 12-year olds are not prepared to vote – tying it to the capacity to exercise reason. Obviously, today we would and do reject most such assumptions, although not those based on age or legally certified sanity. Moreover, as we will see below, some such assumptions were driven by only thinly veiled self-interest. But if these assumptions are accepted, then restrictions of suffrage do not violate the principles of democracy.

To put it abstractly, theories of representation differed in whether they took as the input the actual or "ideal" preferences, the latter being restricted by some normative requirements, such as they be "other-regarding," consider common good, etc.¹⁴ As Montesquieu (1995: 325; italics supplied) would say, "political liberty does not consist of doing what one wants... liberty cannot be other but to be able to do what one *ought to* want and not to be obliged to do what one *ought not* want." Obviously, this distinction disappears if people naturally hold such ideal preferences. If they do not, the burden is placed on institutions, either to promote such preferences by educating citizens – a common theme from Montesquieu to Mill – or to treat such preferences in some privileged manner, by restricting suffrage or weighting votes. As Beitz (1989: 35) observes, the latter solution – defended by Mill – is not unfair if those without such ideal preferences or without the conditions to develop such preferences are willing to accept it. Moreover, while inegalitarian, such a system can be justified in universalistic terms if everyone can acquire such preferences or the conditions to acquire them.

habitants" who held a certain amount of property (Johnson (1913). Many women did vote until 1807 when "male" was explicitly added as a qualification. A similar situation ensued in Chile, where the electoral law of 1874 failed to mention sex as a qualification for citizenship. Only when some women took this opportunity to register to vote, did the Congress pass in 1884 a law explicitly excluding females (Maza Valenzuela 1995). This was clearly an omission: as one Senator admitted, "it did not occur to anyone to concede such rights" ("*a nadie se le ha ocurrido concederle tales derechos*"). Again the same occurred in France, where Mme Barbarousse claimed the right to vote pointing out that *tout français* had this right according to the constitution and it took a court ruling in 1885 to decide that *français* did not include *française* women (Lloyd 1971: 14).

¹⁴For a recent discussion of this distinction, see Sunstein (1995) and Ferejohn (1995).

Yet whatever one thinks of this logic, the final outcome was that birth was replaced by wealth, aristocracy by oligarchy. Still only a select few were to rule in the best interest of all. The society was to be divided into "the rich, the few, the rulers" and "the poor, the many, the ruled": which a Connecticut representative, Samuel Dana, thought was quite proper (Dunn S. 2004: 23). The drafter of the French Constitution of 1795, Boissy d'Anglas, declared that "We must be ruled by the best... a country governed by property-owners is within the social order, that which is dominated by non-property owners is in a state of nature" (cited in Crook 1996: 46). The consensus in mid-nineteenth century Colombia was that "We want enlightened democracy, a democracy in which intelligence and property direct the destinies of the people; we do not want a barbarian democracy in which the proletarianism and ignorance drown the seeds of happiness and bring the society to confusion and disorder" (Gutiérrez Sanin 2003: 185). "The right to make laws belongs to the most intelligent, to the aristocracy of knowledge, created by nature," a Peruvian constitutionalist, Bartolomé Herrera, declared in 1846 (Sobrevilla 2002: 196); the Peruvian theorist José María Pando maintained that "a perpetual aristocracy ... is an imperative necessity"; the Chilean Andrés Bello wanted rulers to constitute "a body of wise men (*un cuerpo de sabios*)"; while the Spanish conservative thinker Donoso Cortés juxtaposed the sovereignty of the wise to sovereignty of the people (Gargarella 2005: 120). Still by 1867, Walter Bagehot (1963 [1867]: 277) would warn that

It must be remembered that a political combination of the lower classes, as such and for their own objects, is an evil of the first magnitude; that a permanent combination of them would make them (now that many of them have the suffrage) supreme in the country; and that their supremacy, in the state they now are, means the supremacy of ignorance over instruction and of numbers over knowledge.

