Edward Said. “Preface to the twenty-fifth anniversary edition.” *Orientalism.* New York: Penguin, 2003. Print. (Edited Version)

Nine years ago I wrote an afterword for Orientalism which, in trying to clarify what I believed I had and had not said, stressed not only the many discussions that had opened up since my book appeared in 1978, but the ways in which a work about representations of "the orient" lent itself to increasing misinterpretation. That I find myself feeling more ironic than irritated about that very same thing today is a sign of how much my age has crept up on me. The recent deaths of my two main intellectual, political and personal mentors, the writers and activists Eqbal Ahmad and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, has brought sadness and loss, as well as resignation and a certain stubborn will to go on.

In my memoir Out of Place (1999) I described the strange and contradictory worlds in which I grew up, providing for myself and my readers a detailed account of the settings that I think formed me in Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon. But that was a very personal account which stopped short of all the years of my own political engagement that started after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

Orientalism is very much a book tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history. Its first page opens with a description of the Lebanese civil war that ended in 1990, but the violence and the ugly shedding of human blood continues up to this minute. We have had the failure of the Oslo peace process, the outbreak of the second intifada, and the awful suffering of the Palestinians on the reinvaded West Bank and Gaza. The suicide bombing phenomenon has appeared with all its hideous damage, none more lurid and apocalyptic of course than the events of September 11 2001 and their aftermath in the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. As I write these lines, the illegal occupation of Iraq by Britain and the United States proceeds. Its aftermath is truly awful to contemplate. This is all part of what is supposed to be a clash of civilisations, unending, implacable, irremediable. Nevertheless, I think not.

I wish I could say that general understanding of the Middle East, the Arabs and Islam in the US has improved, but alas, it really hasn't. For all kinds of reasons, the situation in Europe seems to be considerably better. What American leaders and their intellectual lackeys seem incapable of understanding is that history cannot be swept clean like a blackboard, so that "we" might inscribe our own future there and impose our own forms of life for these lesser people to follow. It is quite common to hear high officials in Washington and elsewhere speak of changing the map of the Middle East, as if ancient societies and myriad peoples can be shaken up like so many peanuts in a jar. But this has often happened with the "orient", that semi-mythical construct which since Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in the late 18th century has been made and remade countless times. In the process the uncountable sediments of history, a dizzying variety of peoples, languages, experiences, and cultures, are swept aside or ignored, relegated to the sandheap along with the treasures ground into meaningless fragments that were taken out of Baghdad.

My argument is that history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and rewritten, so that "our" east, "our" orient becomes "ours" to possess and direct. And I have a very high regard for the powers and gifts of the peoples of that region to struggle on for their vision of what they are and want to be. There has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on contemporary Arab and Muslim societies for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women's rights that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment, and democracy are by no means simple and agreed-upon concepts that one either does or does not find like Easter eggs in the living-room. The breathtaking insouciance of jejune publicists who speak in the name of foreign policy and who have no knowledge at all of the language real people actually speak, has fabricated an arid landscape ready for American power to construct there an ersatz model of free market "democracy".

But there is a difference between knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation. It is surely one of the intellectual catastrophes of history that an imperialist war confected by a small group of unelected US officials was waged against a devastated third world dictatorship on thoroughly ideological grounds having to do with world dominance, security control and scarce resources, but disguised for its true intent, hastened and reasoned for by orientalists who betrayed their calling as scholars.

The major influences on George W Bush's Pentagon and National Security Council were men such as Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami, experts on the Arab and Islamic world who helped the American hawks to think about such preposterous phenomena as the Arab mind and the centuries-old Islamic decline which only American power could reverse. Today bookstores in the US are filled with shabby screeds bearing screaming headlines about Islam and terror, the Arab threat and the Muslim menace, all of them written by political polemicists pretending to knowledge imparted by experts who have supposedly penetrated to the heart of these strange oriental peoples. CNN and Fox, plus myriad evangelical and rightwing radio hosts, innumerable tabloids and even middle-brow journals, have recycled the same unverifiable fictions and vast generalisations so as to stir up "America" against the foreign devil.

Without a well-organised sense that the people over there were not like "us" and didn't appreciate "our" values - the very core of traditional orientalist dogma - there would have been no war. The American advisers to the Pentagon and the White House use the same clichés, the same demeaning stereotypes, the same justifications for power and violence (after all, runs the chorus, power is the only language they understand) as the scholars enlisted by the Dutch conquerors of Malaysia and Indonesia, the British armies of India, Mesopotamia, Egypt, West Africa, the French armies of Indochina and North Africa. These people have now been joined in Iraq by a whole army of private contractors and eager entrepreneurs to whom shall be confided everything from the writing of textbooks and the constitution to the refashioning of Iraqi political life and its oil industry.

Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilise, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires.

Twenty-five years after my book's publication, Orientalism once again raises the question of whether modern imperialism ever ended, or whether it has continued in the orient since Napoleon's entry into Egypt two centuries ago. Arabs and Muslims have been told that victimology and dwelling on the depredations of empire are only ways of evading responsibility in the present. You have failed, you have gone wrong, says the modern orientalist. This of course is also VS Naipaul's contribution to literature, that the victims of empire wail on while their country goes to the dogs. But what a shallow calculation of the imperial intrusion that is, how little it wishes to face the long succession of years through which empire continues to work its way in the lives say of Palestinians or Congolese or Algerians or Iraqis.

