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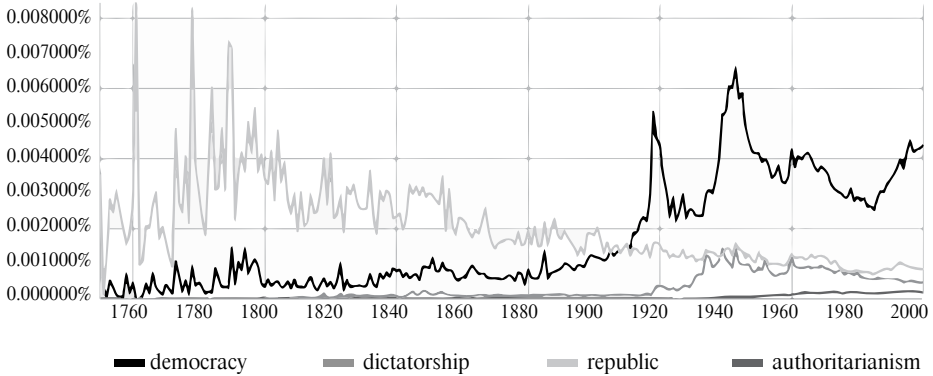
*Adam Przeworski**New York University, USA¹***A CONCEPTUAL HISTORY OF POLITICAL REGIMES: DEMOCRACY, DICTATORSHIP, AND AUTHORITARIANISM²****■ Introduction**

Concepts have histories. They appear at specific times, change meanings at times, disappear sometimes. This has been true of the names of entities we classify as distinct political arrangements. Ancient Greeks saw them as “polities” (*politeiai*), political philosophers of the modern era thought in terms of “governments”, behavioral political scientists (Easton 1953) conceptualized them as “political systems”, while the language dominant today conceives them as “political regimes”. Each of these objects, in turn, has been subject to varying distinctions: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy (Aristotle, Polybius); monarchy, republic, and despotism (Montesquieu); dictatorship and democracy (Lipset 1959); authoritarianism, totalitarianism, and democracy (Linz 1964, 2000).

These distinctions do not travel well in time. To get a sense of the history of the labels used most frequently today, consider the *n*-gram which portrays the frequency with which the terms “republic”, “democracy”, “dictatorship”, and “authoritarianism” appeared in English language books since 1750.

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The relative frequencies of these concepts does not look very differently in Spanish or French. In all the three languages, “republic” (sometimes “representative government”) was for a long time a more frequent term than “democracy”, “dictatorship” became more frequent only when the word radically changed meaning, while “authoritarianism” is a recent term.

Applying our contemporary distinctions to other periods is thus anachronistic. True, one might argue that nothing is wrong with looking at the past through our eyes. The founders of modern representative institutions may have thought that the systems they established were not “democracies” (see below), but we may still think that the “republics” they did found shared enough with the systems we recognize as “democracies” today to consider them as such. Yet with regard to the concept of “dictatorship” complacency about the history of concepts warps our understanding of historical realities: it leads us to find many dictatorships when there were almost none in the present meaning of this word. In turn, “authoritarianism” is a neologism introduced originally in juxtaposition to “totalitarianism”, both terms designating varieties of modern dictatorships.

Moreover, labels are not normatively neutral. They are used to distinguish good from bad systems. Because terms which carry normative connotations serve to distinguish us versus them, they are inevitably ethnocentric. They impose a particular distinction as most salient: during the first half of the nineteenth century, the United States insisted that the Western Hemisphere be the land of “republics” as opposed to “monarchies”, while now that it must be of “democracies”. “Democracy”, in particular, became over time an exceptionally effective geopolitical instrument. All kinds of rating agencies give grades to countries for their conformity with the US political norms: “You cheat in elections, so you are not a democracy, even if you claim to be”. And it stings, so many rulers insist that their systems are “democratic”.

What follows is a conceptual history of political regimes. I have little new to say about “democracy” and “dictatorship”, other than to emphasize the categorical transformation of the latter term. In turn, I believe that the label of “authoritarianism” is misleading and redundant. Moreover, it blinds us to the ubiquitous role of reason-giving in politics. All rulers – those selected in clean elections, those who hold this ceremony without putting their power at stake, and those who do not even bother to hold them – give reasons they should be obeyed and in all political regimes people are willing to listen to reasons and to act upon them if they think they are good reasons. Where regimes differ is in the margins of freedom for people to follow other reasons, including their own, in the use of force. Hence, the distinction between democracy and autocracy is sufficient to characterize political regimes.