It was perhaps not a full circle but a circle it was. And it left a legacy that gave rise to conflicts which in many countries lasted over a hundred years. These new distinctions were soon perceived as evidence that democracy did not fulfill its own ideals. Neither the poor nor women thought that their best interests were being represented by propertied men. They would struggle for suffrage, and suffrage was a dangerous weapon.

5 Democracy and Property

In a society that is unequal, political equality, if it is effective, opens the possibility that the majority would by law equalize property or the benefits of its use. This is a central theme in the history of democracy, as alive and controversial today as it was at the inception of representative government. Since, as distinct from liberty or happiness, property, the kind of property that can be used to generate incomes, always was and continues to be held by a minority, the right to protect property would have to hurl itself against the interest of majorities. Hence, a tension between democracy and property was predictable, and it was predicted.

To sketch the history of this tension, one must begin with the Levellers, who are identified by Wootton (1993: 71) as "the first democrats who think in terms, not of participatory self government within a city-state, but of representative government within a nation-state." While they persistently and vehemently denied it, Levellers were feared by their opponents as wanting to make everyone equal by redistributing land:¹⁵ in Harrington's (1977: 460) words, "By levelling, they who use the word seem to understand: when a people rising invades the lands and estates of the richer sort, and divides them equally among themselves." Some among them – those calling themselves True Levellers or Diggers – did set a commune on common land.

The demand for economic equality appeared during the French Revolution in Babeuf's *Plebeian Manifesto* of 1795. Until then, while the revolutionary government confiscated the lands of the Church and of the emigrant nobility, those were not redistributed to peasants but sold to rich commoners (Fontana 1993: 122). Babeuf did not want to equalize property, but to abolish it: "we do not propose to divide up property, since no equal division would ever last. We propose to abolish private property altogether." Claiming that "stomachs are equal," Babeuf wanted every man to place his product in a common pool and receive from it an equal share. Hence, no one could take advantage of greater wealth or ability. He motivated his "communist" program by a moral principle, *le bonheur commun*, which must lead to the *communauté*, "comfort for all, education for all, equality, liberty and happiness for all." (All citations are from Palmer 1964: 240-241.)

¹⁵Demands for a redistribution of land were made intermittantly in Latin America, most notably in Mexico by Hidalgo and Morelos in Mexico in 1810 and Artigas in Uruguay (then Banda Oriental) in 1813.

The demand for economic equality by the Babeuvists was derived from moral principles. Babeuf claimed that both legal and economic equality were only the natural outcome of the Enlightenment and both within the spirit of the French Revolution. Why should the fact or the postulate that all men are born equal justify political equality but not economic one? Why should reasons be treated as equal but stomachs not? If logic does not dictate this distinction, one can suspect that only interests did. Even if the ultimate value is to be free from domination by another, the right to "*Natural Freedom*, without being subjected to the Will or Authority of any other Man," does not economic compulsion to sell one's services to another bind as much as the political subjugation to the command of another? Rousseau (1964: 154), at least, thought that "no Citizen should be so opulent as to be able to buy another, and none so poor as to be constrained to sell himself."

But one can also think not on moral but on purely logical grounds that democracy, via legal equality, must lead to economic equality. Indeed, at some moment, legal and economic equality became connected by a *sylllogism*: Universal suffrage, combined with majority rule, grants political power to the majority. And since the majority is always poor,¹⁶ it will confiscate the riches. The syllogism was perhaps first enunciated by Henry Ireton in the franchise debate at Putney in 1647: "It [universal male suffrage] may come to destroy property thus. You may have such men chosen, or at least the major part of them, as have no local or permanent interest. Why may not these men vote against all property?" (In Sharp 1998: 113-4). It was echoed by a French conservative polemicist, J. Mallet du Pan, who insisted in 1796 that legal equality must lead to equality of wealth: "Do you wish a republic of equals amid the inequalities which the public services, inheritances, marriage, industry and commerce have introduced into society? You will have to overthrow property" (cited by Palmer 1964: 230).¹⁷

¹⁶It is standard to emphasize the ambiguity of the concept of *demos* in democracy. As Hanson (1989: 71) observes, "we commonly translate *demokratia* as 'rule by the people,' without making distinctions among 'the people,' whereas *demos* originally referred also and quite specifically to 'common people' with little or no economic independence." Yet if "common people" constitute a numerical majority of "the people" and if decisions are made by majority rule, this distinction loses its edge.