Think of the line that starts with Napoleon, continues with the rise of oriental studies and the takeover of North Africa, and goes on in similar undertakings in Vietnam, in Egypt, in Palestine and, during the entire 20th century, in the struggle over oil and strategic control in the Gulf, in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Afghanistan. Then think of the rise of anti-colonial nationalism, through the short period of liberal independence, the era of military coups, of insurgency, civil war, religious fanaticism, irrational struggle and uncompromising brutality against the latest bunch of "natives". Each of these phases and eras produces its own distorted knowledge of the other, each its own reductive images, its own disputatious polemics.

My idea in Orientalism was to use humanistic critique to open up the fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis to replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that so imprison us. I have called what I try to do "humanism", a word I continue to use stubbornly despite the scornful dismissal of the term by sophisticated postmodern critics. By humanism I mean first of all attempting to dissolve Blake's "mind-forg'd manacles" so as to be able to use one's mind historically and rationally for the purposes of reflective understanding. Moreover humanism is sustained by a sense of community with other interpreters and other societies and periods: strictly speaking therefore, there is no such thing as an isolated humanist.

Thus it is correct to say that every domain is linked, and that nothing that goes on in our world has ever been isolated and pure of any outside influence. We need to speak about issues of injustice and suffering within a context that is amply situated in history, culture, and socio-economic reality. I have spent a great deal of my life during the past 35 years advocating the right of the Palestinian people to national self-determination, but I have always tried to do that with full attention paid to the reality of the Jewish people and what they suffered by way of persecution and genocide. The paramount thing is that the struggle for equality in Palestine/Israel should be directed toward a humane goal, that is, coexistence, and not further suppression and denial.

As a humanist whose field is literature, I am old enough to have been trained 40 years ago in the field of comparative literature, whose leading ideas go back to Germany in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. I must mention too the supremely creative contribution of Giambattista Vico, the Neapolitan philosopher and philologist whose ideas anticipate those of German thinkers such as Herder and Wolf, later to be followed by Goethe, Humboldt, Dilthey, Nietzsche, Gadamer, and finally the great 20th-century Romance philologists Erich Auerbach, Leo Spitzer, and Ernst Robert Curtius.

To young people of the current generation the very idea of philology suggests something impossibly antiquarian and musty, but philology in fact is the most basic and creative of the interpretive arts. It is exemplified for me most admirably in Goethe's interest in Islam generally, and the 14th-century Persian Sufi poet Hafiz in particular, a consuming passion which led to the composition of the West-östlicher Diwan, and it inflected Goethe's later ideas about Weltliteratur, the study of all the literatures of the world as a symphonic whole which could be apprehended theoretically as having preserved the individuality of each work without losing sight of the whole.

There is a considerable irony to the realisation that as today's globalised world draws together, we may be approaching the kind of standardisation and homogeneity that Goethe's ideas were specifically formulated to prevent. In an essay published in 1951 entitled "Philologie der Weltliteratur", Auerbach made exactly that point. His great book Mimesis, published in Berne in 1946 but written while Auerbach was a wartime exile teaching Romance languages in Istanbul, was meant to be a testament to the diversity and concreteness of the reality represented in western literature from Homer to Virginia Woolf; but reading the 1951 essay one senses that, for Auerbach, the great book he wrote was an elegy for a period when people could interpret texts philologically, concretely, sensitively, and intuitively, using erudition and an excellent command of several languages to support the kind of understanding that Goethe advocated for his understanding of Islamic literature.

Positive knowledge of languages and history was necessary, but it was never enough, any more than the mechanical gathering of facts would constitute an adequate method for grasping what an author like Dante, for example, was all about. The main requirement for the kind of philological understanding Auerbach and his predecessors were talking about and tried to practise was one that sympathetically and subjectively entered into the life of a written text as seen from the perspective of its time and its author. Rather than alienation and hostility to another time and a different culture, philology as applied to Weltliteratur involved a profound humanistic spirit deployed with generosity and, if I may use the word, hospitality. Thus the interpreter's mind actively makes a place in it for a foreign "other". And this creative making of a place for works that are otherwise alien and distant is the most important facet of the interpreter's mission.

All this was obviously undermined and destroyed in Germany by national socialism. After the war, Auerbach notes mournfully, the standardisation of ideas, and greater and greater specialisation of knowledge gradually narrowed the opportunities for the kind of investigative and everlastingly inquiring kind of philological work that he had

represented; and, alas, it's an even more depressing fact that since Auerbach's death in 1957 both the idea and practice of humanistic research have shrunk in scope as well as in centrality. Instead of reading in the real sense of the word, our students today are often distracted by the fragmented knowledge available on the internet and in the mass media.

Worse yet, education is threatened by nationalist and religious orthodoxies often disseminated by the media as they focus ahistorically and sensationally on the distant electronic wars that give viewers the sense of surgical precision, but in fact obscure the terrible suffering and destruction produced by modern warfare. In the demonisation of an unknown enemy for whom the label "terrorist" serves the general purpose of keeping people stirred up and angry, media images command too much attention and can be exploited at times of crisis and insecurity of the kind that the post-September 11 period has produced.

Speaking both as an American and as an Arab I must ask my reader not to underestimate the kind of simplified view of the world that a relative handful of Pentagon civilian elites have formulated for US policy in the entire Arab and Islamic worlds, a view in which terror, pre-emptive war, and unilateral regime change - backed up by the most bloated military budget in history - are the main ideas debated endlessly and impoverishingly by a media that assigns itself the role of producing so-called "experts" who validate the government's general line. Reflection, debate, rational argument and moral principle based on a secular notion that human beings must create their own history have been replaced by abstract ideas that celebrate American or western exceptionalism, denigrate the relevance of context, and regard other cultures with contempt.

