

ANTHONY
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RUNAWAY
WORLD

How Globalization Is
Reshaping our Lives

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Risk

July 1998 was possibly the hottest month in world history and 1998 as a whole may have been the hottest year. Heat waves caused havoc in many areas of the northern hemisphere. In Eilat, in Israel, for example, temperatures rose to almost 46 degrees centigrade, while water consumption in the country went up by 40 per cent. Texas, in the United States, experienced temperatures not far short of this. For the first eight months of the year, each month topped the record for that month. A short while later, however, in some of the areas affected by the heat waves, snow fell in places that had never seen it before.

Are temperature shifts like this the result of human interference with the world's climate? We can't be sure, but we have to admit the possibility that they might be,

together with the increased numbers of hurricanes, typhoons and storms that have been noted in recent years. As a consequence of global industrial development, we may have altered the world's climate, and damaged a great deal more of our earthly habitat besides. We don't know what further changes will result, or the dangers they will bring in their train.

We can make sense of these issues by saying that they are all bound up with *risk*. I hope to persuade you that this apparently simple notion unlocks some of the most basic characteristics of the world in which we now live.

At first sight, the concept of risk might seem to have no specific relevance to our times, as compared to previous ages. After all, haven't people always had to face their fair share of risks? Life for the majority in the European Middle Ages was nasty, brutish and short – as it is for many in poorer areas of the world now.

But here we come across something really interesting. Apart from some marginal contexts, in the Middle Ages there was no concept of risk. Nor, so far as I have been able to find out, was there in most other traditional cultures. The idea of risk appears to have taken hold in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and was first coined by Western explorers as they set off on their voyages across the world. The word 'risk' seems to have come into English through Spanish or Portuguese, where it was used to refer to sailing into uncharted waters. Originally, in other words, it had an orientation

to space. Later, it became transferred to time, as used in banking and investment, to mean calculation of the probable consequences of investment decisions for borrowers and lenders. It subsequently came to refer to a wide range of other situations of uncertainty.

The notion of risk, I should point out, is inseparable from the ideas of probability and uncertainty. A person can't be said to be running a risk where an outcome is 100 per cent certain.

There is an old joke that makes this point rather neatly. A man jumps from the top of a hundred-storey skyscraper. As he passes each floor, on his way down, the people inside hear him saying: 'so far so good', 'so far so good', 'so far so good' ... He acts as though he is making a risk calculation, but the outcome is in fact determined.

Traditional cultures didn't have a concept of risk because they didn't need one. Risk isn't the same as hazard or danger. Risk refers to hazards that are actively assessed in relation to future possibilities. It comes into wide usage only in a society that is future oriented – which sees the future precisely as a territory to be conquered or colonised. Risk presumes a society that actively tries to break away from its past – the prime characteristic, indeed, of modern industrial civilisation.

All previous cultures, including the great early civilisations of the world, such as Rome, or traditional China, have lived primarily in the past. They have used the ideas of fate, luck or the will of the gods where we now tend

to substitute risk. In traditional cultures, if someone meets with an accident or, conversely, prospers – well, it is just one of those things, or it is what the gods and spirits intended. Some cultures have denied the idea of chance happenings altogether. The Azande, an African tribe, believe that when a misfortune befalls someone it is the result of sorcery. If an individual falls ill, for example, it is because an enemy has been practising black magic.

Such views, of course, don't disappear completely with modernisation. Magical notions, concepts of fate and cosmology still have a hold. But often they continue on as superstitions, in which people only half believe, and follow in a somewhat embarrassed way. They use them to back up decisions of a more calculative nature. Gamblers, and this includes gamblers on the stock exchange, mostly have rituals that psychologically reduce the uncertainties they must confront. The same applies to many risks that we can't help running, since being alive at all is by definition a risky business. It isn't in any way surprising that people still consult astrologers, especially at vital points of their lives.

Yet acceptance of risk is also the condition of excitement and adventure – think of the pleasures some people get from the risks of gambling, driving fast, sexual adventurism, or the plunge of a fairground roller-coaster. Moreover, a positive embrace of risk is the very source of that energy which creates wealth in a modern economy.

