Original Paper

Threats to Democracy

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Abstract

After a discussion of the literature on the development of societies and of the multiple causality of societies, this paper discusses 12 threats to democracy: autocracy, cultural decline, polarisation, elite paradox, populism, confusion, capitalism, dilemma of benevolence and justice, institutional crowding, sort-termism and depletion, AI and robots.

Keywords

Democracy, societies, threats, causality

1. Introduction

To identify threats to democracy, they can be seen from the perspective of the literature on the development of societies and the theory of evolution, discussed in chapter 1. Do civilisations necessarily develop in stages of emergence, flourishing, collapse or decay, or can they sustain themselves indefinitely? What are the roots and outcomes of the development of democracy? To understand what can happen to democracies, it is useful to have a theory of causation, for which I use Aristotle's multiple causality of action, adapted to societies. What causes drive the development of society? In chapter 2 I discuss causality, beginning with Aristotle's multiple causality of action, and with that inspiration I follow on with the proposal of a multiple causality of social systems, and apply it to several cases of the development of society. In chapter 3 I discuss 12 of the twelve threats to democracy that I discuss, some will be well-known, but I want the survey to be as complete as possible. The reader may add threats that I overlooked.

2. Theories of Ddevelopment

2.1 Stage Theories of Society

Societies have been analysed as developing in stages. Are these developments governed by general principles? Are there law-like stages of the development of societies? Historians are generally wary of such thinking: every development is situation- and timebound. History does not repeat itself. In the

18th century, Giambatista Vico proposed that societies develop in the stages of the divine, the heroic and the human. Also in the 18th century, Adam Smith proposed that economic systems have developed from that of hunter-gatherers, pastoralists and agriculturalists to commercialism, in trade between urban centres, with consequent specialisation (Brewer, 2008). We now witness excesses of it in globalisation. Smith neglected that in many cases pastoralism and agriculture were combined, where good soil was reserved for agriculture and less fertile soil for herding animals.

Strauss and Howe (1996) proposed an economic, financial, capitalist theory of four stages of the emergence, flourishing, decay and crisis of an empire, taking as examples the Netherlands, succeeded by Britain, which was succeeded by the USA, which is now beginning to be succeeded by China. An 'awakening' stage arises at the initiative of some enterprising individual or group that inspires a common purpose, dedication and collaboration, with excellent education, giving rise to innovation. This yields a 'high' stage of a flourishing economy and a growth of power globally. In the Netherlands this led to the United East India Company, which established settlements in various places around the world, building up a powerful navy, developing its currency into a reserve currency, which increased borrowing capacity, leading to further expansion. In the next stage of 'unravelling', dedication, discipline and commitment weaken, sense of community slackens, an urge for luxury and entertainment rises, to enjoy the surge of welfare, and devaluation of the currency due to overspending. This yields a crisis, often with internal strife or external war. For the Dutch, the latter was defeat by the English fleet. The East India Company fell apart, with cumulative losses during its last 100 years that were larger than its cumulative profits. The English founded their East India Company, and became a world power, with the pound as a reserve currency. This, in turn, was replaced by the USA as an emerging world power, with the dollar as the reserve currency, which is now being challenged by China.

However, it is difficult to see the present invasion of Russia in Ukraine in the light of that cycle. That invasion is driven not so much by economic, capitalist expansion, but by a romantic, nationalist ideology, driven by nostalgia for the large, sacred empire that Russia was as the Soviet Union and before. Perhaps culture is a bigger factor than the economy.

'Culture' has several meanings. First, something produced by the human being, in contrast with nature. Second, an orientation to nature and life. Third, the anthropological meaning of customs, habits, dress, sports, entertainment. Fourth, 'culture' as heritage, the things established, such as laws, institutions, technology, infrastructure, art and architecture.

The term 'romanticism' also has several meanings. One is a return to nature, away from the artificialities and distortions of society, as professed by the early Jean-Jacques Rousseau. A second is the transgression of boundaries, geographical in the discovery of new realms, or physical as an athlete, or intellectual, as in crossing the boundaries of rationality and science, or morality. We admire discoverers, adventurers, even master criminals. A third meaning is that one is taken up in the protecting arms of a higher level entity, such as a nation, people or culture ('Volksgeist' , in German). a youth gang, or soccer hooliganism.

I attempt to develop a dynamic perspective, and I grant that science, natural as well as social, is myopic, in taking a limited perspective, and static, giving only a temporary insight, though it can be seen as a step in a dynamic process of knowledge development, while that does not necessarily bring us closer to some ultimate truth. In the present book I seek a dynamic causality of the development of knowledge and civilisations.

Western thought should turn from the prevailing focus on 'I' to a focus on 'We'. For this, I turn to the philosophy of Martin Buber.

I acknowledge the importance of culture and world view in the development of societies. Hitler and Putin show how strong the urge for a supreme national spirit and nostalgia for a heroic, mythical past can be, even at the cost of the most horrible war. One may well think that Putin is paranoid, but his motivation is not a personal quirk, but was pushed by Russian philosophers Alexander Dugin, who pleaded for the action that Putin is now conducting in Ukraine, and Ivan Ilyin. Putin's ideology has deep roots in Romantic nationalism that was argued for by the German philosophers Hegel and Fichte, and manifested itself widely in the revolutionary national movements in the mid-19th century, which was temporarily suppressed but then blossomed into the emergence of many nation states, supported by mythical nationalist epics and fairy tales that confirm, among other things, an inalienable right to a given territory. It is important to see this, as it generates an important threat to democracy.