¹⁷Hamilton formulated something like this syllogism in his "Plan for the National Government" (in Ketcham 1986: 75), delivered at the Convention on June 18: "In every community where industry is encouraged, there will be a division of it into the few and the many. Hence separate interests will arise. There will be debtors and creditors, etc.

Note that, contrary to frequent misquoting, of which I am guilty as well,¹⁸ Madison (*Federalist* #10) thought that this consequence applied to direct, but not to representative democracies. Having identified a "pure Democracy" as a system of direct rule, Madison continues that "*such* Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths" (italics supplied). Yet "A Republic, by which I mean a Government in which the scheme of representation takes place, opens a different prospect and promises the cure for which we are seeking." Still, he seems to have been less sanguine some decades later: "the danger to the holders of property can not be disguised, if they are undefended against a majority without property. Bodies of men are not less swayed by interest than individuals.... Hence, the liability of the rights of property...." (Note written at some time between 1821 and 1829, in Ketcham 1986: 152).

Once coined, this syllogism has dominated the fears and the hopes attached to democracy ever since. Conservatives agreed with socialists¹⁹ that democracy, specifically universal suffrage, must undermine property. The self-serving nature of the convoluted arguments for restricting suffrage to the propertied became apparent. The Scottish philosopher James Mackintosh predicted in 1818 that if the "laborious classes" gain franchise, "a permanent animosity between opinion and property must be the consequence" (Cited in Collini, Winch and Burrow, 1983: 98). David Ricardo was prepared to extend suffrage only "to that part of them which cannot be supposed to have an interest in overturning the right to property" (In Collini, Winch and Burrow, 1983: 107). Thomas Macaulay in the 1842 speech on the Chartists pictured the danger presented by universal suffrage in the following terms:

The essence of the Charter is universal suffrage. If you withhold that, it matters not very much what else you grant. If you grant that, it matters not at all what else you withhold. If you grant that, the country is lost.... My firm conviction is that, in our country, universal suffrage is incompatible, not only with this

Give all power to the many, they will oppress the few." Yet he thought, like Madison, that this effect can be prevented.

¹⁸The misquoting consists of skipping the "such" in the citation below. See, for example, Hanson (1985: 57) or Przeworski and Limongi (1993).

¹⁹According to Rosanvallon (2004), this particular word appeared in France in 1834.

or that form of government, and with everything for the sake of which government exists; that it is incompatible with property and that it is consequently incompatible with civilization. (1900: 263)

Eight years later, from the other extreme of the political spectrum, Karl Marx expressed the same conviction that private property and universal suffrage are incompatible:

The classes whose social slavery the constitution is to perpetuate, proletariat, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie, it puts in possession of political power through universal suffrage. And from the class whose old social power it sanctions, the bourgeoisie, it withdraws the political guarantees of this power. It forces the political rule of the bourgeoisie into democratic conditions, which at every moment jeopardize the very foundations of bourgeois society. From the ones it demands that they should not go forward from political to social emancipation; from the others they should not go back from social to political restoration. (1952: 62).

According to Marx, democracy inevitably "unchains the class struggle": The poor use democracy to expropriate the riches; the rich are threatened and subvert democracy, by "abdicating" political power to the permanently organized armed forces. The combination of democracy and capitalism is thus an inherently unstable form of organization of society, "only the political form of revolution of bourgeois society and not its conservative form of life" (1934: 18), "only a spasmodic, exceptional state of things ... impossible as the normal form of society" (1971: 198).