Perhaps you will say that I am making too many abrupt transitions between humanistic interpretation on the one hand and foreign policy on the other, and that a modern technological society which along with unprecedented power possesses the internet and F-16 fighter-jets must in the end be commanded by formidable technical-policy experts like Donald Rumsfeld and Richard Perle. But what has really been lost is a sense of the density and interdependence of human life, which can neither be reduced to a formula nor brushed aside as irrelevant.

That is one side of the global debate. In the Arab and Muslim countries the situation is scarcely better. As Roula Khalaf has argued, the region has slipped into an easy anti-Americanism that shows little understanding of what the US is really like as a society. Because the governments are relatively powerless to affect US policy toward them, they turn their energies to repressing and keeping down their own populations, with results in resentment, anger and helpless imprecations that do nothing to open up societies where secular ideas about human history and development have been overtaken by failure and frustration, as well as by an Islamism built out of rote learning and the obliteration of what are perceived to be other, competitive forms of secular knowledge. The gradual disappearance of the extraordinary tradition of Islamic ijtihad - the process of working out Islamic rules with reference to the Koran - has been one of the major cultural disasters of our time, with the result that critical thinking and individual wrestling with the problems of the modern world have simply dropped out of sight.

This is not to say that the cultural world has simply regressed on one side to a belligerent neo-orientalism and on the other to blanket rejectionism. Last year's United Nations world summit in Johannesburg, for all its limitations, did in fact reveal a vast area of common global concern that suggests the welcome emergence of a new collective constituency and gives the often facile notion of "one world" a new urgency. In all this, however, we must admit that no one can possibly know the extraordinarily complex unity of our globalised world.

The terrible conflicts that herd people under falsely unifying rubrics such as "America," "the west" or "Islam" and invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse, cannot remain as potent as they are, and must be opposed. We still have at our disposal the rational interpretive skills that are the legacy of humanistic education, not as a sentimental piety enjoining us to return to traditional values or the classics but as the active practice of worldly secular rational discourse. The secular world is the world of history as made by human beings. Critical thought does not submit to commands to join in the ranks marching against one or another approved enemy. Rather than the manufactured clash of civilisations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together. But for that kind of wider perception we need time, patient and sceptical inquiry, supported by faith in communities of interpretation that are difficult to sustain in a world demanding instant action and reaction.

Humanism is centred upon the agency of human individuality and subjective intuition, rather than on received ideas and authority. Texts have to be read as texts that were produced and live on in all sorts of what I have called worldly ways. But this by no means excludes power, since on the contrary I have tried to show the insinuations, the imbrications of power into even the most recondite of studies. And lastly, most important, humanism is the only, and I would go as far as to say the final resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history.

Democracy And Its Global Roots

By Amartya Sen

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There is no mystery in the fact that the immediate prospects of democracy in Iraq, to be ushered in by the American-led alliance, are being viewed with increasing skepticism. The evident ambiguities in the goals of the occupation and the lack of clarity about the process of democratization make these doubts inescapable. But it would be a serious mistake to translate these uncertainties about the immediate prospects of a democratic Iraq into a larger case for skepticism about the general possibility of--and indeed the need for--having democracy in Iraq, or in any other country that is deprived of it. Nor is there a general ground here for uneasiness about providing global support for the struggle for democracy around the world, which is the most profound challenge of our times. Democracy movements across the globe (in South Africa and Argentina and Indonesia yesterday, in Burma and Zimbabwe and elsewhere today) reflect people's determination to fight for political participation and an effective voice. Apprehensions about current events in Iraq have to be seen in their specific context; there is a big world beyond.

It is important to consider, in the broader arena, two general objections to the advocacy of democracy that have recently gained much ground in international debates and which tend to color discussions of foreign affairs, particularly in America and Europe. There are, first, doubts about what democracy can achieve in poorer countries. Is democracy not a barrier that obstructs the process of development and deflects attention from the priorities of economic and social change, such as providing adequate food, raising income per head, and carrying out institutional reform? It is also argued that democratic governance can be deeply illiberal and can inflict suffering on those who do not belong to the ruling majority in a democracy. Are vulnerable groups not better served by the protection that authoritarian governance can provide?

The second line of attack concentrates on historical and cultural doubts about advocating democracy for people who do not, allegedly, "know" it. The endorsement of democracy as a general rule for all people, whether by national or international bodies or by human rights activists, is frequently castigated on the ground that it involves an attempted imposition of Western values and Western practices on non-Western societies. The argument goes much beyond acknowledging that democracy is a predominantly Western practice in the contemporary world, as it certainly is. It takes the form of presuming that democracy is an idea of which the roots can be found exclusively in some distinctively Western thought that has flourished uniquely in Europe--and nowhere else--for a very long time.

These are legitimate and cogent questions, and they are, understandably, being asked with some persistence. But are these misgivings really well-founded? In arguing that they are not, it is important to note that these lines of criticism are not altogether unlinked. Indeed, the flaws in both lie primarily in the attempt to see democracy in an unduly narrow and restricted way--in particular, exclusively in terms of public balloting and not much more broadly, in terms of what John Rawls called "the exercise of public reason." This more capacious concept includes the opportunity for citizens to participate in political discussions and so to be in a position to influence public choice. In understanding where the two lines of attack on democratization respectively go wrong, it is crucial to appreciate that democracy has demands that transcend the ballot box.

Indeed, voting is only one way--though certainly a very important way--of making public discussions effective, when the opportunity to vote is combined with the opportunity to speak, and to listen, without fear. The force and the reach of elections depend critically on the opportunity for open public discussion. Balloting alone can be woefully inadequate, as is abundantly illustrated by the astounding electoral victories of ruling tyrannies in authoritarian regimes, from Stalin's Soviet Union to Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The problem in these cases lies not just in the pressure that is brought to bear on voters in the act of balloting itself, but in the way public discussion of failures and transgressions is thwarted by censorship, suppression of political opposition, and violations of basic civil rights and political freedoms.