José Ortega y Gasset (JOG) lamented the emergence, in modern times, in Europe, of what he calls the 'mass man', which is not a social class but a type of conduct that arises in all modern social classes. He describes the mass man as 'he whose life lacks purpose and simply goes drifting along….constructing nothing' (Ortega y Gasset, 1993, p. 49), a spoilt child, taking for granted all the richness developed in the 19th and 18th centuries, all the products, services and conveniences: 'what before would have been considered as one of fortune's gifts, inspiring humble gratitude …., was converted into a right, not to be grateful for, but to be insisted upon,…… in a life as exempted from restrictions'. Mass Man feels less civil commitment to society as a joint project for which one must make an effort of collaboration and debate. The 'mass man' lacks a purpose in life beyond himself, having no project beyond his own comfort and opinion, militating against all things intellectual, obsessed with his self-interest and opinion, respecting no authority or morality, not listening to the other human being, sending, not receiving messages and ending up in boredom. JOG says that the mass man has 'appetites in words', in a 'hermetism of the soul'. No debate, but mindless twitter, and JOG did not know yet about present social media. 'By dint of feeling itself free, he (the mass man), feels itself empty' (JOG, 1993, p. 136). The nation state is dynamic, in perpetual change, to be made by citizens, and 'is not a form of society which man finds ready-made -a gift- but needs to be laboriously built up' (JOG, 1993, p. 154). This is not necessarily political participation, in which in the past people hardly engaged, but a striving to achieve things, to be a moral agent, caring for family, neighbours, or local communities.

JOG did not attribute the state, the nation, to a sacred race, appearance, language or physical obstacles such as rivers or mountains. As a counter-example he mentions Spain and South America: they share a

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language and appearance but do not form a state. Concerning physical obstacles one can think of mountains in Switzerland, which may separate cantons but do not prevent a state, or the river the Dnjepr that cuts across Ukraine. Nations harbour different languages or dialects and different customs. What these different people have in common is the nation as a joint project, dynamic, always on the move, to which people are committed and contribute. But that is crumbling now, with the 'mass man', in a 'bureaucratisation of human existence'. Society is 'divided into discordant groups that … leave no room for a ruling power to be constituted.' All this yields a threat to democracy. At times, JOG's book reads as a harangue of the elitist, the aristocrat, who laments the loss of privilege and reputation in modern times. Indeed, for JOG aristocracy is the preferred form of government. But JOG does not grudge the 'mass man' its enjoyment of the benefits of modern developed society, but deplores his lack of appreciation and historical awareness, taking those benefits for granted.

JOG lambasts the specialist myopia of scientists, but he underestimates the current need to specialise, under the flood of new knowledge (Clive, 1974). Nevertheless, a complaint against disciplinary myopia is valid, as I know from personal experience, and the phenomenon of accomplished scientists going beyond the bounds of themselves, publicly acting as pundits, giving vent to political views, is ludicrous, as JOG states.

Clive (1974) noted that in his contempt for mediocrity and his reverence for pre-eminent personalities, JOG was inspired by Kierkegaard's elitism of the spirit, and Nietzsche's deploration of mediocrity and his celebration of exceptional feats. In spite of its limits, Clive concludes that 'his (JOG's) book continues to stand up remarkably well'.

I cannot claim familiarity with all the historical work that has been written on the subject of the development of civilisations, e.g., by Toynbee, Gibbon, H.G.Wells, Bloch, Raymond Aron, George Kennan (Osterhammel, 2017), and I limit myself to reflection on some principles from natural science (e.g., entropy), economics (diminishing returns, increasing returns to scale, markets), social science (e.g., communities, trust), complex adaptive systems, network theory, and their possible contribution to the subject.

2.2 Stability and Collapse

How stable or prone to collapse are social systems? I analyse civilisations in terms of networks, consisting of nodes with ties between them. The ties between nodes can be beneficial to the system in yielding synergy, but they can also make the nodes vulnerable to collapse when a node fails and then withholds its support to neighbouring nodes or puts a burden on them, or when a node contracts an infection and infects neighbouring nodes, which can yield a cascade of failure by which the system collapses.

There can be negative feedback, restricting deviations from current structure, as part of homeostasis, and positive feedback that increases them. Negative feedback yields stability but can create rigidity. Positive feedback can yield learning but can cause collapse. An example of the latter is the collapse of a

building: when a part of it fails, due to some structural weakness or decay (say, rot of wood or concrete), and then transmits the weight it carried to lower parts that can't bear it, and collapse multiplies.

Stability and collapse depend on network structure. When all nodes are connected to all others, i.e. the network is 'densely' connected, and the ties are tight, it is most vulnerable. When they are not or sparsely and weakly connected, but the system lacks the benefit of connections. A network is 'resilient' to the extent that as a whole it can withstand local collapse.

An example of negative feedback is 'path dependence', where the establishment of a structure in the past inhibits its adaptation (Arthur, 1989). A classic example is that of the 'QUERTY' arrangement of letters on a keyboard. It arose from the need, with early mechanical typewriters with levers that when the key of a letter on the board is pressed, spring out to print, through a tape of ink, the letter on the paper. It was expedient to put levers next to each other that do not often occur in sequence, to prevent the levers from becoming entangled. Once established, that sequence was used for training typists and building new machines, even when they were no longer mechanical but electronic and would have allowed for any other sequence on the keyboard.

Path dependence arises often in social systems, causing widespread rigidity, because they are built upon investments that are sunk, i.e., become worthless if the structure is changed. This applies widely, in systems built on language, communication procedures, technical standards, as in building and machine construction, moral principles and behavioural norms.