The "fundamental contradiction of the Republican constitution" identified by Marx would not materialize either if property ownership would expand spontaneously or if the dispossessed for some reasons abstained from using their political rights to confiscate property.²⁰ "On the other hand," Maier (1993: 127) notes, "if the observer feared that social levelling would continue toward proletarianization, then the advance of democracy must appear

²⁰James Mill, for example, challenged the opponents "to produce an instance, so much as one instance, from the first page of history to the last, of the people of any country showing hostility to the general laws of property, or manifesting a desire for its subversion." (cited in Collini, Winch and Barrow, 1983: 104)

an alarming trend. For this would suggest ... that all democracy must in effect tend towards social democracy. That is, the advent of popular government and expanded electorate would ineluctably lead to programmes for further social equalization and redistribution on wealth." Indeed, the idea that democracy in the political realm must logically lead to social and economic equality became the cornerstone of Social Democracy. For Jean Jaures (1971: 71), "The triumph of socialism will not be a break with the French Revolution but the fulfillment of the French Revolution in new economic conditions." Eduard Bernstein (1961) saw in socialism simply "democracy brought to its logical conclusion." As Beitz (1989: xvi) observed, "historically a main goal of democratic movements has been to seek redress in the political sphere for the effects of inequalities in the economy and society."

Socialists entered into elections with ultimate goals. The Hague Congress of the First International proclaimed that the "organization of the proletariat into a political party is necessary to insure the victory of social revolution and its ultimate goal – the abolition of classes." The first Swedish socialist program specified that "Social Democracy differs from other parties in that it aspires to completely transform the economic organization of the bourgeois society and bring about the social liberation of the working class... (Tingsten 1973: 118-9). Even the most reformist among socialists, Alexandre Millerand, admonished that "whoever does not admit the necessary and progressive replacement of capitalist property by social property is not a socialist." (Cited in Ensor 1908: 51). Yet on the road to these ultimate goals, socialists saw numerous measures that would reduce social and economic inequalities. The Parti Socialiste Français, led by Jean Jaures, proclaimed at its Tour Congress of 1902 that "The Socialist Party, rejecting the policy of all or nothing, has a program of reforms whose realization it pursues forthwith," and listed fifty-four specific measures (Ensor 1908: 345ff). Swedish Social Democrats in 1897 demanded direct taxation, development of state and municipal productive activities, public credit, legislation concerning work conditions, old age, sickness, and accident insurance, as well as purely political rights (Tingsten 1973: 119-20).

The question that haunted social democrats was whether, as Hjalmar Branting posed it in 1886, "the upper class [would] respect popular will *even if it demanded the abolition of its privileges*" (cited in Tingsten 1973: 361). Were there limits to popular sovereignty, as exercised by electoral majorities? Would revolution not be necessary, as August Bebel feared in

1905, "as a purely defensive measure, designed to safeguard the exercise of power legitimately acquired through the ballot"? (cited in Schorske 1955: 43).

Yet there is a prior question which they did not consider. Can any political arrangement generate economic equality? Can equality be established by laws, even if the upper class would concede to the abolition of its privileges? Or is some extent of economic inequality inevitable even if *everyone* would want to abolish it? Did egalitarian democrats fail or did they accomplish all that was within the reach?

6 By What Should We Be Surprised?

According to Dunn (2003: 22), democracy surprisingly turned from a revolutionary project into a conservative one

Where the political force of the idea of democracy came from in this new epoch was its combination of formal social equality with a practical order founded on the protection and reproduction of an increasingly dynamic system of economic inequality.... No one at all in 1750 either did or could have seen democracy as a natural name or an apt institutional form for the effective protection of productive wealth. But today we know better. In the teeth of ex ante perceived probability, that is exactly what representative democracy has in the long run proved.