The need to take a broader view of democracy--going well beyond the freedom of elections and ballots--has been extensively discussed not only in contemporary political philosophy, but also in the new disciplines of social choice theory and public choice theory, influenced by economic reasoning as well as by political ideas. The process of decision-making through discussion can enhance information about a society and about individual priorities, and those priorities may respond to public deliberation. As James Buchanan, the leading public choice theorist, argues, "The definition of democracy as 'government by discussion' implies that individual values can and do change in the process of decision-making."

All this raises deep questions about the dominant focus on balloting and elections in the literature on world affairs, and about the adequacy of the view, well articulated by Samuel P. Huntington in The Third Wave, that "elections, open, free and fair, are the essence of democracy, the inescapable sine qua non." In the broader perspective of public reasoning, democracy has to give a central place to guaranteeing free public discussion and deliberative interactions in political thought and practice--not just through elections nor just for elections. What is required, as Rawls observed, is the safeguarding of "diversity of doctrines--the fact of pluralism," which is central to "the public culture of modern democracies," and which must be secured in a democracy by "basic rights and liberties."

The broader view of democracy in terms of public reasoning also allows us to understand that the roots of democracy go much beyond

the narrowly confined chronicles of some designated practices that are now seen as specifically "democratic institutions." This basic recognition was clear enough to Tocqueville. In 1835, in Democracy in America, he noted that the "great democratic revolution" then taking place could be seen, from one point of view, as "a new thing," but it could also be seen, from a broader perspective, as part of "the most continuous, ancient, and permanent tendency known to history." Although he confined his historical examples to Europe's past (pointing to the powerful contribution toward democratization made by the admission of common people to the ranks of clergy in "the state of France seven hundred years ago"), Tocqueville's general argument has immensely broader relevance.

The championing of pluralism, diversity, and basic liberties can be found in the history of many societies. The long traditions of encouraging and protecting public debates on political, social, and cultural matters in, say, India, China, Japan, Korea, Iran, Turkey, the Arab world, and many parts of Africa, demand much fuller recognition in the history of democratic ideas. This global heritage is ground enough to question the frequently reiterated view that democracy is just a Western idea, and that democracy is therefore just a form of Westernization. The recognition of this history has direct relevance in contemporary politics in pointing to the global legacy of protecting and promoting social deliberation and pluralist interactions, which cannot be any less important today than they were in the past when they were championed.

In his autobiography, Long Walk to Freedom, Nelson Mandela describes how impressed he was, as a young boy, by the democratic nature of the proceedings of the local meetings that were held in the regent's house in Mqhekezweni:

Everyone who wanted to speak did so. It was democracy in its purest form. There may have been a hierarchy of importance among the speakers, but everyone was heard, chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, shopkeeper and farmer, landowner and laborer....The foundation of self-government was that all men were free to voice their opinions and equal in their value as citizens.

Meyer Fortes and Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, the great anthropologists of Africa, argued in their classic book African Political Systems, published more than sixty years ago, that "the structure of an African state implies that kings and chiefs rule by consent." There might have been some over-generalization in this, as critics argued later; but there can be little doubt about the traditional role and the continuing relevance of accountability and participation in African political heritage. To overlook all this, and to regard the fight for democracy in Africa only as an attempt to import from abroad the "Western idea" of democracy, would be a profound misunderstanding. Mandela's "long walk to freedom" began distinctly at home.

Nowhere in the contemporary world is the need for more democratic engagement stronger than in Africa. The continent has suffered

greatly from the domination of authoritarianism and military rule in the late twentieth century, following the formal closure of the British, French, Portuguese, and Belgian empires. Africa also had the misfortune of being caught right in the middle of the Cold War, in which each of the superpowers cultivated military rulers friendly to itself and hostile to the enemy. No military usurper of civilian authority ever lacked a superpower friend, linked with it in a military alliance. A continent that seemed in the 1950s to be poised to develop democratic politics in newly independent countries was soon being run by an assortment of strongmen who were linked to one side or the other in the militancy of the Cold War. They competed in despotism with apartheid-based South Africa.

That picture is slowly changing now, with post-apartheid South Africa playing a leading part. But, as Anthony Appiah has argued, "ideological decolonization is bound to fail if it neglects either endogenous 'tradition' or exogenous 'Western' ideas." Even as specific democratic institutions developed in the West are welcomed and put into practice, the task requires an adequate understanding of the deep roots of democratic thought in Africa itself. Similar issues arise, with varying intensity, in other parts of the non-Western world as they struggle to introduce or consolidate democratic governance.

II.

The idea that democracy is an essentially Western notion is sometimes linked to the practice of voting and elections in ancient Greece, specifically in Athens from the fifth century B.C.E. In the evolution of democratic ideas and practices it is certainly important to note the remarkable role of Athenian direct democracy, starting from Cleisthenes's pioneering move toward public balloting around 506 B.C.E. The term "democracy" derives from the Greek words for "people" (demos) and "authority" (kratia). Although many people in Athens--women and slaves in particular--were not citizens and did not have the right to vote, the vast importance of the Athenian practice of the sharing of political authority deserves unequivocal acknowledgment.