■ “Democracy”

Due to the work of Dunn (2005), Hansen (2005), Manin (1997), Rosanvallon (1995) and others, we now know that those who established first modern representative institutions in Great Britain, United States, and France did not think of them as “democracies”. The story of this word is bewildering. It appeared during the fifth century BC in a small municipality in Southeastern Europe, acquired a bad reputation, and vanished from usage already in Rome. According to *OED*, its first appearance in English was in 1531. The 1641 constitution of Rhode Island was the first to refer to a “Democratical or Popular Government”. In Europe the term entered public discourse only in the 1780’s, significantly at the same time as the word “aristocracy” came into common usage as its antonym (Hansen 1989: 72, Palmer 1959: 15, Rosanvallon 1995: 144): “democrats” were those who wanted everyone to enjoy the same rights as aristocrats. “Democracy” as a system of government was still employed almost exclusively with reference to its ancient meaning: the first edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* referred in 1771 to “Democracy, the same with a popular government, wherein the supreme power is lodged in the hands of the people; *such were Rome and Athens of old...*” (quoted after Hansen 2005: 31, italics supplied). The word carried a negative connotation, so that both in the United States and in France, the newly established systems were distinguished as “republics”. “Under the confusion of names, it has been an easy task to transfer to a republic observations applicable to democracy only”, complained Madison in *Federalist #14* because democracy was a danger to the security of property, often coded as “anarchy”.

Note that one should not confuse the use of “democracy” as a label for a political regime with the use of “democratic” or, in English of the eighteenth century “democratical”, element of mixed constitutions (Pasquino 2011). With an eye on Great Britain, several constitutional theorists proposed systems of representative government in which a “democratical” or “popular” element, embodied in the lower house of legislatures³, would be counterpoised by an “aristocratic” one in the form of a Senate and at times also by a monarchy. These were not “democracies” as we now understand the term, but “mixed constitutions”.

While the “Democratic” label was positively reclaimed in the United States in 1828, a positive view of Ancient Greece as a democracy emerged in England, France, and Germany only in the middle of the nineteenth century (Hansen (2005). I could not find a similar history of “democracy” in Latin America⁴, but it is clear that the founders of Latin American representative institutions shared the negative view of this system.⁵ Yet after several Latin American political thinkers spent some years in the Philadelphia in the 1820s, some adopted a positive connotation for this term. The first to use the term “representative democracy” in a positive sense may have been the Peruvian constitutionalist Manuel Lorenzo de Vidaurre in 1827 (see Aguilar 2011, chapter 3), but this history remains to be written.

My guess is that if one had conducted a survey in 1913 asking people around the world which countries are “democracies”, the only one that would have been so identified would have been the United States, and perhaps because of Tocquevillian association of this word with social equality rather than because of its political characteristics. Identifying good governments as “democracies” became the norm only after the 1918 Versailles Peace Congress when, at the instigation of Woodrow Wilson, “Democracy became a word of common usage in a way that it had never been previously. An examination of the press, not only in the United States, but in other Allied states as well, shows a tendency to use the word democracy in ways that Wilson made respectable and possible” (Graubard 2003: 665).⁶ According to Manela (2007: 39ff.), to counter the political impact of Lenin’s proclamation of self-determination of nations, Wilson combined it with the “consent of the governed”. As the result, he used self-determination

³ According to Saguir’s (2011) account of the Argentine Constitutional Convention of 1816–19, democracy was seen as a danger because it portended anarchy but a democratic element, in the form of the lower house representing the lower classes and checked by the Senate, would be needed to absorb them into the constitutional system.

⁴ Neither could Posada-Carbó (2008: 16), and he knows better.

⁵ See McEvoy (2008) on Jose Ignacio Moreno in Peru, Posada-Carbó (2008) on Eloy Valenzuela in Colombia. Sarmiento (quoted in Zimmerman 2008: 12) referred to “la democracia consagrada por la Republica de 1810” but only in 1845.

⁶ See the ngram for the peak of “democracy” in 1918 (p. 10).

“in a more general, vaguer sense and usually equated this term with popular sovereignty, conjuring an international order based on democratic forms of government”. The popularity of this word peaked again after World War II, when it was embraced by the newly formed United Nations. Yet “democracy” became an unquestioned norm perhaps only in the 1980s, when President Reagan launched the program of “democracy promotion” (Munck 2009: 2).

Thus, from a label everyone avoided, “democracy” become a self-denomination that almost all regimes in the world, even the “Democratic People’s Republic of North Korea”, now claim for themselves. It bears emphasis that the language of “democracy” emanated from the United States, so in most of the world it has been an import, if not simply an export. France until today is a “republique” before a “democratie” (Nicolet 1982: 9).⁷