Should we share his surprise?

My argument has been that the sin was original. While, as Dunn (2005) emphasizes, in the second part of the eighteenth century democracy was a revolutionary idea, the revolution it offered was strictly political. Morally based arguments for redistribution or abolishment of property were marginal and ephemeral. In my reading, in its inception democracy was a project simply blind to economic inequality, regardless how revolutionary it may have been politically. Moreover, by restricting suffrage, democracies replaced aristocracy by oligarchy.

Hence, I do not think that the surprise can be dated to 1750. In turn, viewed from the perspective of 1850, the coexistence of democracy with unequal distribution of property is hard to fathom. The syllogism according to

which the poor would use their majority status to expropriate the rich was after all almost universally accepted. And it still makes logical sense today. Just consider the favorite toy of political economists, the median voter model (Meltzer and Richards 1981): Each individual is characterized by an endowment of labor or capital and all individuals can be ranked from the poorest to the richest. Individuals vote on the rate of tax to be imposed on incomes generated by supplying these endowments to production. The revenues generated by this tax are either equally distributed to all individuals or spent to provide equally valued public goods, so that the tax rate uniquely determines the extent of redistribution. Once the tax rate is decided, individuals maximize utility by deciding in a decentralized way how much of their endowments to supply. The median voter theorem asserts that there exists a unique majority rule equilibrium, this equilibrium is the choice of the voter with the median preference, and the voter with the median preference is the one with median income. And when the distribution of incomes is right-skewed, that is, if the median income is lower than the mean, as it is in all countries for which data exist, majority rule equilibrium is associated with a high degree of equality of post-fisc (tax and transfer) incomes, tempered only by the deadweight losses of redistribution.

Moreover, the demand for social and economic equality persists. While elites see democracy in institutional terms, mass publics, at least in Eastern Europe and Latin America, conceive of it in terms of "social and economic equality." In Chile, 59 percent of respondents expected that democracy would attenuate social inequalities (Alaminos 1991), while in Eastern Europe the proportion associating democracy with social equality ranged from 61 percent in Czechoslovakia to 88 percent in Bulgaria (Bruszt and Simon 1991). People do expect that democracy would breed social and economic equality. Hence, the coexistence of democracy and inequality continues to be tense.

Yet income distribution appears to be amazingly stable over time. The strongest evidence, albeit for a relatively short period, comes from Li, Squire, and Zou (1997), who report that about 90 percent of total variance in the Gini coefficients is explained by the variation across countries, while few countries show any time trends. Longer time-series show that while income distribution became somewhat more equal in some democratic countries, redistribution was quite limited. These assertions are not contradictory: the main reason for equalization was that wars and major economic crises destroyed large fortunes and they could not be accumulated again because of progressive

income tax. Earned incomes show almost no variation during the twentieth century. (For long-term dynamics of income distribution, see Piketty 2003 on France, Piketty and Saez 2003 on the United States, Saez and Veall 2003 on Canada, Banerjee and Piketty 2003 on India, Dell 2003 on Germany, and Atkinson 2002 on the United Kingdom.) It appears that there are no countries which equalized market incomes without some kind of cataclysm. The cataclysms come in two kinds: (1) destruction of large property as a result of foreign occupation (Japanese in Korea, Soviet in Eastern Europe), revolution (Soviet Union), or war (France according to Piketty 2000), or (2) massive emigration of the poor (Norway, Sweden).