But to what extent does this make democracy a basically Western concept? There are two major difficulties in taking this view. The first problem concerns the importance of public reasoning, which takes us beyond the narrow perspective of public balloting. Athens itself was extremely distinguished in encouraging public discussion, as was ancient Greece in general. But the Greeks were not unique in this respect, even among ancient civilizations, and there is an extensive history of the cultivation of tolerance, pluralism, and public deliberation in other societies as well.

The second difficulty concerns the partitioning of the world into discrete civilizations with geographical correlates, in which ancient Greece is seen as part and parcel of an identifiable "Western" tradition. Not only is this a difficult thing to do given the diverse history of different parts of Europe, but it is also hard to miss an implicit element of racist thinking in such wholesale reduction of

Western civilization to Greek antiquity. In this perspective, no great difficulty is perceived in seeing the descendants of, say, Goths and Visigoths and other Europeans as the inheritors of the Greek tradition ("they are all Europeans"), while there is great reluctance to take note of the Greek intellectual links with ancient Egyptians, Iranians, and Indians, despite the greater interest that the ancient Greeks themselves showed--as recorded in contemporary accounts--in talking to them (rather than in chatting with the ancient Goths).

Such discussions often concerned issues that are directly or indirectly relevant to democratic ideas. When Alexander asked a group of Jain philosophers in India why they were paying so little attention to the great conqueror, he got the following reply, which directly questioned the legitimacy of inequality: "King Alexander, every man can possess only so much of the earth's surface as this we are standing on. You are but human like the rest of us, save that you are always busy and up to no good, traveling so many miles from your home, a nuisance to yourself and to others! ... You will soon be dead, and then you will own just as much of the earth as will suffice to bury you." Arrian reports that Alexander responded to this egalitarian reproach with the same kind of admiration as he had shown in his encounter with Diogenes, even though his actual conduct remained unchanged ("the exact opposite of what he then professed to admire"). Classifying the world of ideas in terms of shared racial characteristics of proximate populations is hardly a wonderful basis for categorizing the history of thought.

Nor does it take into account how intellectual influences travel or how parallel developments take place in a world linked by ideas rather than by race. There is nothing to indicate that the Greek experience in democratic governance had much immediate impact in the countries to the west of Greece and Rome--in, say, France or Germany or Britain. By contrast, some of the contemporary cities in Asia--in Iran, Bactria, and India--incorporated elements of democracy in municipal governance, largely under Greek influence. For several centuries after the time of Alexander, for example, the city of Susa in southwest Iran had an elected council, a popular assembly, and magistrates who were proposed by the council and elected by the assembly. There is also considerable evidence of elements of democratic governance at the local level in India and Bactria over that period.

It must be noted, of course, that such overtures were almost entirely confined to local governance, but it would nevertheless be a mistake to dismiss these early experiences of participatory governance as insignificant for the global history of democracy. The seriousness of this neglect has to be assessed in light of the particular importance of local politics in the history of democracy, including the city-republics that would emerge more than a millennium later in Italy, from the eleventh century onward. As Benjamin I. Schwartz pointed out in his great book The World of Thought in Ancient China, "Even in the history of the West, with its memories of Athenian 'democracy,' the notion that democracy cannot be implemented in large territorial

states requiring highly centralized power remained accepted wisdom as late as Montesquieu and Rousseau."

Indeed, these histories often play inspirational roles and prevent a sense of distance from democratic ideas. When India became independent in 1947, the political discussions that led to a fully democratic constitution, making India the largest democracy in the twentieth century, not only included references to Western experiences in democracy but also recalled India's own traditions. Jawaharlal Nehru put particular emphasis on the tolerance of heterodoxy and pluralism in the political rules of Indian emperors such as Ashoka and Akbar. The encouragement of public discussion by those tolerant political orders was recollected and evocatively linked to India's modern multi-party constitution.

There was also, as it happens, considerable discussion in the early years of Indian independence of whether the organization of "the ancient polity of India" could serve as the model for India's constitution in the twentieth century, though that idea was actually even less plausible than would have been any attempt to construct the constitution of the United States in 1776 in line with Athenian practices of the fifth century B.C.E. The chair of the committee that drafted the Indian constitution, B.R. Ambedkar, went in some detail into the history of local democratic governance in India to assess whether it could fruitfully serve as a model for modern Indian democracy. Ambedkar's conclusion was that it should definitely not be given that role, particularly because localism generated "narrow-mindedness and communalism" (speaking personally, Ambedkar even asserted that "these village republics have been the ruination of India"). Yet even as he firmly rejected the possibility that democratic institutions from India's past could serve as appropriate contemporary models, Ambedkar did not fail to note the general relevance of the history of Indian public reasoning, and he particularly emphasized the expression of heterodox views and the historical criticism of the prevalence of inequality in India. There is a direct parallel here with Nelson Mandela's powerful invocation of Africa's own heritage of public reasoning in arguing for pluralist democracies in contemporary Africa.

III.

The established literature on the history of democracy is full of well-known contrasts between Plato and Aristotle, Marsilius of Padua and Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke, and so on. This is as it should be; but the large intellectual heritages of China, Japan, East and Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, Iran, the Middle East, and Africa have been almost entirely neglected in analyzing the reach of the ideal of public reasoning. This has not favored an adequately inclusive understanding of the nature and the power of democratic ideas as they are linked to constructive public deliberation.