As Dunn (2005) incisively observed, this history poses two questions: (1) Why any single label would gain the monopoly of being considered irresistibly attractive, (2) Why this particular label? The answer to the first question must be that the ideal – Morgan (1988) would say the “myth” – of “self-government of the people” is an irresistible force in the modern era (Przeworski 2011). Something is deeply appealing in the claim that, even if all cannot rule, the government governs with the authorization of the people, that we are ruled by those we want to rule us. This claim is ubiquitous. Giovanni Gentile, a theoretician of Italian fascism, asserted that “The fascist State... is a popular State, and in this sense democratic State *per eccellenza*” (quoted in Cassese 2011). So claimed Communist leaders of “People’s Democracies”. So echoed various gentlemen who thought that democracy must be “tutelary” (Sun Yat-sen), “guided” (Sukarno), or “sovereign” (led by the State, Surkov 2007). The foundation for such claims was laid by Carl Schmitt (1993 [1928]: 372) for whom democracy is “the identity of the dominating and the dominated, of the government and the governed, of he who commands and he who obeys”. This is a perfidious definition for it opens room for any ruler to assert that he is “identical” with those whom he manipulates, oppresses, imprisons, and even kills. It allows rhetorical maneuvers such as “the Russian political system – in its essence although not in form – does not differ in anything from real, serious Western democracies” (A Russian journalist, Mikhail Leontiev, in an interview with a Polish newspaper, *Dziennik*, January 19, 2008). The unity of the leader and the led is the “essence” of democracy while particular institutions, including elections, are just “forms” because no ruler can admit to ruling without a popular mandate. But why good political arrangements acquired the label attached two thousand years ago to some

⁷ On the history of these two terms in France, see Nicolet (1982: 18–31).

villages in the Balkans is bewildering, perhaps just a historical accident due to the emergence of “democracy” in opposition to “aristocracy” in the eighteenth century.

Already J.S. Mill (1859) observed that the slogan of the government “by the people” is incoherent: all citizens cannot rule simultaneously. Following Kelsen (1988 [1920]: 27), this observation became the point of departure of democratic theory: “[I]t is not possible for all individuals who are compelled and ruled by the norms of the state to participate in their creation...”. People must be represented and they can be represented only through political parties, which “group men of the same opinion to assure them real influence over the management of public affairs” (Kelsen 1988: 28) or which are groups “whose members propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power” (Schumpeter 1942: 283) or “a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election” (Downs 1957: 25). Parties, in turn, have followers and leaders, who become representatives through elections. Representatives will for the people. “Parliamentarism”, says Kelsen (1988: 38), “is the formation of the directive will of the State by a collegial organ elected by the people.... [t]he will of the State generated by the Parliament is not the will of the people...”. Schumpeter (1942: 269) echoes: “Suppose we reverse the roles of these two elements and make the deciding of issues by the electorate secondary to the election of the men who are to do the deciding”. Although in the classical theory “the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions... by making the people decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will”, in fact the democratic method is one in which the individuals who are to assemble to will for the people are selected through elections (1942: 250). Yet even if the modern conception of democracy yields to the claim that political life is inevitably elitist (Mosca 1939 [1896], Pareto 1991 [1920]), it draws the difference between “elites that *propose* themselves and elites that *impose* themselves” (Bobbio 1989: 157). Hence, we distinguish “democracy” (or “autonomy”, Kant 1891 [1793], Kelsen 1988), in which people through some procedures choose those who decide under what laws we live from “autocracy” (or “heteronomy”) in which the laws are imposed on the people. And the crucial test of this distinction are competitive elections. In Bobbio’s (1987: 93) definition, democracy is these days a system “in which supreme power (supreme in so far as it alone is authorized to use force as a last resort) is exerted in the name of and on behalf of the people by virtue of the procedure of elections...”.

The fact is that if by “democracy” we mean regimes in which incumbents expose themselves to being removed from office by elections, such unpleasant

events have been historically rare and quite recent. As of 2009, sixty-eight countries, including the two elephants – Russia and China – never experienced a peaceful alternation in office resulting from elections. In some countries – from Luxembourg, to post-war Japan and Italy, to Botswana – elections have been reasonably clean but the incumbents continued to win them during long periods. Most rulers who did hold elections saw to it that votes would not threaten their tenure in office: over the past two hundred years, incumbents won about 80% of about 3,000 national-level elections in which the office of the chief executive was at stake. Moreover, a handful of countries still never experienced national-level elections.⁸

■ “Dictatorship”

The concept of “dictatorship” radically changed meaning over the past two hundred years.

Around 1800, its meaning was precise and clear because the common reference was to the design of this institution in Rome, where dictatorship was a power delegated (normally by the consuls upon a declaration of emergency by the senate) to someone else than those authorizing it, limited to a strictly defined period (normally six months), not to be used against the delegating body or its members (Nicolet 2004, Pasquino 2010). The duty of the Roman dictatorship was to return the polity to the constitutional *status quo ante*. These dictatorships were “commissarial” in the language of Schmitt (1921, see McCormick 2004).