The two aspects of risk – its negative and positive sides – appear from the early days of modern industrial society. Risk is the mobilising dynamic of a society bent on change, that wants to determine its own future rather than leaving it to religion, tradition, or the vagaries of nature. Modern capitalism differs from all previous forms of economic system in terms of its attitudes towards the future. Previous types of market enterprise were irregular or partial. The activities of merchants and traders, for example, never made much dent in the basic structure of traditional civilisations, which all remained heavily agricultural and rural.

Modern capitalism embeds itself into the future by calculating future profit and loss, and therefore risk, as a continuous process. This couldn't be done until the invention of double entry bookkeeping in the fifteenth century in Europe, which made it possible to track in a precise way how money can be invested to make more money. Many risks, of course, such as those affecting health, we do wish to reduce as far as we can. This is why, from its origins, the notion of risk is accompanied by the rise of insurance. We shouldn't think only of private or commercial insurance here. The welfare state, whose development can be traced back to the Elizabethan poor laws in England, is essentially a risk management system. It is designed to protect against hazards that were once treated as at the disposition of the gods – sickness, disablement, job loss and old age.

Insurance is the baseline against which people are prepared to take risks. It is the basis of security where fate has been ousted by an active engagement with the future. Like the idea of risk, modern forms of insurance began with seafaring. The earliest marine insurances were written in the sixteenth century. A London company first underwrote an overseas risk in 1782. Lloyds of London soon after took a leading position in the emerging insurance industry, a position that it has sustained for two centuries.

Insurance is conceivable only where we believe in a humanly engineered future. It is one of the means of doing that engineering. Insurance is about providing security, but it is actually parasitic upon risk and people's attitudes towards it. Those who provide insurance, whether in the shape of private insurance or state welfare systems, are essentially simply redistributing risk. If someone takes out fire insurance against his or her house burning down, the risk doesn't go away. The householder trades off the risk to the insurer in exchange for payment. The trading and off-loading of risk isn't just a casual feature of a capitalist economy. Capitalism is actually unthinkable and unworkable without it.

For these reasons, the idea of risk has always been involved in modernity, but I want to argue that in the current period risk assumes a new and peculiar importance. Risk was supposed to be a way of regulating

the future, of normalising it and bringing it under our dominion. Things haven't turned out that way. Our very attempts to control the future tend to rebound upon us, forcing us to look for different ways of relating to uncertainty.

The best way to explain what is going on is to make a distinction between two types of risk. One I shall call external risk. External risk is risk experienced as coming from the outside, from the fixities of tradition or nature. I want to distinguish this from manufactured risk, by which I mean risk created by the very impact of our developing knowledge upon the world. Manufactured risk refers to risk situations which we have very little historical experience of confronting. Most environmental risks, such as those connected with global warming, fall into this category. They are directly influenced by the intensifying globalisation I discussed in Chapter 1.

The best way I can clarify the distinction between the two kinds of risk is as follows. In all traditional cultures, one could say, and in industrial society right up to the threshold of the present day, human beings worried about the risks coming from external nature – from bad harvests, floods, plagues or famines. At a certain point, however – very recently in historical terms – we started worrying less about what nature can do to us, and more about what we have done to nature. This marks the transition from the predominance of external risk to that of manufactured risk.

Who are the 'we' here, doing the worrying? Well, I think now it is all of us, regardless of whether we are in the richer or poorer areas of the world. At the same time, it is obvious that there is a division that by and large separates the affluent regions from the rest. Many more 'traditional' risks, of the sort just mentioned – such as the risk of famine when the harvest is bad – still exist in poorer countries, overlapping with the new risks.

Our society lives after the end of nature. The end of nature doesn't mean, obviously, that the physical world or physical processes cease to exist. It refers to the fact that there are few aspects of our surrounding material environment that haven't been in some way affected by human intervention. Much of what used to be natural isn't completely natural any more, although we can't always be sure where the one stops and the other begins. In 1998 there were big floods in China, in which many people lost their lives. The flooding of the major rivers has been a recurrent part of Chinese history. Were these particular floods more of the same, or were they influenced by global climate change? No one knows, but there are some unusual features of the floods that suggest their causes were not wholly natural.