The ideal of public reasoning is closely linked with two particular social practices that deserve specific attention: the tolerance of different points of view (along with the acceptability of agreeing to disagree) and the encouragement of public discussion (along with

endorsing the value of learning from others). Both tolerance and openness of public discussion are often seen as specific--and perhaps unique--features of Western tradition. How correct is this notion? Certainly, tolerance has by and large been a significant feature of modern Western politics (leaving out extreme aberrations like Nazi Germany and the intolerant administration of British or French or Portuguese empires in Asia and Africa). Still, there is hardly a great historical divide here of the kind that could separate out Western toleration from non-Western despotism. When the Jewish philosopher Maimonides was forced to emigrate from an intolerant Europe in the twelfth century, for example, he found a tolerant refuge in the Arab world and was given an honored and influential position in the court of Emperor Saladin in Cairo--the same Saladin who fought hard for Islam in the Crusades.

Maimonides's experience was not exceptional. Even though the contemporary world is full of examples of conflicts between Muslims and Jews, Muslim rulers in the Arab world and in medieval Spain had a long history of integrating Jews as secure members of the social community whose liberties--and sometimes leadership roles--were respected. As María Rosa Menocal notes in her recent book The Ornament of the World, the fact that Cordoba in Muslim-ruled Spain in the tenth century was "as serious a contender as Baghdad, perhaps more so, for the title of most civilized place on earth" was due to the joint influence of Caliph Abd al-Rahman III and his Jewish vizier Hasdai ibn Shaprut. Indeed, there is considerable evidence, as Menocal argues, that the position of Jews after the Muslim conquest "was in every respect an improvement, as they went from persecuted to protected minority."

Similarly, when in the 1590s the great Mughal emperor Akbar, with his belief in pluralism and in the constructive role of public discussions, was making his pronouncements in India on the need for tolerance and was busy arranging dialogues between people of different faiths (including Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsees, Jains, Jews, and even atheists), the inquisitions were still taking place in Europe with considerable vehemence. Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake for heresy in the Campo dei Fiori in Rome in 1600 even as Akbar was speaking on tolerance in Agra.

We must not fall into the trap of arguing that there was in general more tolerance in non-Western societies than in the West. For no such generalization can be made. There were great examples of tolerance as well as of intolerance on both sides of this allegedly profound division of the world. What needs to be corrected is the underresearched assertion of Western exceptionalism in the matter of tolerance; but there is no need to replace it with an equally arbitrary generalization of the opposite sort.

A similar point can be made about the tradition of public discussion. Again, the Greek and Roman heritage on this is particularly important for the history of public reasoning, but it was not unique in this respect in the ancient world. The importance attached to public deliberation by Buddhist intellectuals not only led to extensive communications on religious and secular subjects in India and in East

and Southeast Asia, but also produced some of the earliest open general meetings aimed specifically at settling disputes regarding different points of view. These Buddhist "councils," the first of which was held shortly after Gautama Buddha's death, were primarily concerned with resolving differences in religious principles and practices, but they dealt also with demands of social and civic duties, and they helped to establish the practice of open discussion on contentious issues.

The largest of these councils--the third--occurred, under the patronage of Emperor Ashoka in the third century B.C.E., in Pataliputra, then the capital of India, now called Patna (perhaps best known today as a source of a fine long-grain rice). Public discussion, without violence or even animosity, was particularly important for Ashoka's general belief in social deliberation, as is well reflected in the inscriptions that he placed on specially mounted stone pillars across India--and some outside it. The edict at Erragudi put the issue forcefully:

... the growth of essentials of Dharma [proper conduct] is possible in many ways. But its root lies in restraint in regard to speech, so that there should be no extolment of one's own sect or disparagement of other sects on inappropriate occasions, and it should be moderate even on appropriate occasions. On the contrary, other sects should be duly honoured in every way on all occasions.... If a person acts otherwise, he not only injures his own sect but also harms other sects. Truly, if a person extols his own sect and disparages other sects with a view to glorifying his own sect owing merely to his attachment to it, he injures his own sect very severely by acting in that way.

On the subject of public discussion and communication, it is also important to note that nearly every attempt at early printing in China, Korea, and Japan was undertaken by Buddhist technologists, with an interest in expanding communication. The first printed book in the world was a Chinese translation of an Indian Sanskrit treatise, later known as the "Diamond Sutra," done by a half-Indian and half-Turkish scholar called Kumarajeeva in the fifth century, which was printed in China four and half centuries later, in 868 C.E. The development of printing, largely driven by a commitment to propagate Buddhist perspectives (including compassion and benevolence), transformed the possibilities of public communication in general. Initially sought as a medium for spreading the Buddhist message, the innovation of printing was a momentous development in public communication that greatly expanded the opportunity of social deliberation.

The commitment of Buddhist scholars to expand communication in secular as well as religious subjects has considerable relevance for the global roots of democracy. Sometimes the communication took the form of a rebellious disagreement. Indeed, in the seventh century Fu-yi, a Confucian leader of an anti-Buddhist campaign, submitted the following complaint about Buddhists to the Tang emperor (almost paralleling the current official ire about the "indiscipline" of the

Falun Gong): "Buddhism infiltrated into China from Central Asia, under a strange and barbarous form, and as such, it was then less dangerous. But since the Han period the Indian texts began to be translated into Chinese. Their publicity began to adversely affect the faith of the Princes and filial piety began to degenerate. The people began to shave their heads and refused to bow their heads to the Princes and their ancestors." In other cases, the dialectics took the form of learning from each other. In fact, in the extensive scientific, mathematical, and literary exchanges between China and India during the first millennium C.E., Buddhist scholars played a major part.