This understanding of dictatorship was prevalent until the early 1920s. While General Francisco Miranda was the first person to bear the title of “dictator” in the modern era, this denomination was still based on the Roman concept of dictatorship.⁹ The only person during the nineteenth century to establish a “perpetual dictatorship” was Dr. Jose Gaspar Rodriguez de Francia who in 1816 proclaimed himself *El Dictador Perpetuo* of Paraguay and ruled it until 1840 as *El Supremo*.¹⁰ While periods of autocratic rule were frequent, particularly in Latin America, they were invariably justified by a need to respond to emergencies, crises, or exceptional circumstances. As Rippy (1965: 93) observed, “Whether sincere or deliberately deceptive, the

⁸ These numbers are based on Przeworski (2015).

⁹ In 1808–1809, Miranda wrote an *Esquisse de Gouvernement federal*, a blueprint where he justified an exceptional dictatorship by invoking the experience of Rome (Aguilar 2000: 169).

¹⁰ Rodriguez de Francia is the protagonist of a richly documented historical novel by Augusto Roa Bastos, *Yo el supremo*, but I could not find there any surprise at the notion of a perpetual dictator, an oxymoron in the language of the time.

documents of the period always employed expressions suggesting a crisis: liberator, restorer, regenerator, vindicator, deliverer, savior of the country, and so on. Somebody was constantly having to ‚save‘ these countries...”. Dictators were “saviours” whose intervention was to be restricted to restoring the Roman *salus publica*. The crucial difference from the Roman institution was that, although dictators almost always insisted that they are performing a task authorized by a constitution, claiming the mantle of *gobierno constitucional*, the mission to save the country was unilaterally undertaken by force. Nevertheless, dictatorships were seen as something abnormal and something to self-dissolve when the situation is restored to normal.¹¹

Dictators assumed power unilaterally but they were also to abdicate unilaterally. To cite Paz (1963: 3–4), “It is significant that the frequency of military coups has never faded democratic legitimacy from the conscience of our people. For this reason, dictators assuming power almost invariably declared that their government is provisional and that they are ready to restore democratic institutions as soon as circumstances permit”.¹²

Europeans, however, faced a problem. In 1799, a general usurped power in France by a coup d’état and a few years later proclaimed himself “emperor”. Given that dictatorship was universally understood in the Roman meaning, the only forms of government known at the end of the eighteenth century were monarchies and republics, with the third type distinguished by Montesquieu, “despotism”, relegated to the exotic Asia. Hence, the form of government Napoleon established was unclassifiable in the language of the time. He had no legitimate dynastic claim, so he was not a monarch.¹³ He abolished the republic by becoming the Emperor. He established a system that was highly institutionalized, ruling by law, so he was not a “despot” in Montesquieu’s language. The puzzlement facing the contemporary observers in thinking about this form of government is evidenced by the first labels used to identify it: “Bonapartism” (from Napoleon’s last name, suggesting uniqueness), “Caesarism” (from the last Roman dictator who attempted to establish permanent rule), “Imperialism” (from “Emperor”). According to Baehr and Richter (2004: 25), the term “dictatorship” in its modern sense was used in

¹¹ When Bolivar wanted to resign from his first of three dictatorships, he was asked to keep the office in the following terms: “Remain, your Excellency, as a Dictator, improve your efforts at saving the Fatherland, and once you have done it, then restore full exercise of sovereignty by proposing a Democratic Government”. On Bolivar and dictatorship, see Aguilar (2000: Chapter V).

¹² Already Bolivar, in the speech accepting the position of the Dictador Jefe Supremo de la Republica, announced that “ya respiro devolviendos esta autoridad”. (Discurso de Angostura, in Bolivar 1969: 93).

¹³ On “usurpation” as distinct from hereditary monarchy, see Constant (1997 [1809]).

Europe only during two periods of the nineteenth century: referring to France between 1789 and 1815 and briefly after 1852 to the Second Empire.¹⁴

The transformation of the concept of “dictatorship” is largely due to European difficulties in understanding regimes such as those of the two Napoleons, communism, fascism, and nazism. The Soviets were the first to use the term as a positive self-designation in the “dictatorship of the proletariat”.¹⁵ While some earlier dictatorships ended up lasting long periods and many dictators changed constitutions, so these dictatorships were “sovereign” in terms of Schmitt, none had the pretension of permanently changing the society. The Soviet dictatorship, while still proclaiming to be transitional, was aimed to establish a new economic, social, and political order. As such, it was a new historical phenomenon, not an imitation of the Roman one (McCormick 2004: 199).

The term radically changed its meaning only with the rise of fascism and then nazism, when liberal opponents of these regimes, as well as of communism, adopted “dictatorship” as the label designating what they were fighting against. As a result, we came to include under the concept of dictatorship regimes that were foundational, designed to permanently transform political order. Moreover, the ambiguity is not only conceptual: several military governments in Latin America after 1930 were themselves split or confused as to whether their mission was only to “eradicate the foreign virus of subversion from the body of the nation” and abdicate once this body was sanitized or to establish a new permanent political order.¹⁶

As this history demonstrates, lumping together the moments when some general usurped power for a few years with institutionalized autocratic regimes designed to last forever ignores the originality of the phenomenon of modern dictatorship. Permanent dictatorships are an invention of the last one hundred years.