Another conservative effect arises, paradoxically, from the 'learning curve', where efficiency increases and costs decline as a function of accumulated experience. This is beneficial in itself, but raises the threshold of turning to a new system, in which one would have to start all over again the system's initial inefficiencies. The trick is to find a system that allows the benefit of connections, in reception of novelty, but at the same time are strong enough to be resilient to the propagation of collapse, without causing lock-in in path dependence.

An attractive social system is the 'small worlds' network (Milgram, 1967; Watts, 1999), with 'cliques' in which internal nodes are densely and strongly connected, with frequent interactions with each other, with external nodes that are not connected directly to each other, but indirectly through the clique, but may connect the clique to other cliques. The clique then acts as a 'hub', like a wheel with spokes. An example of such 'hub' networks is The airline industry. The merit of that is that it avoids almost empty flights directly between small airports outside the hub, and collects a greater number of passengers in the hub. Paris is a hub for trains, airplanes, motorways, politics and protests. The nodes in an airline hub are airline offices, loading facilities and services, suppliers, taxi stands, shops, and railway stations. Evolutionary theory shows that variety generation is needed for the development of new species. Variety is needed to throw up new life forms for selection of the fittest, which develop into new species. In biology this takes place by the mutation and copying errors of genes, and chromosome crossover, in sexual reproduction. In evolutionary economics evolution is mimicked with the idea that entrepreneurs create variety, which is subsequently weeded out by the selection environment of markets and

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institutions. In Complex Adaptive Systems new combinations of elements are randomly generated for selection, in economic systems they arise from science, technology, and entrepreneurship.

In economics and business science, studies of innovation show that diversity is needed as a source of innovation. Nooteboom (2000) showed how 'cognitive distance' between people and organisations on the one hand yields a problem of mutual incomprehension, but on the other hand a benefit of 'novel combinations' which according to the economist Schumpeter yield innovation. The trick is to develop relations at a cognitive distance that is sufficient to yield novelty, but not so large as to preclude understanding. Where that optimum lies depends on whether the purpose of a firm is efficient exploitation of resources, for which one needs to minimise misunderstanding due to cognitive distance, or exploration of novelty, for which there must be diversity of ideas, hence more 'cognitive distance'.

Theoretically, a small world structure of a network with a clique of dense and strong internal ties and weak and sparse external ties is optimal for innovation. But the lesson for democravy is that it also needs variety and groups wiht strong ties, in combination with weak ties between groups. The dense, strong ties give a basis for trust, but by itself that unity can yield too little variety, and the less dense and tight relations with external nodes, other cliques, compensate for that, offering requisite variety. The strong internal ties in the clique arise for efficiency of complementarity and cooperation on the basis of trust. The external ties often arise on the initiative of peripheral nodes with a weaker position in the clique, to improve their position as 'boundary spanners', acquiring power by crossing 'structural holes' between cliques.

The empirical evidence for the innovative benefits of small worlds is mixed, but the theoretical blessings can be disturbed by additional contingencies. After a while the innovative impulse from external nodes can become exhausted, and a condition for ongoing innovativeness then is that external links are renewed and/or that there is a turnover of nodes internal to the hub. Another contingency is that if the hub is dominated by a strong central node, that may impose its regime on the whole of the hub, making it less receptive to innovation from outside. Present Russia is an example, but it may also affect democravy.

3. Causality

3.1 Multiple Causality

Social systems are subject to causality, albeit a multiple causality, in a confluence of causes that may be simultansous or sequential, called 'flocks' of causality by MacCumber (2007).

For an example of such a flock of causes, consider the lamp on my desk. It is an old-fashioned one, with the light radiating from a wire in a bulb, heated by electricity. A lampshade deflects the light. The electricity emerges from wiring and cables in the ground, from a electricity generation station operated with labour and machinery. The lightbulb is screwed into a socket that rests upon a ceramic vase made by an artist. I switched on the light. An example of multiple causality is Aristotelian multiple causality of action: the efficient, final, material, formal, conditional and exemplary causes. I am not implying

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that this causality applies to cultures or civilisations, but it is a pradigm for multiple causality. I am looking for one that is appropriate to civilisations. Inspired by Aristotle, I wonder if a similar multiple causality of social systems can be designed.

Understanding of social systems, such as a democracy, requires an understanding of how they work; of who does what, why, with what and whom, how, under what conditions, and following what role models. I propose the following multiple causality of social systems:

As in Aristotelian multiple causality, I propose:

the efficient cause, in the form of the population of a state, including expats, minorities and immigrants.

the material cause, in the form of GDP, oil and minerals, metals, forests (to build ships and smelt iron, in earlier times), arable land (for food), water (for consumption, irrigation, waterways for transport), coal (for industry, smelting iron, in earlier times), silver and gold (for coinage until not so long ago), infrastructure of roads, ports, bridges, airports, pipelines and communication infrastructure.

the formal cause, in the form of knowledge, science and technology, language, schooling, sense of justice, ethics, norms, and operating rules.

the conditional cause, in the form of geography (access to the sea or a river for shipping), enmity or alliance with foreign nations, earthquakes, vulcanoes, flooding), the speech community, climate (rain for waterways for transport, ice-free ports, desiccation, torrential rains, hurricanes.), sedentary or nomadic existence.

the exemplary cause: heroes, role models, myths, fairy tales, iconic people.

Instead of the final cause I propose what I would call the *generative cause*, composed of ideology, religion, world view, mentality, view of authority and liberty, individualism/collectivism, morality. This causality guides goals and preferences, the final cause in the Aristotelian causality of action. It also consists of positions preferred in the many dilemmas that arise in life, such as unity and diversity, authenticity and conformism, meritocracy and equality of opportunity, progressiveness and conservatism, democracy and authoritarianism, stability and change, competition and collaboration and certainty and uncertainty (Nooteboom, 2022). Generative causality is not homogeneous, the same for the whole population, and varies with personalities and conditions. The extent of this variety is part of national culture.