In Japan in the early seventh century, the Buddhist Prince Shotoku, who was regent to his mother Empress Suiko, not only sent missions to China to bring back knowledge of art, architecture, astronomy, literature, and religion (including Taoist and Confucian texts in addition to Buddhist ones), but also introduced a relatively liberal constitution or kempo, known as "the constitution of seventeen articles," in 604 C.E. It insisted, much in the spirit of the Magna Carta (signed in England six centuries later), that "decisions on important matters should not be made by one person alone. They should be discussed with many." It also advised: "Nor let us be resentful when others differ from us. For all men have hearts, and each heart has its own leanings. Their right is our wrong, and our right is their wrong." Not surprisingly, many commentators have seen in this seventh-century constitution what Nakamura Hajime has called Japan's "first step of gradual development toward democracy."

There are, in fact, many manifestations of a firm commitment to public communication and associative reasoning that can be found in different places and times across the world. To take another illustration, which is of particular importance to science and culture, the great success of Arab civilization in the millennium following the emergence of Islam provides a remarkable example of indigenous creativity combined with openness to intellectual influences from elsewhere--often from people with very different religious beliefs and political systems. The Greek classics had a profound influence on Arab thinking, and, over a more specialized area, so did Indian mathematics. Even though no formal system of democratic governance was involved in these achievements, the excellence of what was achieved--the remarkable flourishing of Arab philosophy, literature, mathematics, and science--is a tribute not only to indigenous creativity but also to the glory of open public reasoning, which influences knowledge and technology as well as politics.

The idea behind such openness was well articulated by Imam Ali bin abi Taleb in the early seventh century, in his pronouncement that "no wealth can profit you more than the mind" and "no isolation can be more desolate than conceit." These and other such proclamations are quoted for their relevance to the contemporary world by the excellent "Arab Human Development Report 2002" of the United Nations. The thesis of European exceptionalism, by contrast, invites the Arabs, like the rest of the non-Western world, to forget their own heritage of public reasoning.

IV.

To ignore the centrality of public reasoning in the idea of democracy not only distorts and diminishes the history of democratic ideas, it also detracts attention from the interactive processes through which a democracy functions and on which its success depends. The neglect of the global roots of public reasoning, which is a big loss in itself, goes with the undermining of an adequate understanding of the place and the role of democracy in the contemporary world. Even with the expansion of adult franchise and fair elections, free and uncensored deliberation is important for people to be able to determine what they must demand, what they should criticize, and how they ought to vote.

Consider the much-discussed proposition that famines do not occur in democracies, but only in imperial colonies (as used to happen in British India), or in military dictatorships (as in Ethiopia, Sudan, or Somalia, in recent decades), or in one-party states (as in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, or China from 1958 to 1961, or Cambodia in the 1970s, or North Korea in the immediate past). It is hard for a government to withstand public criticism when a famine occurs. This is due not merely to the fear of losing elections, but also to the prospective consequences of public censure when newspapers and other media are independent and uncensored and opposition parties are allowed to pester those in office. The proportion of people affected by famines is always rather small (hardly ever more than 10 percent of the total population), so for a famine to become a political nightmare for the government it is necessary to generate public sympathy through the sharing of information and open public discussion.

Even though India was experiencing famines until its independence in 1947--the last one, the Bengal famine of 1943, killed between two and three million people--these catastrophes stopped abruptly when a multi-party democracy was established. China, by contrast, had the largest famine in recorded history between 1958 and 1961, in which it is estimated that between twenty-three and thirty million people died, following the debacle of collectivization in the so-called "Great Leap Forward." Still, the working of democracy, which is almost effortlessly effective in preventing conspicuous disasters such as famines, is often far less successful in politicizing the nastiness of regular but non-extreme undernourishment and ill health. India has had no problem in avoiding famines with timely intervention, but it has been much harder to generate adequate public interest in less immediate and less dramatic deprivations, such as the quiet presence of endemic but non-extreme hunger across the country and the low standard of basic health care.

While democracy is not without success in India, its achievements are still far short of what public reasoning can do in a democratic society if it addresses less conspicuous deprivations such as endemic hunger. A similar criticism can also be made about the protection of minority rights, which majority rule does not guarantee until and unless public discussion gives these rights enough political visibility and status to produce general public support. This

certainly did not happen in the state of Gujarat last year, when politically engineered anti-Muslim riots led to unprecedented Hindu sectarian militancy and an electoral victory for the Hindu-chauvinist state government. How scrupulously secularism and minority rights will be guarded in India will depend on the reach and the vigor of public discussion on this subject. If democracy is construed not merely in terms of public balloting, but also in the more general form of public reasoning, then what is required is a strengthening of democracy, not a weakening of it.

To point to the need for more probing and more vigorous public reasoning even in countries that formally have democratic institutions must not be seen as a counsel of despair. People can and do respond to generally aired concerns and appeals to tolerance and humanity, and this is part of the role of public reasoning. Indeed, it is not easy to dismiss the possibility that to a limited extent just such a response may be occurring in India in the wake of the Gujarat riots and the victory of Hindu sectarianism in the Gujarat elections in December 2002. The engineered success in Gujarat did not help the Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, in the state elections in the rest of India that followed the Gujarat elections. The BJP lost in all four state elections held in early 2003, but the defeat that was particularly significant occurred in the state of Himachal Pradesh, where the party had actually been in office but was routed this time, winning only sixteen seats against the Congress Party's forty. Moreover, a Muslim woman from the Congress Party won the mayoral election in Ahmadabad, where some of the worst anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat had occurred only a few months earlier. Much will depend on the breadth and the energy of public reasoning in the future--an issue that takes us back to the arguments presented by exponents of public reasoning in India's past, including Ashoka and Akbar, whose analyses remain thoroughly relevant today.