¹⁴ The idea that “permanent dictatorship” is necessary when religion fails to sustain order was developed by a Spanish thinker Juan Donoso Cortés in a speech in 1849. It found echoes in Mexico but an explicit argument that dictatorship should be permanent in Latin America was offered only in 1919 by Vallenilla Lanz (Aguillar 2011, Chapter 7).

¹⁵ “Dictatorship of the proletariat” had intellectual roots in the 1793 French “Committee of public safety”.

¹⁶ This ambiguity was first evident in the 1930 coup in Argentina. This coup was led by General Uriburu, who intended to replace individual by functional representation, while General Justo, who became president in 1931, participated in the coup wanting only to depose President Irigoyen and restore democracy. See Ibarguen (1955), Pinedo (1946). The same division reappeared in the Brazilian military government after the coup of 1964, the Onganía regime in Argentina after 1966, the Chilean military regime after 1973, and the Argentine one after 1976.

■ “Authoritarianism”

Consider the following type of regime: “political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones”. If you did not know the label which the author, obviously Linz (1964: 225), attached to such systems, what label would you choose? Linz’s intent was to extend the notion of “totalitarianism” beyond the narrow meaning given to it by Arendt (1958)¹⁷ and still to distinguish it from Franco’s Spain (Dormagen 2008: 20–25). Yet even if Spain under Franco was not “totalitarian”, his rule was based on force and, as Arendt (1954: 103) pointed out, “All those who call modern dictatorships, authoritarian?... have implicitly equated violence with authority...”. Confounding force with authority as causes of the power to command and be obeyed, treating authoritarianism as just a synonym of soft dictatorship, “dictablanda”¹⁸, renders the concept of “authoritarianism” redundant. “Authoritarianism” cannot just mean that repression is less intense: when preventive repression is sufficiently intimidating, no manifest repression is necessary, but the regime is still based on force.¹⁹ Hence, we need to ask if there is something specific to “authoritarianism” that distinguishes it as a type of dictatorship, other than the intensity of manifest repression.

One answer is provided by Levitsky and Way (2010: 5), according to whom the authoritarian regimes are “civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents’ abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-a-vis their opponents.... Competition is real but unfair”. In this influential conception, “authoritarianism” is a label for regimes based on force

¹⁷ Arendt’s conception of “totalitarianism” required mass terror and thus limited the historical extension of this concept to Hitler’s Germany and the two periods of Stalinist purges in the Soviet Union.

¹⁸ According to Wikipedia, “The term was first used in Spain in 1930 when Damaso Berenguer replaced Miguel Primo de Rivera y Orbaneja as the head of the ruling military junta (or “directorio militar”) and attempted to reduce tensions in the country by repealing some of the harsher measures that had been introduced by the latter”.

¹⁹ Franco’s Spain does not qualify as a “soft” dictatorship. This regime was in fact highly repressive by comparative standards: about 100,000 people were killed in the repression following the civil war and political killings continued until the very last days of the regime. It was not less murderous than the Nazi regime if one excludes the genocide of Jews, even if less so than the Soviet Union under Stalin.

that preserve a façade of democratic institutions. Note that this is a departure from Linz, because Franco's Spain does not qualify as authoritarian under this definition. Neither does China, while Putin's Russia does. Yet how can we tell that competition is sufficiently "unfair" to qualify a regime as "authoritarian" or even "semi-so"? After all, as Putin's apologists maintain, there is nothing non-democratic about a popular leader winning overwhelming support in elections. Hence, if "authoritarianism" is to be a useful concept, it must also be a somehow distinguishable from democracy.

Perhaps because of our ideological biases, we seem to be blind to the political force of giving reasons. Reason-giving is ubiquitous in politics. All rulers – those selected in clean elections, those who hold this ceremony without putting their power at stake, and those who do not even bother to hold them – claim to have reasons to be obeyed and people are willing to obey them if they believe these are good reasons. When people believe that the ruler has good reasons to command them to do (or not do) something, reliance on force is unnecessary. The rulers do not even need to specify the reasons: it is sufficient that people believe that they could do so if asked.