In addition, I propose an *institutional cause*. Institutions are man-made conditions or rules that order society. They are best characterised as *enabling constraints*. The paradigmatic example is that of a path across a swamp. It constrains in that if you deviate from the path, you wind up in the swamp, but it enables in that it does get you across the swamp.

There is a host of institutions. They includes markets, language, laws, reputation mechanisms. It includes arrangements of security, such as health care, social security, police, firebrigade, army, traffic regulations, etc. It includes laws and the judiciary, parliament, municipalities, networks, and a host of associations, of employers, workers, professions and trades. These elements of institutional causation

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accumulate as prosperity increases, in the development of the service economy, taking up a growing share of the national product.

Both the generative and the institutional causes shift in time. The causes influence each other. For example, reputation mechanisms are more important and feasible in sedentary communities than for nomadic peoples. These multiple forms of causality are not independent. The formal cause of technology postponed the depletion of resources, in the material cause, such as that of soil depletion, deforestation, and acted against some calamities of geography (by building dykes against flooding, wind and solar energy against depletion and pollution by fossil fuels). Means of communication were developed by industry and enabled trade, TV and social media.

World trade prevented problems of monoculture. At first, it was thought that Corona would unravel world trade, but that happened only to a small extent. The lesson was to continue world trade but to keep sufficient stocks of goods and not be uniquely dependent on trade with a country with authoritarian rule. However, the war in Ukraine is sobering in showing how we can suffer from economic interdependencies. Actions of government and associations of employees and employers affect GNP, preference for individuality and variety over collectivity, and the muddling of democracy over the decisiveness and central direction of autocracy.

Sciences of economics, sociology, anthropology and law should give insight in these connections. With this complex and changing tapestry of causalities, no developments of society will be the same for different societies. In different configurations, together they shape the macro development of history, from hunter-gatherers to pastorality and agriculture, to nations, industrial and service economies, globalisation and global disparities and conflicts.

An illustration of the confluence of causes is the much debated fall of the Roman empire. It has been described as due to the following causes (Bardi, 2017). Material cause: depletion of soil for food production, depletion of Spanish gold and silver mines needed for coinage, plus drainage of coinage due to trade of silks from China, along the 'silk road'. Institutional cause: Internal rivalry and imperial overstretch of the Roman empire, affecting the ability to control foreign tribes, and delegation to them of defending frontiers, which stimulated their wish for independence. Conditional cause: invasion by Goths and Vandals in the 5th century. Generative cause: decline of a warrior mentality, enhanced by rising thirst for luxury, and the rise of Christianity.

The famine in Ireland, in 1845-1850, in which many succumbed, also narrated by Bardi, can be reconstructed as follows: Institutional cause: The economy was a mono-culture of small farmers growing mostly potatoes, with little manufacturing industry.

Conditional cause: A steep, rocky coast precluded ports that would have enabled fishing, a contageous potato-disease that spread quickly, no coal as in England.

Generative cause: a preference for large families, which resulted in over-population that worsened the famine Bardi explains the shift of power from Spain to England in the 17th century as follows:

Material cause: Soil erosion in Spain, and deforestation that disabled the smelting of iron and the building of wooden ships, while the English had abundant coal, enabling them to develop iron ships. Depletion of silver and gold mines in Spain.

3.2 Multiple Causes of Society

Extra exploitation, but that entails that the Energy Return On Investment (EROI) is declining and can become negative: more energy has to be put in than comes out.

The formal cause: science mostly still flourishes, but rational reflection has given way to hype, fake news, conspiracy theories, and a decline of the level of schooling.

The conditional cause: Pollution has negatively affected the positive conditional cause of clean air, water, a moderate sea level, and a relatively placid climate. Currently looming above all is the invasion of Ukraine, and repercussions on the availability and price of oil and gas and foods.

The generative cause: the orientation of people has shifted further towards entertainment, consumption, self-interestedness, resentment, victimhood, in a regress to personal autonomy and neglect of social and cultural coherence. Enhanced by social media, people have become increasingly locked up in local huddles of like-minded that no longer communicate between them, and caricature and fight each other, disabling democratic compromises and decision making.

The exemplary cause: 'influencers', social media mimicry, stardom, instead of the knowledge of learned people and the experience of professionals.

The institutional cause: Networks have become fragmented in closely and tightly tied groups with little dialogue between them, preferential attachment has led to increasing inequality of opportunity and riches, exclusion from dominant networks of people with a low income, low level of education, or racial distinction.

The institutional cause is extensive and varied. One is that of short-termism. Another is that of preferential attachment that gives rise to increasing inequality. Democracy faces problems of increasingly vociferous protest of those who feel left behind and neglected and yield a mushrooming of claims for redress, which is increasingly difficult to fulfill in an already clogged system of regulations and the procedures needed to control their legitimate use, often in excess, creating an elaborate bureaucracy.

There appears to be or a flight from democracy into authoritarian regimes.

The democratic potential of diverse people and communities can only be realised with dialogue and compromise between them, an ethic of community and solidarity, coordination by laws and institutions, with the risk of over-extension in an excess of regulation.

What is an appropriate balance of rules needed to enable markets and at the same time constrain their imperfections such as lobbying, skewing and even capturing government policy, tax evasion by large firms, and an excess of regulation throttling citizens, constraining their negative freedom in entangled spaghettis of regulations and rules?