Manufactured risk doesn't only concern nature – or what used to be nature. It penetrates into other areas of life too. Take, for example, marriage and the family, now undergoing profound changes in the industrial countries and to some extent world-wide. Two or three

generations ago, when people got married, they knew what it was they were doing. Marriage, largely fixed by tradition and custom, was akin to a state of nature – as of course remains true in many countries. Where traditional ways of doing things are dissolving, however, when people marry or form relationships, there is an important sense in which they don't know what they are doing, because the institutions of marriage and the family have changed so much. Here individuals are striking out afresh, like pioneers. It is inevitable in such situations, whether they know it or not, that they start thinking more and more in terms of risk. They have to confront personal futures that are much more open than in the past, with all the opportunities and hazards this brings.

As manufactured risk expands, there is a new riskiness to risk. The rise of the idea of risk, as I pointed out earlier, was closely tied to the possibility of calculation. Most forms of insurance are based directly upon this connection. Every time someone steps into a car, for instance, one can calculate that person's chances of being involved in an accident. This is actuarial prediction – there is a long time-series to go on. Situations of manufactured risk aren't like this. We simply don't know what the level of risk is, and in many cases we won't know for sure until it is too late.

Not long ago (1996) was the tenth anniversary of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear station in the

Ukraine. No one knows what its long-term consequences will be. There might or might not be a stored-up disaster to health due to happen some while from now. Exactly the same is true of the BSE episode in the UK – the outbreak of so-called mad cow disease – in terms of its implications for humans. At the moment, we can't be sure whether at some point many more people than at present will fall ill.

Or consider where we stand with world climate change. Most scientists well versed in the field believe that global warming is occurring and that measures should be taken against it. Yet only in the mid-1970s, orthodox scientific opinion was that the world was in a phase of global cooling. Much the same evidence that was deployed to support the hypothesis of global cooling is now brought into play to bolster that of global warming – heat waves, cold spells, unusual types of weather. Is global warming occurring, and does it have human origins? Probably – but we won't, and can't, be completely sure until it is too late.

In these circumstances, there is a new moral climate of politics, marked by a push and pull between accusations of scaremongering on the one hand, and of cover-ups on the other. If anyone – government official, scientific expert or researcher – takes a given risk seriously, he or she must proclaim it. It must be widely publicised because people must be persuaded that the risk is real – a fuss must be made about it. Yet if a fuss is indeed

created and the risk turns out to be minimal, those involved will be accused of scaremongering.

Suppose, however, that the authorities initially decide that the risk is not very great, as the British government did in the case of contaminated beef. In this instance, the government first of all said: we've got the backing of scientists here; there isn't a significant risk, and anyone who wants to can continue eating beef without any worries. In such situations, if events turn out otherwise – as in fact they did – the authorities will be accused of a cover-up – as indeed they were.

Things are even more complex than these examples suggest. Paradoxically, scaremongering may be necessary to reduce risks we face – yet if it is successful, it appears as just that, scaremongering. The case of AIDS is an example. Governments and experts made great public play with the risks associated with unsafe sex, to get people to change their sexual behaviour. Partly as a consequence, in the developed countries, AIDS did not spread as much as was originally predicted. Then the response was: why were you scaring everyone like that? Yet as we know from its continuing global spread, they were – and are – entirely right to do so.

This sort of paradox becomes routine in contemporary society, but there is no easily available way of dealing with it. For as I mentioned earlier, in most situations of manufactured risk, even whether there are risks at all is likely to be disputed. We cannot know beforehand

when we are actually scaremongering and when we are not.

Our relationship to science and technology today is different from that characteristic of earlier times. In Western society, for some two centuries, science functioned as a sort of tradition. Scientific knowledge was supposed to overcome tradition, but actually in a way became one in its own right. It was something that most people respected, but was external to their activities. Lay people 'took' opinions from the experts.

The more science and technology intrude into our lives, and do so on a global level, the less this perspective holds. Most of us – including government authorities and politicians – have, and have to have, a much more active or engaged relationship with science and technology than used to be the case.