Innumerable studies of "authoritarian regimes" see their rulers as coopting, repressing, propagandizing, or censoring, but not as evoking voluntary compliance. Yet consider Mussolini's retrospective justification of his rule: "strictly speaking, I was not even a dictator, because my power to command coincided perfectly with the will to obey of the Italian people" (a note to a journalist, Ivano Fossani, in March 1945; quoted in Cassese 2011). Clearly, one can easily reject his claim as an ex-post excuse for repression. But is it true that Italian people did not want to obey Mussolini? Is the popularity of Presidents Putin or Xi due only to the threat of force? Is this the only reason many Russians and Chinese believe that they are led by great leaders? As Kojeve's (2014 [1942]: 2) observed, "Reducing Authority to Force is... simply either to deny or ignore the existence of the former".²⁰

The point of departure in understanding "authoritarianism" must be that "Authority is not power, but it may cause it" (Friedrich 1958: 37). Power, the power to be obeyed, may originate from different sources. One is active authorization to command by those potentially subject to commands, "other-authorization" (Dunn 2015), which in the modern era means elections. Another is physical force. Yet another is "authority". Force is not the same as authority: someone wielding a *stiletto* has the power to cause me to obey but

²⁰ Sennett's (1980: 17) observation that "the word 'authoritarian' is used to describe a person or system which is repressive" is just one among his innumerable confusions.

someone who gives me good reasons need not brandish a *stiletto* for me to obey (Friedrich 1958: 37).

What, then, is “authority”?²¹ Positive analyses of authority canonically depart from a formulation by Theodore Mommsen,²² according to whom authority is a property of communications that are “more than advice, less than command, an advice which one may not safely ignore” (Friedrich 1958: 30, Arendt 1961: 123, Terre’s Introduction to Kojève 2014: xiv). Authority is “less than command” because authoritative messages do not include a threat of sanctions by whoever issues them. But it is less obvious why it is “more than advice”. Any advice entails a view of consequences of one’s actions: if you see a sign saying “35 mph” when approaching a curve, you are being advised that driving faster exposes you to a risk of an accident. What is distinctive about authority is that the emitter of the message knows the eventual consequences of your actions better than you do. In Friedrich’s (1958: 30) interpretation, authority of the Roman Senate “was intended to prevent violations of what was sacred in the established order of things... . It was a matter of adding wisdom to will, a knowledge of values shared and traditions hallowed, to whatever the people wanted to do”. Authority, then, is advice which one cannot safely ignore because it adds to (“augments”) the information about the consequences of one’s action and because with the better knowledge one is led to choose a different course of action than would have been chosen based only on one’s own knowledge. Authority “adds wisdom to will”.

On what political leaders must be the authority? Put differently, what are the actions that are subject to authority, again, advice one cannot ignore “safely”? The Roman Senate was the authority on the tradition of Rome and on the conditions for preserving the Roman Republic. The actions this authority was charged to prevent or promote were thus those that would threaten or advance *salus publica*, the wellbeing of all. In this ideological construction, which is what it is, there is one community and one common good. Some one or some body knows what we as a community share in common, our common interest, and it issues advice that makes us promote it. People may not understand correctly what they share in common and may mistakenly take actions that threaten it,

²¹ Discussions of authority among legal philosophers focus on its normative justification, asking when authority is “legitimate” and when rulers have a “right” to be obeyed. I do not delve into these discussions here unless they provide useful distinctions.

²² Mommsen was a 19th century German historian, best known for a five volume *History of Rome*. The quote, however, is from volume 3 of his *Römisches Staatsrecht* (three volumes, 1871–1888, available in German from www.gutenberg.com). Friedrich and Arendt, who acknowledges Friedrich, quote from the 1878 second German edition, while Terre quotes from the 1985 French translation, *Le droit public romain* (Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, vol. 3, page 1034).

so they need to be guided. Hence, authority results from a superior knowledge of what is good for all. The prudential advice given by the authority is “If you pursue your particularistic interest, everyone will be worse off”.

Note that this construction assumes that individuals are motivated to pursue the common good and would act against it only out of ignorance. When the collectivity is unanimous about the state of the world it wants to prevail, collective decisions are self-implementing: if someone commands me to do what I want to do anyway, I do not need to be coerced to do it. At most, I need to be enlightened about the consequences of my actions. Yet this assumption is too strong: for authority to exist it is sufficient that people voluntarily submit themselves to coercion applied to enforce a particular conception of common good. Suppose that the structure of interests of a society generates a prisoner’s dilemma. The common interest is to cooperate (not steal, vaccinate your child) and if the question whether individuals should be coerced to cooperate were put to a plebiscite, it would win unanimous vote of people who are informed that if they were permitted to defect, each and all would be worse off. Hence, exercise of authority does not preclude coercion.

Hence, the Leader (an elected President, *el Jefe, il Duce, ein Führer*), the Party, or the State must be the authority on the common interest.²³ In the words of Antonio Salazar, “The return of the State to a wellconstituted order, *rational* as an expression of the nation organized, just in subordinating particular interests to the general, strong because of having as its basis the *authority that cannot be rejected and should not be rejected* [is] the highest achievement of civilization...”. (1934 speech, loose translation, italics added; quoted in de Oliveira Marques 1998: 432). The exercise of authority does not preclude coercion as long as it is limited to the subordination of “particular interests to the general”. According to an eminent fascist leader, Alfredo Rocco, fascism was inspired by the idea of “liberty conditioned on the protection of general interests” (*libertà condizionata dalla tutela degli interessi generali*, quoted in Cassese 2011).