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4. Threats to Democracy

4.1 Autocracy

There are several threats to liberal democracy, with its features of free elections, free association and expression, protection of minorities, and separation of powers of the executive, parliament and the judiciary. In Russia and China, and to a large degree in Hungary, for example, elections are a sham, free expression is suppressed, parliament and the judiciary are arms of the executive. Such illiberalities are growing, in an increasing number of countries: Argentina, Brazil, a number of African countries, Syria, Iran, Saudi-Arabia, China, Honkong, Myanmar, Turkey and to some extent even in Poland and Hungary. In Russia, the military invasion of Ukraine is an extreme present threat. The good news, horrific as it may be, is that the war in Ukraine has re-established unity and a sense of urgency to protect democracy, in the US and Europe.

How resilient will democracy be? In defense of democracy, what can we learn from the theories of change, development, of dynamic and interactive systems discussed above?

What are the threats against it, and is it robust enough to survive? Formal (science and technology), generative (creativity, entrepreneurship, thymos), and institutional (capitalism, democracy) causes have yielded great prosperity. They were first part of the flourishing of society, increasing the positive freedom of access to resources, but now seem to tend towards saturation, in the increasing difficulty of satisfying the urge towards more and more satisfaction of desires, the drift of people from being moral 'agents' to being moral 'patients', redress of inequalities that forever remain and crop up in demands that cannot all be satisfied.

Next to the threat of external authoritarianism, there is an internal threat of its seductiveness to some people. Some people feel attracted to an autoritarian leader. He has a Romantic appeal of being decisive, as opposed to the apparent blundering and indecisiveness of democracy, crossing moral and geographic boundaries, and offering the comforting feeling of safety in being taken up in the arms of a stable nation with a strong collective culture. This internal drift to autocracy is the second threat to democracy.

4.2 Cultural Decline

Putin was not entirely wrong when he lambasted the West for being decadent, though that does not of course in any way condone his conduct. As proposed long ago by Ortega y Gasset (1930), in his book 'Revolt of the masses', in Western culture hedonism, blind pursuit of consumption and entertainment has led to a culture of self-satisfaction and lack of commitment to the common cause, not by everyone but by many.

In Western societies there has been a shift to the centrality of 'I' over 'We', where the gaining of property, entertainment and holidays is seen as a right one can claim, that does not require justification. A manager of a Dutch network announced that a news-show at prime time should not only be informative, but especially 'fun'. Morality and virtues should not be too tight, to leave room for diversity between people and situations, but a certain minimum is needed. The main 'cardinal' virtues

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are reasonableness, courage, moderation and justice, and they are crumbling, as are the virtues of truthfulness, sincerity, tolerance of differences in appearance, convictions, and habits, friendliness, and empathy.

Who am I to say that people should not live like this. Perhaps this is happiness to them, but I observe that it is accompanied by saturation, obesity, boredom and the lust for yet more consumption and excitement. But what matters here, is that this development of culture, in the anthropological sense of habits, is accompanied by less commitment to communication and debate and contribution to the common cause, and this is a third threat to democracy. Fortunately, the loss of such commitment does not apply to the whole of society. There are still many people who strive for excellence and commit to local health care, aid to the elderly, contribution to the local soccer club, maintenance of parks, or local debates and local elections. The shift from 'We' to 'I', however, is continuing.

4.3 Polarisation

There is increasing polarisation that yields a fourth threat to liberal democracies. It has several dimensions: polarisation between rich and poor, high and low educated, elites and population, city and country-side. In the predominance of an urge for consumption and entertainment, there is lack of communication between groups. A network effect that contributes to inequality of riches is the so-called 'preferential attachment'. A node with many direct connections is attractive to attach to, to gain access to opportunities, and yields an accumulation of ties in nodes that already have many. This has been called the 'Matthew effect': The rich get richer.

Earlier, I discussed the merits of a 'small world' network structure, with 'cliques' of strong ties, functioning as a hub, and weak ties mutually connecting different cliques. That has the merit of local trust, combined with external linkages for requisite variety. That structure is also needed for democracy, with the cliques being political parties and/or local communities. The crucial point is that the cliques communicate and deliberate, crossing their cognitive distances, in the formation of coalition governments, but also in shared public spaces where citizens observe and try to understand each other and maintain toleration of their differences if that fails. Present polarisation is breaking down democracies.

A technological factor is the development of internet and social media, which yields benefits but also enables people to seek and find like-minded people to have interaction with, rather than the random encounters one has in physical public spaces. The result is narrower cliques, with a paucity of connections between them.

Ongoing neo-liberal market ideology and the development of a knowledge society have increased inequality of education, income, wealth and influence. Such accumulation of inequality causes resentment among the poor and others who remain left out of lucrative networks.

4.4 Elite Paradox

Elites are needed for democracy, but can also destroy it. Liberal democracies are a combination of a vertical structure in representation by an elite, and a horizontal corrective by citizens. Highly and

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Burton (2006) claimed that liberal democracies need integrated, consensual elites that share norms of conduct, in political rivalry without violence, with negotiation and collaboration. 'The sine qua non of liberal democracy is a well-ordered, internally accommodative, and relatively secure political elite'. (see also Schonfeld, 2008). This is as natural as organisations having directors. Direct, unmediated access to the will of the people is an illusion.

There is condemnation of secrecy, lack of transparency, of the elite, not publicising the goings on in closed backroom chambers. But some temporary secrecy is needed in negotiation. If you publicise your standpoints prior to negotiation, then in making compromises you have to relax some of them to gain your way on another point, and this is then seen as having weak knees and failing to keep promises, which further increases the fall of trust among the population. But when the negotiation is done, one can publicise what standpoints were taken, and why. Highly and Burton speak of a web of overlapping and interlocked sectoral elites across different layers of society, such as industries, interest groups, social groups and NGO's.

