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totalitarian (certainly authoritarian) tyrannical mass societies, the problem was numbers. The problem was that, whatever your preferences may be, you cannot run this place democratically, run it as an egalitarian society. It's got to be a pyramid or nothing will get done. It's got to be an autocracy.

Suppose, however, that into that by now very ancient mix, we were to introduce mass media. Suppose we were to give these societies, millions strong, the ability to talk to one another across the millions.

Nothing grand like television to begin with, just literacy and printing, newspapers and books — so that it becomes possible, for the first time since we moved into the cities, to agree on what the question at issue is. Not only that, but these relatively simple technologies also allow us to discuss and debate the issue across the society and reach some conclusion about what we ought to do as a collectivity, as a group, rather than simply waiting for the decision to be handed down from on top. That is the process that begins to unfold only about 250 years ago. Indeed, until then there is not a single society of over a million people in human history which is not a tyranny.

And then, as the new mass medium of printing becomes available in various societies, you begin to see what I would call a reversion to democratic type, or to egalitarian type. The very first society ever to have a genuine and successful democratic revolution was the first one where over 50 percent of the population was literate: the United States of America 222 years ago.

Since then we have seen democracy spreading around the planet in direct consequence of the spread of mass media, which now of course may not be print and literacy but simply the electronic media. My hunch — and I think the chain of events between 1986 and 1994 is very powerful evidence for it — is that the default mode of human beings is probably egalitarian, that the 5 000 years of tyranny was very probably a functional response to the situation we found ourselves in, and that now that we have the options given us by mass media, we are reverting to type.

The implication, by the way, is that it's got nothing to do with your particular cultural history, that it is not relevant whether you do or do not have Greeks up your family tree. If you're human, your default mode is egalitarian. Now if that's a correct analysis, and I think it is, we already have a changed world. Not a cast-iron guarantee it could never change back, but a fairly solid guarantee that this is real and large-scale change.

What about the question of war, which was the central question of foreign policy until very recently? Well, one of the interesting things about democratic is they don't fight wars with each other. They fight wars quite cheerfully with a whole variety of other countries that aren't democratic (Canada has been at war five times this century), but never against genuinely democratic countries.