We cannot simply 'accept' the findings which scientists produce, if only because scientists so frequently disagree with one another, particularly in situations of manufactured risk. And everyone now recognises the essentially mobile character of science. Whenever someone decides what to eat, what to have for breakfast, whether to drink decaffeinated or ordinary coffee, that person takes a decision in the context of conflicting and changeable scientific and technological information.

Consider red wine. As with other alcoholic drinks, red wine was once thought harmful to health. Research then indicated that drinking red wine in reasonable

quantities protects against heart disease. Subsequently it was found that any form of alcohol will do, but it is protective only for people above age 40. Who knows what the next set of findings will show?

Some say that the most effective way to cope with the rise of manufactured risk is to limit responsibility by adopting the so-called 'precautionary principle'. The notion of the precautionary principle first emerged in Germany in the early 1980s, in the context of the ecological debates that were carried on there. At its simplest, it proposes that action on environmental issues (and, by inference, other forms of risk) should be taken even though there is insecure scientific evidence about them. Thus in the 1980s, in several European countries, programmes were initiated to counter acid rain, whereas in Britain lack of conclusive evidence was used to justify inactivity about this and other pollution problems too.

Yet the precautionary principle isn't always helpful or even applicable as a means of coping with problems of risk and responsibility. The precept of 'staying close to nature', or of limiting innovation rather than embracing it, can't always apply. The reason is that the balance of benefits and dangers from scientific and technological advance, and other forms of social change too, is imponderable. Take as an example the controversy over genetically modified foods. Genetically modified crops are already growing on 35 million hectares of land across the world – an area 1.5 times the size of Britain. Most are

being grown in North America and China. Crops include soya, maize, cotton and potatoes.

No more obvious situation could be found where nature is no longer nature. The risks involve a number of unknowns – or, if I can put it this way, known unknowns, because the world has a pronounced tendency to surprise us. There may be other consequences that no one has yet anticipated. One type of risk is that the crops may carry medium- or long-term health hazards. After all, a good deal of gene technology is essentially new, different from older methods of cross-breeding.

Another possibility is that genes incorporated into crops to increase resistance to pests might spread to other plants – creating 'super weeds'. This in turn could pose a threat to biodiversity in the environment.

Since pressure to grow, and consume, genetically modified crops is partly driven by sheer commercial interests, wouldn't it be sensible to impose a global ban on them? Even supposing such a ban were feasible, things – as ever – are not so simple. The intensive agriculture widely practised today is not indefinitely sustainable. It uses large amounts of chemical fertilisers and insecticides, destructive of the environment. We can't go back to more traditional modes of farming and still hope to feed the world's population. Bioengineered crops could reduce the use of chemical pollutants, and hence help resolve these problems.

Whichever way you look at it, we are caught up in risk management. With the spread of manufactured risk, governments can't pretend such management isn't their business. And they need to collaborate, since very few new-style risks have anything to do with the borders of nations.

But neither, as ordinary individuals, can we ignore these new risks – or wait for definitive scientific evidence to arrive. As consumers, each of us has to decide whether to try to avoid genetically modified products or not. These risks, and the dilemmas surrounding them, have entered deeply into our everyday lives.

Let me move towards some conclusions and at the same time try to make sure my arguments are clear. Our age is not more dangerous – not more risky – than those of earlier generations, but the balance of risks and dangers has shifted. We live in a world where hazards created by ourselves are as, or more, threatening than those that come from the outside. Some of these are genuinely catastrophic, such as global ecological risk, nuclear proliferation or the meltdown of the world economy. Others affect us as individuals much more directly, for instance those involved in diet, medicine or even marriage.

An era such as ours will inevitably breed religious revivalism and diverse New Age philosophies, which turn against a scientific outlook. Some ecological thinkers have become hostile to science, and even to rational thought more generally, because of ecological

risks. This isn't an attitude that makes much sense. We wouldn't even know about these risks without scientific analysis. However, our relationship to science, for reasons already given, won't and can't be the same as in previous times.

