The Psychology of Democracy, by Fathali M. Moghaddam

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Democracy is vulnerable today. It requires courage to defend it in the face of narratives stressing its lapses. The rise of China has led some to argue that economic growth can best be achieved through non-democratic governance. The outcome of the recent EU referendum in the United Kingdom has been called democratic deficit. The Chilcot Report (Committee of Privy Councillors, 2016) and the 'war on terror' show how democracies can be misled by their own leaders. Both the far right and religious extremists are capitalizing on the prevailing sense of despair about democracy. Alternatives such as epistocracy are being offered. Amid these narratives, Moghaddam, in his book *The Psychology of Democracy*, wants to demonstrate that democracy remains our best hope and that we need to work to make it better, not abandon it. Does he succeed?

For Terry Eagleton (2000), the point in having a utopia is not to go elsewhere, but to use elsewhere as a reflection on where you are. Moghaddam creates the notion of *actualized democracy* as a utopia to serve this purpose of critique of the existing state of our democracies. The book belongs to the tradition of exploring conditions of democracy that goes back to John Dewey's (1963 [1916]) seminal work *Democracy and Education.* Like Dewey, Moghaddam sees critical thinking in the general population as central to democracy. His book is distinctive within that tradition in that its focus is personal and psychological – how we think and act – rather than institutional, with its central question being: what are the psychological processes underlying political behaviour leading towards actualized democratic societies?

Three assumptions and empirical claims frame the book's research and normative directions. First, that though 'contemporary democracies have a great deal of room for improvement' (3), this form of governance remains the most desirable. In support of this, the author provides commonly made arguments relating to matters such as freedom of expression and judicial independence. These arguments can be challenged, but for the author democracy is now like romantic love – 'something the young in particular aspire to, an ideal that many people assume is the right of every human' (34). This left me with a sense that a more powerful defence of democracy against its detractors should have been provided. The second assumption is that it is more accurate to see the countries of the world on a continuum from pure dictatorship to actualized democracy rather than the common approach that divides countries into democratic and non-democratic categories. This is an insightful idea. The point here is that the ends of the continuum are not found anywhere; there is neither a pure democracy nor a total dictatorship. On the one hand, even the most advanced democracies, such as those in Switzerland and in Scandinavian countries, are far from being perfect and are only relatively more democratic. This means that the imaginary point of actualized democracy can serve as utopic to assess and critique the varieties of actual democracies. On the other hand, even societies seen as highly dictatorial carry in their histories and cultures elements and traditions that can serve as potential sources of democratic outlook. This point is well illustrated through the example of contemporary Iran. The continuum also means that over time countries can slide up or down the scale; democracy is fragile. The third assumption is that political institutions are embedded in cultural and historical conditions. Through appropriate socialization, including education, people can acquire elements of psychological make-up and identity that are conducive for a society to move towards a state of actualized democracy. The book's main purpose is to develop and defend this final assumption. Sprinkled throughout the chapters are discussions about the history of democracy, the additive and subtractive effects of globalization on democracy, and the role of education in creating democratic citizens.

The book's organization reflects these frames. In the first part, consisting of two chapters, the author provides a theoretical backdrop to his study by discussing what it means to approach democracy from a psychological point of view. His main argument is that for democracy to thrive, societies need to have people with characteristics of democratic citizens. These individual-level characteristics range from a curiosity to learn about others to a willingness to admit when wrong (51). These characteristics are formed in a psychosocial context that shapes thinking, identity, and self-image; perception of leadership; stratification of power; and ideas about justice. This part of the book also argues that we have a variety of democratic forms, from the UK to India and from Switzerland to the USA, each rooted in its particular cultural and historical trajectory. The second part, the longest in the book, explores nine conditions under which actualized democracy can be achieved. These include, among others, rule of law, a responsive leadership, open-mindedness, and freedom of expression. A chapter is dedicated to each of these conditions. Central to these conditions is the quality of leadership, whose pro-democracy attitude is key to the development of these conditions. The third part explores the idea of democratic actualization, 'a point of departure for societies to grow in different ways' (19).

Although seeking to examine the ideal conditions for democracy, the author is also aware of the challenges to achieving such an aim. This is strongly indicated in the discussion of globalization, which observes the tension between democracy at national levels and the forces of global capitalism, which are fast replacing the democratic citizen with the consumer citizen. Reminiscent of Benjamin Barber's (1996) *Jihad vs McWorld*, Moghaddam writes about two main global forces undermining democracy: 'a wide assortment of theology-driven forces that are prodictatorship' and 'global business organisations primarily concerned with achieving maximum ingroup profits' (32). However, in line with the overall tone of the book, the discussion of globalization also stresses the rising consciousness of human rights, freedom, and people-to-people contact as equally significant outcomes of globalization.

Limitation of space precludes me from going over the nine conditions for democracy the book discusses in Part Two but I will briefly mention two of them: rule of law (Chapter 5) and freedom of speech (Chapter 7).

Although the idea of the rule of law can be traced back to Cicero and Aristotle, as well as to the Muslim tradition, in its modern formulation it became popular in the twentieth century. In more recent decades it has become a mantra within the international discourse about governance and serves to categorize societies. Moghaddam rightly complicates the idea by insisting that laws can be unjust, made to perpetuate unfair power arrangements, and limit equal opportunities. The recent Panama Papers tax revelations show how the rule of law can be a cover for morally questionable practices. It is therefore important that the laws themselves are just. Here we see a tension in the author's methodology. Is the rule of (just) law a condition of democracy or an outcome of democracy?

Another important condition for democracy explored by the author is freedom of speech. This presumes a person capable of bearing freedom, an autonomous person. The author discusses recent criticisms of autonomy, particularly from the behaviourist camp. The Enlightenment idea of autonomy came under critique almost from the start but has remained resilient. Moghaddam could have done more to signpost recent discussions on autonomy, which have led to its reconceptualization in light of communitarian and feminist critiques, leading to what is called the relational conception of autonomy. The chapter's focus is rather an insightful analysis of the impediments to free speech created by mass media, controlled by a particular section of society. In particular, it explores the impact of legal rulings in the USA allowing unlimited media campaigns by the rich.

Given the important role of socialization in the making of a democratic citizen and in bringing about the conditions for actualized democracy, the book could have benefited from an examination of the role of philosophy, not as a specialized subject but as part of public education. Many of the characteristics that Moghaddam sees as being important for democratic citizens, from empathetic listening to critical thinking, are the cornerstone of learning to philosophize. Further, in discussing the challenges to the achievement of actualized democracy, the author could have paid more attention to factors inhibiting its realization. In this regard, the tensions between democracy and capitalism needed to be explored in greater depth, with consideration given to how to address these tensions.

The book carries an important message of hope among the narratives of decline and fear that surround us. It may not persuade everyone sitting on the fence about the value of democracy but it has the potential to continue the debate and provide resistance to anti-democratic forces.

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