The complex role of public reasoning can also be seen in the comparisons between China's and India's achievements in the field of health care and longevity over recent decades. This happens to be a subject that has interested Chinese and Indian public commentators over millennia. While Faxian (Fa-Hien), a fifth-century Chinese visitor who spent ten years in India, wrote admiringly in effusive detail about the arrangements for public health care in Pataliputra, a later visitor who came to India in the seventh century, Yi Jing (I-Ching), argued in a more competitive vein that "in the healing arts of acupuncture and cautery and the skill of feeling the pulse, China has never been surpassed [by India]; the medicament for prolonging life is only found in China." There was also considerable discussion in India on chinachar--Chinese practice--in different fields when the two countries were linked by Buddhism.

By the middle of the twentieth century, China and India had about the same life expectancy at birth, around forty-five years or so. But post-revolution China, with its public commitment to improve health care and education (a commitment that was carried over from its days of revolutionary struggle), brought a level of dedication in radically enhancing health care that the more moderate Indian administration could not at all match. By the time the economic

reforms were introduced in China in 1979, China had a lead of thirteen years or more over India in longevity, with the Chinese life expectancy at sixty-seven years, while India's was less than fifty-four years. Still, even though the radical economic reforms introduced in China in 1979 ushered in a period of extraordinary economic growth, the government slackened on the public commitment to health care, and in particular replaced automatic and free health insurance by the need to buy private insurance at one's own cost (except when provided by one's employer, which happens only in a small minority of cases). This largely retrograde movement in the coverage of health care met with little public resistance (as it undoubtedly would have in a multi-party democracy), even though it almost certainly had a role in slowing down the progress of Chinese longevity. In India, by contrast, unsatisfactory health services have come more and more under public scrutiny and general condemnation, with some favorable changes being forced on the services offered.

Despite China's much faster rate of growth since the economic reforms, the rate of expansion of life expectancy in India has been about three times as fast, on the average, as that in China. China's life expectancy, which is now just about seventy years, compares with India's figure of sixty-three years, so that the lifeexpectancy gap in favor of China has been nearly halved, to seven years, over the last two decades. But note must be taken of the fact that it gets increasingly harder to expand life expectancy further as the absolute level rises, and it could be argued that perhaps China has now reached a level at which further expansion would be exceptionally difficult. Yet this explanation does not work, since China's life expectancy of seventy years is still very far below the figures for many countries in the world--indeed, even parts of India.

At the time of the economic reforms, when China had a life expectancy of about sixty-seven years, the Indian state of Kerala had a similar figure. By now, however, Kerala's life expectancy of seventy-four years is considerably above China's seventy years. Going further, if we look at specific points of vulnerability, the infant-mortality rate in China has fallen very slowly since the economic reforms, whereas it has continued to fall extremely sharply in Kerala. While Kerala had roughly the same infant mortality rate as China--thirty-seven per thousand--in 1979, Kerala's present rate, between thirteen and fourteen per thousand, is considerably less than half of China's thirty per thousand (where it has stagnated over the last decade). It appears that Kerala, with its background of egalitarian politics, has been able to benefit further from continued public reasoning protected by a democratic system. The latter on its own would seem to have helped India to narrow the gap with China quite sharply, despite the failings of the Indian health services that are widely discussed in the press. Indeed, the fact that so much is known--and in such detail--about the inadequacies of Indian health care from criticisms in the press is itself a contribution to improving the existing state of affairs.

The informational role of democracy, working mainly through open public discussion, can be pivotally important. It is the limitation of this informational feature that has come most sharply to attention

in the context of the recent SARS epidemic. Although cases of SARS first appeared in southern China in November 2002 and caused many fatalities, information about the deadly new disease was kept under wraps until this April. Indeed, it was only when that highly infectious disease started spreading to Hong Kong and Beijing that the news had to be released, and by then the epidemic had already gone beyond the possibility of isolation and local elimination. The lack of open public discussion evidently played a critical part in the spread of the SARS epidemic in particular, but the general issue has a much wider relevance.

V.

The value of public reasoning applies to reasoning about democracy itself. It is good that the practices of democracy have been sharply scrutinized in the literature on world affairs, for there are identifiable deficiencies in the performance of many countries that have the standard democratic institutions. Not only is public discussion of these deficiencies an effective means of trying to remedy them, but this is exactly how democracy in the form of public reasoning is meant to function. In this sense, the defects of democracy demand more democracy, not less.

The alternative--trying to cure the defects of democratic practice through authoritarianism and the suppression of public reasoning--increases the vulnerability of a country to sporadic disasters (including, in many cases, famine), and also to the whittling away of previously secured gains through a lack of public vigilance (as seems to have happened, to some extent, in Chinese health care). There is also a genuine loss of political freedom and restrictions of civil rights in even the best-performing authoritarian regimes, such as Singapore or pre-democratic South Korea; and, furthermore, there is no guarantee that the suppression of democracy would make, say, India more like Singapore than like Sudan or Afghanistan, or more like South Korea than like North Korea.

Seeing democracy in terms of public reasoning, as "government by discussion," also helps us to identify the far-reaching historical roots of democratic ideas across the world. The apparent Western modesty that takes the form of a humble reluctance to promote "Western ideas of democracy" in the non-Western world includes an imperious appropriation of a global heritage as exclusively the West's own. The self-doubt with regard to "pushing" Western ideas on non-Western societies is combined with the absence of doubt in viewing democracy as a quintessentially Western idea, an immaculate Western conception.

This misappropriation results from gross neglect of the intellectual history of non-Western societies, but also from the conceptual defect in seeing democracy primarily in terms of balloting, rather than in the broader perspective of public reasoning. A fuller understanding of the demands of democracy and of the global history of democratic ideas may contribute substantially to better political practice today. It may also help to remove some of the artificial cultural fog that obscures the appraisal of current affairs.