We do not currently possess institutions which allow us to monitor technological change, nationally or globally. The BSE debacle in Britain and elsewhere might have been avoided if a public dialogue had been established about technological change and its problematic consequences. More public means of engaging with science and technology wouldn't do away with the quandary of scaremongering versus cover-ups, but might allow us to reduce some of its more damaging consequences.

Finally, there can be no question of merely taking a negative attitude towards risk. Risk always needs to be disciplined, but active risk-taking is a core element of a dynamic economy and an innovative society. Living in a global age means coping with a diversity of new situations of risk. We may need quite often to be bold rather than cautious in supporting scientific innovation or other forms of change. After all, one root of the term 'risk' in the original Portuguese means 'to dare'.

Democracy

On 9 November 1989, I was in Berlin, in what was then West Germany. At the meeting I had come to take part in, some of those present were from East Berlin. One such person, who was away that afternoon, later came back in a state of some excitement. He had been in the East, and was told that the Berlin Wall was on the point of being opened.

A small group of us got down there very quickly. Ladders were being put against it and we started to climb up. But we were pushed back by television crews who had just arrived on the scene. They had to go up first, they said, so that they could film us scaling the ladders and arriving at the top. They even persuaded some people to go back down and climb up twice, to make sure they had good television footage.

Thus is history made in the closing years of the twentieth century. Television not only gets there first, but also stages the spectacle. In a way, as I shall go on to argue, the television crews had the right to push themselves to the front. For television had an important role in making the opening of the Wall happen, as it did more generally in the transformations of 1989 in Eastern Europe. The driving force of the 1989 revolutions was democracy or self-rule. And the spread of democracy, I shall try to show, has been strongly influenced in the recent period by the advance of global communications.

Democracy is perhaps the most powerful energising idea of the twentieth century. There are few states in the world today that don't call themselves democratic. The former Soviet Union and its East European dependencies labelled themselves 'people's democracies', as communist China continues to do. Virtually the only countries that are explicitly non-democratic are the last remaining semi-feudal monarchies, such as Saudi Arabia – and even these are hardly untouched by democratic currents.

What is democracy? The issue is a contentious one, and many different interpretations have been offered. I shall mean by it the following. Democracy is a system involving effective competition between political parties for positions of power. In a democracy, there are regular and fair elections, in which all members of the population may take part. These rights of democratic

participation go along with civil liberties – freedom of expression and discussion, together with the freedom to form and join political groups or associations.

Democracy isn't an all or nothing thing. There can be different forms, as well as different levels, of democratisation. Democracy in Britain and the United States, for instance, has contrasting qualities. A British traveller in the US once enquired of an American companion: 'How can you bear to be governed by people you wouldn't dream of inviting to dinner?', to which the American replied, 'How can you bear to be governed by people who wouldn't dream of inviting you to dinner?'

Everyone is a democrat now, but it certainly wasn't always so. Democratic ideas were fiercely resisted by established elites and ruling groups in the nineteenth century, and often treated with derision. Democracy was the inspiring ideal of the American and French revolutions, but for a long while its hold was limited. Only a minority of the population had the vote. Even some of the most fervent advocates of democratic government, such as the political philosopher John Stuart Mill, argued that limitations should be imposed on it. Mill recommended that some of the electorate should have more votes than others, so that in his words, the 'wiser and talented' have more influence than the 'ignorant and less able'.

Democracy in the West became fully developed only in the twentieth century. Before the First World War,

women had the vote in only four countries – Finland, Norway, Australia and New Zealand. Women didn't get the vote in Switzerland until as late as 1974. Moreover, some countries that became fully democratic later experienced relapses. Germany, Italy, Austria, Spain and Portugal all had periods of authoritarian rule or military dictatorship during the period from the 1930s to the 1970s. Outside Europe, North America and Australasia, there have been only a small number of long-standing democracies, such as Costa Rica in Latin America.

Over the past few decades, however, much of this has changed, and in a remarkable way. Since the mid-1970s, the number of democratic governments in the world has more than doubled. Democracy has spread to over 30 more countries, while all the existing democratic states have kept democratic institutions in place. These changes began in Mediterranean Europe, with the overthrow of the military regimes in Greece, Spain and Portugal. The second group of countries where democracy spread, this time mainly in the early 1980s, was in South and Central America. Some 12 countries established or re-established democratic government, including Brazil and Argentina.