The integrated, consensual elites share social and recreational facilities 'in executive and priviliged settings' (Highly & Burton, 2006, p. 11), exhibit reciprocity in maintaining cohesion, preserving their structural unity, and a 'stable polyarchy', maintain a ertain secrecy of proceedings, a certain amount of protection against reputational damage under mistakes, and revolving doors of careers between different networks in the web. They tend to be technocratic, emphasising technical and procedural feasibilities, rather than ultimate rights and wrongs. This yields the risk of an inward look, myopia and even exclusion of some societal needs and opinions. This can 'blur the distinction between procedural democracy and an authoritarian regime' (Pakulski, 2012, p. 13). This derailing of a governing elite is a fifth threat to democracy.

The conduct of governing elites is easy to condemn, but it is an outflow of the necessary reciprocity and sharing of a morality of conduct, in the elite. However, elites cannot afford to ignore those needs, and they are disciplined by periodic elections. Nevertheless, correctives are needed, such as an ombudsman or courts of appeal. Social media and citizen councils can give opportunities for direct contact, horizontalisation, between citizens and representatives, bypasssing or influencing representation, but in practice they often derail in invective, vindictiveness and outrageous conspiracy theories.

Much grumbling against the political elite is misguided, born from a mentality of victimhood and a feeling of exclusion of the have-nots, understandable in view of the greater ot lesser misconduct of the elite, but arising also from a lack of understanding of the need for an elite. Measures taken in the public interest, such as measures against covid, and environmental measures of a tax on flights or meat are felt to impinge on the right to consumption, by Ortega y Gasset's 'mass man', and are branded as 'elitist', while environmental protection, for example, is good for everyone. While a democracy requires such an elite, there are other types of elite that are not conducive to democracy.

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More often than not, there are 'disunited elites' that vie with each other and compete for dominance, often with violence, as used to predominate Europe in the past, and now predominate in many African countries. The transition to an integrated, consensual elite is possible, but takes time and a certain prosperity in order to wish for preservation of the status quo, and mobilisation of non-elite support. Third, there are ideologically united elites, that on the surface agree on a religious or political doctrine, but hide dissent that is carefully masked, as in Iran, Northern Korea, the former Soviet Union and current Russia under Putin, yielding a 'simulated democracy'. (Pakulski, 2012, p. 15)

4.5 Populism

Kaltwasser (2010) indicated that populism can be a corrective or a threat to democracy. Populism can be intended as instituting real democracy, government by the people, against the perceived myopic manipulation by governing elites in networks arising from party politics and career circuits, in representative democracy. The means proposed for expression of the popular will is referendums or popular councils. Thus, one should not be too quick in condemning populist attitudes, which are varied, some positive and some negative, counter-democratic.

Studying not political parties but citizens, Zaslove et al. (2020) show, on the basis of a survey in the Netherlands, with regression analysis, that 'citizens with stronger populist attitudes are more supportive of democracy and also favour more people-centered modes of participation such as referenda and, contrary to our expectations, support deliberative forms of participation'. They expected populists not to engage in protests and demonstrations because they would consider that something for unruly leftists but there was no evidence of that.

However, populism can derail in the claim of a charismatic authoritarian leader that elections are superfluous because the leader knows what the people want, that he grasps the 'general will' proposed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and representation is not needed. Such claims can easily regress in special pleading and power play by private or group interests. This suspicion arose in the French revolution, and led to 'a virtuous terror' by Robespierre in the attempt to impose the unmediated purity of the general will.

Then, preying on the discontent of the people, fueling it and harvesting their votes, populism can derail into dictatorship, becoming illiberal, curtailing freedom of expression and opposition, and imposing a paranoid order, as was the case with Stalin, and now is the case with Putin. With the claim of knowing what is good for the people, promises are made and actions taken to realise it, and when that fails, the blame is off-loaded onto some preferred scapegoat, such as the Jews under Nazism, and so-called Ukrainian 'nazis' in the war in Ukraine.

Populists militate against elites and claim direct access to the population, but when in power will themselves institute an elite, while hidden under a euphemism of 'cadres, comrades, officials or functionaries' (Pakulski, 2012, p. 13). It is astonishing to anyone living in a democracy how far suppression of free speech can go by means of censureship by terror, with people getting to believe in blatant lies and fake news, as happens now in the Russia of Putin.

People can adhere to populist parties for diverse reasons: prejudice against immigrants and the benefits they receive, in contrast with 'ordinary' citizens, a conservative urge to preserve an undiluted nation or national culture, preservation of religious values, a grudge from unattended needs, ideological protest against socialism, or opposition to internationalisation, as in the EU. Out of fear of losing votes, middle-of-the-road political parties in government gravitate towards the positions paraded by populist parties. This is a weakness, a vulnerability, of democracy.

The inclination to being disgruntled, in advanced liberal democracies, has been enhanced by the neo-liberal ideology that citizens also are 'customers', and those have been told that 'the customer is always right', so they can now demand that their demands are met without delay in government offices, that children receive diploma's

unconditionally, that all claims are honoured.

4.6 Confusion

How many political parties should there be? Two is too few, confirming polarisation. Thirteen or more, as in the Netherlands, is too many. With more parties you can claim that you come closer to the diversity of society, but the voter can no longer see the forest for the trees. Some parties are dedicated to a single issue, such as animals, the environment, the elderly, or agriculture. That makes coalition formation difficult. Other parties have much in common and hardly distinguish themselves substantively, but cannot wrest loose from their history, as a movement with its own identity, style, networks and positions of authority built up over time.

Populist parties benefit from the confusion, creating contrast and with that claim clarity. This forms a seventh threat to democracy. Perhaps the optimal number of parties is four: two in government and two in opposition.