Delving into mechanisms which make authority effective would require a full-fledged game-theoretic analysis, which is beyond the scope of this essay. Authority may be effective when the claims it conveys are not observable (*Après moi, le déluge*), when it dissuades individuals from a costly search for information, when people know that faking authority is costly to the leaders

²³ Thus, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the Chairman of the Polish governing party, *PiS*, called for “the common good to become at least the basic premise of the functioning of the public media. Common good, that is, search for truth and appeal to the values which construct our national community. And here there are no values other than those that arise from our history, which is closely tied to the Church”. (www.se.pl/wiadomosci/polityka/jaroslaw-kaczynski-we-wloclawku-omediach-narodowych-maja-mowic-prawde_822470.html)

(Guriev and Treisman 2015), or when it provides a signal on which individuals can coordinate. I suspect there are other potential reasons, but a necessary condition of authority is that people believe that someone knows better what is better for them as a collectivity. Hence, what is called in game-theory language “strategic complementarity” – the motivation to coordinate one’s action with those of others – is not sufficient. An orchestra obeys the conductor because all its members want to play in tune even if they think that the conductor leads off key because cacophony is worse than any coordinated interpretation. A Soviet textbook of Marxism-Leninism asked “How does the Party play its leading role...?”, with the answer, “It acts through the government and mass public organizations, guiding their efforts toward one single goal... Party leadership may be compared to the art of the conductor, who strives for harmony in the orchestra...” (Kuusinen 1962: 554–555).²⁴ But a bad conductor can be a conductor only because someone or something granted him this role, not because members of the orchestra spontaneously recognize his capacity to lead them. While the Party may have played a coordinating role, this does not imply that Soviet citizens believed that it acts in their best interest.

■ Democracy, Dictatorship, and Authoritarianism

To have authority, the leader must be able to provide reasons. The Pope has authority when he speaks *ex cathedra* on matters of doctrine because he cannot err. The Soviet leaders derived authority from their correct understanding of the laws of history. The contemporary Chinese leaders use the term “scientific development” to justify their authority. What constitutes valid reasons depends, however, on sharing some premises and is, therefore, historically contingent and always questionable. Reasons valid for some “may well appear wholly ,irrational’ to anyone outside the particular belief or value system” (Friedrich 1958: 40). Non-Catholics may not accept the authority of the Pope because they do not share the belief that the Holy Ghost can prevent someone from erring. Non-Nazis do not accept Hitler’s views of Jews because they do not share the premise that the history of mankind consists of conflict among races for *Lebensraum*. Fundamentalist Christians do not accept the authority of scientists when it conflicts with the letter of the Bible. Power would be based exclusively on authority only if people could coordinate differently but do not

²⁴ According to Sabl (2015: ft. 5), “the Nazi term for its totalitarian policy of requiring all civil society and voluntary groups to align themselves with Nazi ideology was *Gleichschaltung*, whose literal meaning is having all railways use the same gauge of track. Nazification was conceptualized, in other words, as a coordination problem”.

because they believe the coordination offered to them by the leader is best. But no political leader, not even the Pope, has such self-evident authority. And, to cite Friedrich (1958: 32) again, “when people begin to ask the question ‘why should I obey X?’, X is on the way to losing his authority”. Authority becomes unquestionable only if people are prevented from coordinating on beliefs other than those of the political leader, on their own beliefs about what is best for them as a collectivity and as individuals.

Where does authority originate from? Someone or some body has authority, in the sense of evoking voluntary compliance, if others believe in advance that “whatever is advocated will be worth of respect and of compliance” (Carter 1979: 14), “in advance” meaning even before the emitter of the message itself learns the true state of the world. Views about the origins of such an authority diverge. Arendt, who was not a paragon of historical accuracy,²⁵ thinks that authority can originate only from an exogenously given position in a generally accepted hierarchy: “The authoritarian relation between the one who commands and the one who obeys rests neither on common reason nor on the power of the one who commands; what they have in common is the hierarchy itself, whose rightness and legitimacy both recognize and where both have their predetermined stable place” (1954: 93). Hence, authority does not entail “persuasion”: no reasoning is entailed, only recognition of a pre-existing hierarchy. For Friedrich (1958: 36), however, authority is the “capacity to issue communications which may be elaborated by reasoning”. A communication is authoritative if the receivers of the message believe that the communicator has good reasons to believe that the message is epistemologically true or morally valid, that he or she knows something they do not and that this something will guide them to a better action. The listeners need not know these reasons; it suffices that they believe that the emitter of the message could cite good reasons and that he or she believes that these reasons are valid. Yet reasoning is an intrinsic feature of authoritative communication. Authority is the capacity to persuade.²⁶

To clarify what is entailed, consider the example used by almost all students of authority: parenthood. Arendt (1954) bemoans “the decline” of traditional authority of parents, whose ability to command children is given by the fact

²⁵ While she uses Mommsen’s analysis of the Roman Senate, she neglects the fact that the Senate was not hierarchically superior to the plebs. See Carter (1979: 20): “it is clearly nonsensical to describe the relationship between the Senate and the plebs as hierarchical”.