The story continues across all continents. The transition to democracy post-1989 in Eastern Europe, and parts of the former Soviet Union, was followed in a number of countries in Africa. In Asia, with some problems and reversals, democratisation has been going on

over the whole period since the early 1970s – in countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Thailand and Mongolia. India has remained a democratic state since its independence in 1947.

Of course, some states making the passage to democracy fall short of full democratisation, or appear to have stalled along the way. Russia is only one of many examples. Others are simply putting back what existed before. Argentina, and some other Latin American countries, have had democratic government previously, as have the Czech Republic, or Poland in Eastern Europe. Since democratic governments have often been overthrown, we can't be sure how permanent any of these democratic transitions will be. Yet democracy has made nearly as much advance since the 1960s as it did over more than a whole century before that. Why?

One possible answer is offered by those who take a triumphalist view of the Western combination of democracy and free markets. This is that other systems have been tried and have failed. Democracy has come out top because it is best. It simply took most countries outside the Western ambit some while to recognise this.

I wouldn't dispute part of the argument. Democracy is best. But as an account of the recent waves of democratisation, it is hardly adequate. It doesn't explain why such changes should happen at this juncture in history.

To get a better explanation, we need to resolve what I shall call the paradox of democracy. The paradox of

democracy is that democracy is spreading over the world, as I have just described, yet in the mature democracies, which the rest of the world is supposed to be copying, there is widespread disillusionment with democratic processes. In most Western countries, levels of trust in politicians have dropped over past years. Fewer people turn out to vote than used to, particularly in the US. More and more people say that they are uninterested in parliamentary politics, especially among the younger generation. Why are citizens in democratic countries apparently becoming disillusioned with democratic government, at the same time as it is spreading round the rest of the world?

The changes that I have been analysing throughout this book explain why. For increasing numbers across the world, life is no longer lived as fate – as relatively fixed and determined. Authoritarian government becomes out of line with other life experiences, including the flexibility and dynamism necessary to compete in the global electronic economy. Political power based upon authoritarian command can no longer draw upon reserves of traditional deference, or respect.

In a world based upon active communication, hard power – power that comes only from the top down – loses its edge. The economic conditions that the top-down Soviet economy, or other authoritarian regimes, couldn't handle – the need for decentralisation and flexibility – were mirrored in politics. Information

monopoly, upon which the political system was based, has no future in an intrinsically open framework of global communications.

In the East European events of 1989, large numbers of people took to the streets. But – unlike almost any other revolution in history – there was remarkably little violence. What seemed a system of implacable power – communist totalitarianism – faded away as though it had hardly existed. Few thought apartheid in South Africa could disappear without being forcibly overthrown. But it did.

The only episodes of violence that occurred in 1989 were involved in the seizure of television stations. Those who invaded them got their priorities right. The communications revolution has produced more active, reflexive citizenries than existed before. It is these very developments that are at the same time producing disaffection in the long-established democracies. In a detraditionalising world, politicians can't rely upon the old forms of pomp and circumstance to justify what they do. Orthodox parliamentary politics becomes remote from the flood of change sweeping through people's lives.

Where does this leave democracy itself? Should we accept that democratic institutions are becoming marginal just at the point where democracy seems on a roll?

Some very interesting findings are revealed in the opinion polls carried out in different Western countries

about trust in government. People have in fact lost a good deal of the trust they used to have in politicians and orthodox democratic procedures. They haven't lost their faith, however, in democratic processes. In a recent survey in the US and the major West European countries, well over 90 per cent of the population said that they approved of democratic government. Moreover, contrary to what many assume, most people aren't becoming disinterested in politics as such. The findings actually show the reverse. People are actually more interested in politics than they used to be. This includes the younger generation. Younger people are not, as has so often been said, a generation X, disaffected and alienated.