4.7 Capitalism

Some people claim that democracy facilitates capitalism, others that capitalism destroys it. Capitalism has produced much good. The failure of communism shows that we need the market mechanism, to tune production to the great local variation of needs and ideas that exists (Hayek, 1954). It hereby opens up room for the creativity and daring of entrepreneurs and artists, furthering the diversity that is part of democracy.

However, unfettered capitalism also has disastrous effects, such as monopolies and oligopolies that disturb market dynamics, misleading advertising, lobbies of firms for soft conditions of environmental policy, low tax, subsidies, lax labour conditions, and growing inequality of property, which all contribute to feelings of injustice. The law of supply and demand now causes excessive wealth to suppliers of food, due to scarcities arising from the war in Ukraine. During the storm Katrina, profiteers exploited the scarcity of potable water. That is the seventh threat to democracy. The conclusion is not to abolish markets, but to contain them. How that is to be done does not fit in this article, but the needed measures are not the same everywhere, across all industries and markets.

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4.8 The Dilemma of Benevolence and Justice

David Hume held that next to a drive towards self-interest, people have an innate inclination towards benevolence. Extreme in this was Levinas, who demanded that one surrender completely to dedication to the other, his 'visage', which precedes self-interest and one's own identity. One must offer this even to one's henchman. This brought him into problems at the step he had to make from benevolence to justice for all. He had to make that step, in view of the harm that an individual other can perpetrate on others. He could not solve this, and could only say that the basic intuition of unconditional dedication to the single other had to be kept, and that one can find this in 'voices that emerge from the folds of society, e.g. in the press' (Levinas, 1991).

The problem for democracy is that benevolence is directed at individuals, with made-to-measure regulations, yielding difference between people, and chafing with justice, which should be the same for all. This the ninth threat to democracy.

The problem is that policymakers feel compelled to orient themselves towards justice, with the same regulation for all, and throw the problem of needed tailor-made adjustments over the fence to civil-servants responsible for execution, who aim to take care of individual cases, but don't get the room for it.

Social regulations are often motivated by harsh, individual cases of need, entangled with the specific conditions of those involved: employment, income, marital status, children, school, housing, health, neighbourhood, aim in life, sports, etc. It is a tough job to tailor regulations to those conditions. This requires information that may soon be in conflict with privacy. And then, in a democracy, the inequality arising from made-to-measure rulings evokes claims of inequality and injustice, demanding compensation for unequal treatment. In this way, regulations and special arrangements and compensations accumulate, and exceed administrative capacity, yielding further complaints. This yields a ratcheting effect of the benevolence of special arrangements, and claims of equalising justice. This is the sixth threat to democracy.

An example is the recent affair, in the Netherlands, concerning benefits for child care. The rules that were intended to apply to everyone did not fit everywhere. To ensure fit nevertheless, the regulation became complicated, and recipients overlooked the complications, or made a mistake, but those were not seen as such but as fraud, after which people had to repay all the benefits received, plus a penalty, regardless of personal conditions. Regularly, one hears that the solution is to practice made-to-measure implementation, allowing civil servants their specific interpretation. That is possible, but one should realise that this costs much time, can violate privacy, and is vulnerable to arbitrariness, favouritism and even corruption, for which some check of practices is needed. Furthermore, tailor-made execution yield variety of treatment, that is next branded as unjust.

I am not saying that therefore one should not do it, but one must accept a certain amount of inequality, and that fits ill in the ruling orientation on precision, distrust and control. One should trust by default,

and take measures and not take measures until untrustworthiness is established. But lack of trust as a default pervades our culture.

4.9 Institutional Crowding

Democratic governments are pressed by their constituents to offer additional benefits, in grants, subsidies or relief, but this labours under the dilemma of benevolence and equal justice, leading to a ratchet of benevolence concerning the special needs of some group, evoking claims of injustice and demands for equal treatment from all others. Also, when dedicated to specific groups, every new regulation requires control against misuse, necessitating formal bureaucratic procedures that are felt to be inhumane, which evokes further measures, complicating the procedure and worsening the perception of bureaucratic, inhumane meddling. The more regulation is added, the greater the chance that it becomes in conflict with already existing regulations. The system of regulations and control gets clogged up. I call it 'institutional crowding'.

In society, to make room one must abolish regulations from time time, bu such elimination is absent, which yields less and less room to satisfy new demands, which yields grudges and resentments, and an excess of regulation that detracts from the freedom of space for action, and the volatility and 'buzz' of society, ultimately causing the society to crumble.

The war in Ukraine, with the need for armaments, the flood of refugees, scarcity and rising prices of oil, gas, grain, and sunflower oil, necessitates that large funds be found, for which a number of existing benefits have to be stopped. That may a sobering, and unintendedly positive exercise.

To make a career, individual members of parliament need to profile themselves and stand in the limelight with new proposals, and in a multi-party democracy progressive political parties fail to unite on a shared programme, and compete on different new arrangements of their own, further clogging up the system.

This phenomenon of crowding is similar to the economic phenomena of 'diminishing returns', and 'increasing marginal costs' and to the phenomenon of 'EROI', diminishing return on investment in energy: more energy is needed to insert novelty, relative to what comes out, discussed before.