²⁶ Carter (1979: 23–25) criticizes Friedrich for failing to distinguish reasons for the existence of an authority and reasons for particular messages issued by this authority. There may be good reasons to respect the institution of a constitutional tribunal even if the reasons motivating some rulings of the tribunal are not persuasive.

that they are parents, as the ability to rule of monarchs was based on their birthrights. Parents do not have to give reasons to require compliance with their commands and traditional parents did not. Their authority declined when children became less willing to obey them. But for Friedrich (1958: 34), the authority of parents is greater when they reason with their children rather than expect blind obedience. Parents have authority when their reasons evoke compliance of children who are free to disobey. By giving reasons, “discipline is turned into self-discipline”. Their effectiveness in generating obedience may have historically declined but perhaps only because reasoning with children is less effective than pure coercion. Yet authority rests on reason, not on submission to authority given by any exogenous force.

By the same argument, elections do not generate epistemic or moral authority of those who are elected (Kojève 2014: 34, Friedrich 1958: 38). When an elected president tells us that we should use clean energy or if he exhorts us to be compassionate, we obey only if we have reasons to believe that he knows better, not because he was elected. Elections do not create authority; they ratify it. We elect those who we believe have authority. As Manin (1997) argues, we select leaders through elections rather than lot – elections are an “aristocratic” method of selecting rulers – because we believe that some people are better qualified to govern than others. We use whatever observable indicators we want but the quality we are after is authority. As Dworkin (1996: 27) observes, “We certainly do want influence to be unequal in politics for other [than money] reasons: we want those with better views or those who can argue more cogently to have more influence”. Hence, we obey elected leaders not only because elections generate legal authority to command and empower the elected rulers to use legally qualified coercion but also because at least some of us believe that they were elected because they have epistemic or moral authority. Moreover, it may be true that having seen that a majority recognizes someone as the authority we update our beliefs on the basis of their information, so that elections do enhance the belief that those elected have authority. “The authority that is based on knowledge”, Carter (1979: 11) observes, “is not intrinsically incompatible with democratic and egalitarian attitudes and beliefs”. Yet the belief that someone knows better just because he or she is the ruler, having arrived to this position by whatever means, including elections, is an authoritarian attitude.

The difference between regimes is that under democracy authorities compete. The very fact that no one is ever elected unanimously in reasonably clean elections is *prima facie* evidence that there are people other than those elected who also have authority; moreover, that authority is being questioned. Perhaps the people is not united but divided; perhaps they are united but still disagree

what is better for all: whether elections aggregate interests or judgements, the pluralism of authority is anti-authoritarian. Authority is monopolistic only when it is guarded by repression and censorship. Yet even when rulers monopolize authority by force, obedience is not blind. Communication may be falsified (Kuran 1991, 1995): when information is censored²⁷ or when dissatisfied individuals who are the center of larger communication networks are repressed (Perez-Oviedo 2012), people have no access to information by which they could update their beliefs, including those about the general support for the regime. Yet falsified communication still entails reasoning and acting for reasons. Obedience is a result of falsified beliefs but still of beliefs. Authoritarianism is when we have no choice of reasons, not when we have no reasons.

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²⁷ The Portuguese Constitution of 1933 specified (in Article 3) that “The censorship will have the aim only to impede the perversion of public opinion as a social force and should be exercised to defend it from all the factors that disorient it from truth, justice, morality, good administration and common good...”. In turn, the July 1946 decree of the Polish Communist government defined the mission of the censorship as “to avoid misleading public opinion by information that does not correspond to reality” (quoted in Tokarz 2012).

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A CONCEPTUAL HISTORY OF POLITICAL REGIMES: DEMOCRACY, DICTATORSHIP, AND AUTHORITARIANISM

The labels we attach today to distinguish political regimes have histories. Applying them without understanding these histories is sometimes anachronistic and ethnocentric. I have little new to say about “democracy” and “dictatorship”, so that the discussion of these concepts is just a reminder. “Authoritarianism”, however, is a dubious neologism. I advance two claims: (1) In all regimes the power to command and be obeyed entails some dose of reason-giving, (2) What distinguishes regimes is the form and the extent to which the authority of rulers is monopolised by physical force. I conclude that the concept of “authoritarianism” adds little to the distinction between democracy and dictatorship.

Key words: political regimes, democracy, dictatorship, authoritarianism