What they are, or many of them are, is more cynical about the claims that politicians make for themselves and – crucially – concerned about political questions about which they feel politicians have little to say. Many regard politics as a corrupt business, in which political leaders are self-interested rather than having the interests of their citizens at heart. Younger people see as most important issues such as ecological questions, human rights, family policy and sexual freedom. On an economic level, they don't believe that politicians are able to deal with the forces moving the world. As everyone understands, many of these go beyond the level of the nation-state. It isn't surprising that activists should choose to put their energies into special-interest groups,

since these promise what orthodox politics seems unable to deliver.

How can democracy and active government be sustained when they seem to have lost their purchase on events? I think there is an answer. What is needed in the democratic countries is a deepening of democracy itself. I shall call this *democratising democracy*. But democracy today must also become transnational. We need to democratise above – as well as below – the level of the nation. A globalising era demands global responses, and this applies to politics just as much as any other area.

A deepening of democracy is required, because the old mechanisms of government don't work in a society where citizens live in the same information environment as those in power over them. Western democratic governments, of course, have never been as secretive as communist states or other types of authoritarian government. Yet secretive in some contexts they certainly have been. Think, for example, of how much was concealed by the US and British governments in the Cold War period about nuclear testing and weapons development. Western democratic systems have also involved old boy networks, political patronage and backstage deals. They frequently make use of traditional symbolism, and traditional forms of power, that are less than wholly democratic. The House of Lords in the UK is only one of the most obvious of such examples. As traditions lose their grip, what once seemed venerable, and

worthy of respect, almost overnight can come to appear quaint, or even ridiculous.

It is not by accident that there have been so many corruption scandals in politics around the world in the past few years. From Japan to Germany, France and the US to the UK, corruption cases have made the news. I doubt that corruption is more common in democratic countries than it used to be. Rather, in an open information society it is more visible, and the boundaries of what counts as corruption have shifted. In Britain, for example, the old boy network in the past was simply the way things were done, even when left-of-centre parties were in power. Such networks have hardly disappeared, but much of what used to happen through them, and be widely accepted, is now defined as illegitimate.

The democratising of democracy will take different forms in different countries, depending on their background. But there isn't any country so advanced that it is exempt. Democratising democracy means having an effective devolution of power, where – as in Britain – it is still strongly concentrated at the national level. It means having effective anti-corruption measures at all levels.

It often also implies constitutional reform, and the promotion of greater transparency in political affairs. We should also be prepared to experiment with alternative democratic procedures, especially when these might help bring political decision making close to the

everyday concerns of citizens. People's juries, for example, or electronic referenda won't replace representative democracy, but they can be a useful complement to it.

Political parties will have to get more used to collaborating with single-issue groups, such as ecological pressure groups, than they have in the past. Some people see contemporary societies as fragmented and disorganised, but in fact the opposite is true. People are getting more involved in groups and associations than they used to. In Britain, 20 times more people belong to voluntary or self-help groups than are members of political parties, and much the same is true of other countries.

Single-issue groups are often at the forefront in raising problems and questions that may go ignored in orthodox political circles until too late. Thus well before the BSE crisis in the UK, groups and movements had been warning about the dangers of contamination in the food chain.

The democratising of democracy also depends upon the fostering of a strong civic culture. Markets cannot produce such a culture. Nor can a pluralism of special-interest groups. We shouldn't think of there being only two sectors of society, the state and the market-place – or the public and private. In between is the area of civil society, including the family and other non-economic institutions. Building a democracy of the emotions is one part of a progressive civic culture. Civil society is the arena in which democratic attitudes, including

tolerance, have to be developed. The civic sphere can be fostered by government, but is in turn its cultural basis.

The democratising of democracy isn't relevant only to the mature democracies. It can help build democratic institutions where they are weak and undernourished. In Russia, for instance, where gangster capitalism is rife and strong authoritarian overtones persist from the past, a more open and democratic society can't be built only in a top-down manner. It has to be constructed bottom up, through the revival of civic culture. Replacing state control with markets, even if they were more stable than they are, wouldn't achieve this end. A well-functioning democracy has been aptly compared to a three-legged stool. Government, the economy and civil society need to be in balance. If one dominates over the others, unfortunate consequences follow. In the former Soviet Union, the state dominated most areas of life. Hence, there wasn't an energetic economy and civil society was all but killed off.