Since the issue is burning, explanations abound. Most assert that for a variety of reasons those without property, even if they constitute a vast majority in all known societies, either do not want to or cannot use their political rights to equalize property, incomes, or even opportunities. For reasons of space, I can only list the explanations of why the poor would not want to redistribute: (1) "false consciousness" due to a lack of understanding of the distinction between productive and non-productive property, (2) ideological domination due to the ownership of the media by the propertied, (3) difficulty of the poor to coordinate when they have some non-economic heterogeneous tastes, such as religion or race, (4) expectations that the poor would become rich, (5) the fact that taxes are palpable, while public spending is amorphous. I am not taken by the idea that in general the poor would not want to lead better lives at the expense of the rich, but several arguments to the effect that political rights are ineffective against private property make eminent sense. Wealth holders enjoy disproportionate political influence, which they use to successfully defend themselves from redistribution (Benabou 2000).²¹ Nominally equal political rights do not seem to be enough to bar the privileged access of the rich to politics. Put differently, oblivion to economic differences is not sufficient to protect politics from the influence of money.

Yet this entire way of thinking confronts an awkward fact that many governments were elected with the support of the poor, wanted to equalize incomes, and tried to do so. Hence, to the extent to which they failed, it must have been for reasons other than not wanting or not trying. Here are some possible reasons:

²¹Grossman and Helpman (2001) analyze several mechanisms through which the rich buy political influence; Graetz and Shapiro (2005) tell one story in tantalizing detail.

(1) Redistributing productive property or even incomes is costly to the poor. Confronting the perspective of losing their property or not being able to enjoy its fruits, property owners save and invest less, thus reducing future wealth and future income of everyone. As Machiavelli observed, "everybody is eager to acquire such things and to obtain property, provided that he be convinced that he will enjoy it when it has been acquired" (*Discourses on Livy. II.2*, cited after Holmes 2003). Prospects of redistribution reduce investment. This "structural dependence on capital" (Przeworski and Wallerstein 1988) imposes a limit on redistribution even on those governments that want to equalize incomes. Hence, while some democratic governments do correct distributions of income generated by the unequal ownership of assets, equalizing assets ends up being a cataclysmic event, occurring only under exceptional circumstances.

(2) What are the assets that can be equalized in modern societies? Note that when the idea of equal property first appeared productive assets meant land. Land is relatively easy to redistribute. It is enough to take it from some and give it to others. Hence, agrarian reforms were frequent in history of the world: according to data collected by Thomas (2005), there were at least 175 land reforms entailing redistribution between 1946 and 2000 alone. But today the distribution of land plays a relatively minor role in generating income inequality. In turn, other assets resist such a simple operation. Communists redistributed industrial capital by turning it into the hands of the state and announcing that the uninvested profits would be equally distributed to households. This solution engendered several negative consequences that need not be discussed. Alternatively, one could redistribute titles to property in the form of shares. But this form of redistribution has problems of its own.²² Finally, one could, and many countries did, equalize human capital by investing in education. But people exposed to the same educational system acquire very different income earning capacities as a function of their social and economic background. Moreover, since people are born with different talents and since the use of these talents is socially beneficial, we would want to educate talented people more. In sum, redistributing productive assets seems to be difficult for purely technological, not just political

²²One is, that as the Czech experience shows, they could be and likely would be quickly reconcentrated. People who hold better shares would purchase from those with worse ones. Another problem is that dispersion of ownership lowers the incentives of shareholders to monitor the managers. While some solutions to this problem have been proposed, they do not seem to be very effective.

or economic, reasons.

(3) Asking "How laws establish equality in a democracy?" – the title of Chapter 5 of Book 5 – Montesquieu takes as the point of departure equality of land. Then he goes on, "If, when the legislator makes such a division, he does not give laws to maintain it, he only makes a passing constitution; inequality will enter from the side the laws do not defend, and the republic will be lost." Therefore, "although real equality would be the soul of the state, it is so difficult to establish that an extreme rigor in this respect is not always convenient." It is sufficient, he continues, to reduce differences to some point, "after which, it is for particular laws to equalize, to put it this way, the inequalities, by the charges they impose on the rich and the relief they accord to the poor." (1995: 151-5)

Remember that Babeuf believed that redistribution of property would not solve the problem of inequality, "since no equal division would ever last." Suppose productive assets had been equalized. But individuals have different and unobservable abilities to transform productive assets into incomes. Moreover, they are subject to vicissitudes of luck. Assume that particular individuals (or projects they undertake) are subject to slightly different rates of return: some lose at the rate of -0.02 and some gain at the rate 0.02. After 25 years, the individual who generates a 2 percent return will be 2.7 times wealthier than the individual who loses 2 percent per year, and after 50 years (say from the age of 18 to 68) this multiple will be 7.4. Hence, even if productive assets were to be equalized, inequality would creep back in. (The classical statement of this argument is by Pareto 1897, investigated recently by Mookherjee and Ray 2003 as well as Benhabib and Bisin 2007).