4.10 Short-termism and Depletion

There is an institutional myopia in democracy, because the focus of elected politicians is on the next elections, in four or five years. In addition to this system phenomenon, there is a psychological drive of individual people to prefer present consumption to restraint. These tendencies yield neglect of the future, resulting in depletion of resources, neglect of the environment, pollution and climate change, and the economic dependence on authoritarian regimes, as currently in oil and gas from Russia. People discount the future, unloading risks on future generations. Politicians cater to this for electoral reasons. They have a justified fear that constraints on consumption of meat, airline travel to distant locations and car usage, needed for preserving the environment, will be taken electoral advantage of by populist parties with no such qualms. Those parties might win out in elections, blocking environmental policy. This may be one of the most fundamental constraints on the environmental policies needed. It requires

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a fundamental shift of consumer mentality which is a matter of generations, and will likely come too late.

An important force of depletion also is the 'tragedy of the commons'. Here, a common resource, such as a meadow of grass for grazing sheep, is insufficiency maintained by the herdsmen grazing the sheep, whose interest it is to keep more sheep, causing overgrazing, without maintaining the commons. They may be withheld from doing this, and contribute to maintaining the commons by the force of reputation, but that is viable only in small communities of personal contact between the inhabitants. In larger communities, this fades and has to be replaced by regulations and monitoring.

Maintaining the commons of a clean environment, requires constraints on polluting industry that raise costs to the extent that it may jeopardise employment, and meets with strong industry lobbies that have become part of modern capitalism.

4.11 AI and Robots

Next to robots, 'Artificial Intelligence' (AI) includes numerous devices that use algorithms, for weather forecasts, trade in securities, tracing criminals, pattern recognition, surveillance, face recognition, fire control, often in self-learning and self-guiding systems, in cars, airplanes and drones. I will here focus on robots. Self-learning systems mimic the evolutionary process of more or less random adjustments subjected to a selection process, where most adjustments fail, while the successful ones are reinforced, in 'genetic algorithms'. Robots are such systems; they have 'agency', can act.

There is some fear that such systems will bypass humans in efficiency and even innovation. They take over ever more activities, and that can relieve us of many boring activities, offer new opportunities, apart from lowering costs. Humans do become more dependent, losing 'agency', and become 'patients' (Danaher, 2019). But agency contributes to humanity, to yield contributions, offer challenges to hone capabilities, contributing to identity, in interaction with others, which broadens our views and reduces preconceptions.

While we become more dependent on robots, we become less dependent on other people. And thereby we lose a source of correction and creative conflict. Because in the foreseeable future a robot has no rejoinder to what we say and do, she is less 'bothersome' than people, and preference for robots may push out interaction with people. The extreme is a willing sex robot. One may see that as attractive, but the point here is that it lowers contact and communicative interaction between people, needed for democracy. That forms the twelfth threat to democracy. Could robots give criticism? Criticism requires some form of morality (Wallach & Allen, 2009; Caeckelbergh, 2010). That may be conceivable, but on what basis? That would have to be programmed in, or developed by self-learning systems, with genetic algorithms, on the basis of a fitting selection environment. Who determines that? In an evolutionary process one cannot predict the outcome. Human morality has developed in hundreds of thousands years. How would you mimic that in a genetic algorithm? Suppose the rate of evolution could speed up immensely. Who can say whether the outcome in morality would be anywhere like that of humans?

4.12 Conditions for Democracy

Some people think that in spite of threats, democracy is robust enough to withstand them. And indeed, in many countries there still is representation of citizens in political parties and a parliament, making policy on the basis of debate and compromise, with free elections, separation of powers, independent judiciary and freedom of expression. But the threats are accumulating.

How would the multiple causality of social systems apply, to give solutions? Concerning the efficient cause, who are the actors? The wave of democratisation, in European countries, has wiped out the privileged positions of royalty, aristocracy and church, which is beneficial but does intensify the emergence of the 'Mass Man' of JOG. The wholesale reception of Ukrainian refugees in European countries is a switch from former grudging immigration attitudes towards refugees from Syria, Afghanistan or African countries.

Concerning the generative cause, democracy requires an attitude of civility, of not only being consumers of government services, but having civic responsibilities as well as rights, tolerating people with different views and the willingness to understand them and deliberate, and a desire for and commitment to mutual resonance. Concerning the material cause, there must be a degree of prosperity, and public spaces where people can meet, communication technology, and media, supported by visual, musical and performing arts. But there has to be control, somehow of fake news and conspiracy theories on the social media.

Concerning the formal cause, there must be a shared language, excellent education and schooling, generating an ability to understand each other and the news about what is going on in the world.

Concerning the institutional cause, the best social structure for a democracy seems to be that of connected small worlds, cliques in the form of municipalities or city quarters, with strong internal ties and weak external ties to other cliques. They should have much discretion in policy regarding local issues, such as care for the weak and elderly, schooling, local security (police, fire-brigade, traffic control), design of public space, local amenities of roads, parks and playgrounds, and communication infrastructure. This leads inevitably to different conditions in different cliques. Some cliques can provide other cliques with services that are subject to economies of scale which make local provision too expensive. The task of national government retracts to what links the cliques, such as highways, railroads, crime fighting, legal practice, preservation of the environment and supervision of adequate justice in the cliques.

Concerning the conditional cause, there must be the usual freedoms of expression and association, public security, and an independent judiciary.

Concerning the exemplary cause, it helps to have icons that are virtuoso's in practical wisdom, setting examples of prudence, toleration, empathy, and practising justice with benevolence.

Limits are to be set to the urge of a race to the bottom in sociality, arising from economic globalisation. A universal Basic Income (UBI) would lay a floor in inequality, while at the same time reducing the complexity of social regulations, reducing institutional crowding. Some say that it cannot be financed.

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However, in calculations of its cost, some likely positive effects and savings have not been taken into account, such as an increase of independent entrepreneurship, the savings involved in the abolition of a number of social benefits, and new ways of finance, such as tax on the use of robots and increase of tax on the excessively rich, to avoid too high a tax on labour.

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