We can't leave the media out of this equation. The media, particularly television, have a double relation to democracy. On the one hand, as I have stressed, the emergence of a global information society is a powerful democratising force. On the other hand, television and the other media tend to destroy the very public space of dialogue they open up, through a relentless trivialising, and personalising, of political issues. Moreover, the growth of giant multinational media corporations

means that unelected business tycoons can hold enormous power.

Countering such power can't be a matter of national policy alone. Crucially, the democratising of democracy can't stop at the level of the nation-state. As practised up to now, democratic politics has presumed a national community that is self-governing and able to shape most of the policies that concern it. It has presumed the sovereign nation. But under the impact of globalisation, sovereignty has become fuzzy. Nations and nation-states remain powerful, but there are large democratic deficits opening up – as the political scientist, David Held, points out – between them and the global forces that affect the lives of their citizens. Ecological risks, fluctuations in the global economy, or global technological change, do not respect the borders of nations. They escape democratic processes – one of the main reasons, as I said earlier, for the declining appeal of democracy where it is best established.

Talk of democracy above the level of the nation might seem quite unrealistic. Such ideas, after all, were widely spoken of a hundred years ago. Instead of an era of global harmony, there arrived the two world wars; more than a hundred million people have been killed in warfare during the twentieth century.

Are circumstances different now? Obviously no one can say for sure, but I believe they are. I have given the reasons in earlier chapters. The world is much more

interdependent than it was a century ago, and the nature of world society has changed. As a reverse side of the coin, the shared problems we face today – such as global ecological risks – are also much greater.

How might democracy be fostered above the level of the nation-state? I would look to the transnational organisations as much as the international ones. The United Nations, as its very name indicates, is an association of nation-states. For the moment at least, it rarely challenges the sovereignty of nations, and indeed its charter asserts that it should not do so. The European Union is different. I would see it as forging a way that could, and very likely will, be followed in other regions too. What is important about the EU isn't that it is located in Europe, but that it is pioneering a form of transnational governance. Contrary to what some of its supporters and its critics say, it is not a federal state or a super nation-state. But nor is it merely an association of nations. The countries which have entered the EU have voluntarily given up some of their sovereignty in order to do so.

Now, the European Union isn't itself particularly democratic. It has famously been said of the EU that if it applied to join itself, it wouldn't get in. The EU doesn't meet the democratic criteria it demands of its members. Yet there is nothing in principle that prevents its further democratisation and we should press hard for such change.

The existence of the EU drives home a cardinal principle of democracy, when seen against the background of the global order. This is that the transnational system can actively contribute to democracy within states, as well as between them. The European courts, for example, have made a range of decisions, including measures protecting individual rights, that hold within the member countries.

As we look round the globe at the end of the twentieth century, we can see cause for optimism and pessimism in about equal measure. The expansion of democracy is a case in point. On the face of it, democracy seems a fragile flower. In spite of its spread, oppressive regimes abound, while human rights are routinely flouted in states around the world. In Kosovo, hundreds of thousands were forced from their homes, and all pretence of the rule of law abandoned. I would like to quote some words here, from a reporter who observed the events: 'Nearly half a million refugees', he wrote, 'are in Macedonia. How they are to be fed, nobody knows ... Come over into Macedonia and help us!' This was published in the *Toronto Daily Star*. The reporter was Ernest Hemingway, the date 20 October 1922.

One might be forgiven for thinking that some problems are simply intractable, without hope of resolution. Democracy might appear to flourish only in especially fertile soil, which has been cultivated in the long term. In societies, or regions, that have little history of

democratic government, democracy seems to have shallow roots and is easily swept away. Yet perhaps all this is changing. Rather than thinking of democracy as a fragile flower, easily trampled underfoot, perhaps we should see it more as a sturdy plant, able to grow even on quite barren ground. If my argument is correct, the expansion of democracy is bound up with structural changes in world society. Nothing comes without struggle. But the furthering of democracy at all levels is worth fighting for and it can be achieved. Our runaway world doesn't need less, but more government – and this, only democratic institutions can provide.