7 Judging Democracy

Analyzing the Thatcher era, Dunn (2000: 147) observes that "the state at this point is more plausibly seen as a structure through which the minimally participant citizen body (those prepared to take the trouble to vote) select from the meagre options presented to them those they hope will best serve their several interests. In that selection, the meagreness of the range of options is always important and sometimes absolutely decisive." The issue is to what extent these choices are tightly circumscribed because the logic of electoral competition pushes political parties to offer and pursue similar policies and to what extent there is just little else they could do. The question is im-

portant because it affects our political judgment of democracy (On political judgment, see Dunn 2000 and the Introduction to this volume). Suppose that economic inequality could be diminished below the levels prevailing in developed democracies without reducing future incomes and that it is not being diminished only because of the institutional features of democracy, however one thinks about them. Obviously, judging this trade-off would depend on other values we would have to give up opting for equality. But there is no such trade-off.

Some degree of economic inequality is just inevitable. Democracy is impotent against it, but so is every other conceivable political arrangement. Think of Brazil: during the past two centuries it was a royal colony, an independent monarchy, an oligarchical republic, a populist military dictatorship, democracy with a weak presidency, a right-wing military dictatorship, and democracy with a strong presidency. Yet, to the best of our knowledge, income distribution did not budge. Even the communists, who were out to *uravnit* everything, and who did equalize assets in the form of public ownership, had to tolerate the inequality arising from different talents and motivations. Indeed, it turns out that the average household/individual income inequality is almost exactly the same in democracies and in non-democracies at each level of per capita income.²³

The quest for equality in the economic and social realm has been perpetual in democracies. The original blinders that modern representative institutions placed on economic and social standing of citizens could not effectively cover the glaring inequality of their life conditions. At least since Babeuf, not to speak of Marx, limiting equality to the political realm always seemed "illogical." Moreover, if the right always feared that effective political equality would threaten property, the left knew that equality limited to the political realm cannot be sustained in the face of economic and social inequalities. "Extending democracy from the political to the social realm" was not just a call for social justice but for making democracy effective in the political realm itself. But this quest may have its limits and the knowledge of these limits is essential to judge democracy.

This is not to say that all democracies are the same. I am not arguing in support of Pareto's "law," according to which income distribution remains the same whatever the institutional framework and in spite of progressive

²³This is true at least in the Deininger and Squire (1996) data set, which covers the post 1960 period.

taxation. Among contemporary democracies, the ratio incomes of the top to the bottom quintile, which is perhaps the most intuitive measure of inequality, ranges from about 33 in Brazil to less than 6 in Finland, Belgium, Spain, and South Korea. Hence, we can compare and judge the choices parties offer to voters, as well as policies of particular governments. Moreover, since conflicts over distribution of opportunities, employment, and consumption are the bread and butter of democratic politics, we must be vigilant. But even the best governments operate under limits not of their making. The ratio of 6 is still very large: it means that in a country with per capita income of \$15,000 (about average for these countries in 2002, counted in 1995 PPP dollars), a member of the top quintile would have the income of \$27,000, while a member of the bottom quintile \$4,500. Most survey respondents in Spain and South Korea see such inequality as excessive. Yet perhaps this is just the extent to which any political system can equalize assets or incomes.

My point, thus, is that perhaps Dunn, and we all, put too much burden on democracy.

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