

ELEVENTH EDITION

# Ideals and Ideologies

A Reader



Terence Ball  
Richard Dagger  
Daniel I. O'Neill

# IDEALS AND IDEOLOGIES

*Ideals and Ideologies: A Reader* is a comprehensive compilation of classic and contemporary readings representing all of the major “isms.” It offers students a generous sampling of key thinkers in different ideological traditions and places them in their historical and political contexts. Used on its own or with *Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal*, the anthology accounts for the different ways people use ideology and conveys the continuing importance of ideas in politics.

## New to this 11th Edition:

- Alexander Keyssar, “Voter Suppression, Then and Now” (a distinguished historian traces the tawdry history of attempts, successful and unsuccessful, to disenfranchise voters).
- Andrew Sullivan, “Democracies End When They Become Too Democratic” (an eminent conservative commentator and author argues that, under certain circumstances, democracies pose a danger to their very own existence).
- Timothy Egan, “The Dumbed Down Democracy” (a prominent author and columnist argues that American democracy has been “dumbed down” due, in large part, to the absence of civic education in the public school curriculum).
- Max Boot and David Brooks, “Conservatives Assess Trump” (two leading contemporary conservatives ponder the fundamental ideological problems the current president poses for the movement, and consider the ways in which Donald Trump is—and isn’t—a true conservative).
- Eugene V. Debs, “Speech to the Conference for Progressive Political Action” (an early 20th-century American socialist and former presidential candidate articulates his vision for a new workers’ party that would challenge capitalism in the United States).
- Robert Kagan, “This is How Fascism Comes to America” (a prominent neoconservative historian detects disturbing parallels between the rise of Donald Trump and that of various interwar fascists).
- Erik Loomis, “A New Chapter in the Black Liberation Movement” (an American historian makes the case for Black Liberation with a particularly compelling case study: how prisoners (mainly black) work essentially as slaves in both public and for-profit prisons in the United States).
- Black Lives Matter, “A Vision for Black Lives: Demands for Black Power, Freedom & Justice” (leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement set forth their basic ideological beliefs and public policy prescriptions).
- Josephine Livingstone, “The Task Ahead for Feminism” (the author argues that much remains to be done after the #MeToo movement).

**TERENCE BALL** received his Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley and is now Professor Emeritus of Political Science and Philosophy at Arizona State University.

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# PRAISE FOR THE ELEVENTH EDITION

“An anthology of classic readings, *Ideals and Ideologies* has itself become a classic. This is a deep reflection on and of our political world. Introducing students to the powerful ideas that have mobilized and inspired political actors and causes across the contemporary landscape, it is a wonderful teaching tool and useful reference guide. Chosen for accessibility as well as significance, and updated with important and timely new voices, each reading is expertly introduced by the editors. This eleventh edition maintains the high standards one has come to expect from Ball, Dagger, and O’Neill.”

—*Simone Chambers, University of California-Irvine, USA*

“The reason this anthology is now in its eleventh edition is that Ball, Dagger, and O’Neill strike the right balance between historical and contemporary as they expertly select, introduce, and contextualize essential readings for the study of political ideologies. Offering an accessible and profound account of the significance and role of ideas in politics, *Ideals and Ideologies* continues to hold its place as one of the leading introductory textbooks for undergraduate teaching of political theory.”

—*Michaëlle L. Browers, Wake Forest University, USA*

# IDEALS AND IDEOLOGIES A READER

ELEVENTH EDITION

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Eleventh edition published 2020  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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Seventh edition published by Pearson Education, Inc., 2009  
Eighth edition published by Pearson Education, Inc., 2011  
Ninth edition published by Pearson Education, Inc. 2014, and Routledge, 2016  
Tenth edition published by Routledge, 2017

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Ball, Terence, editor. | Dagger, Richard, editor. | O'Neill, Daniel L, editor.

Title: Ideals and ideologies : a reader / Terence Ball, Arizona State University, Richard Dagger, University of Richmond, Daniel I. O'Neill, University of Florida.

Description: Eleventh Edition. | New York : Routledge, 2019. | "Tenth edition, published by Routledge, 2017"—T.p. verso. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019006462 (print) | LCCN 2019009346 (ebook) | ISBN 9780429286827 (Master) | ISBN 9780415015158 (Adobe) | ISBN 9780415015295 (Mobi) | ISBN 9780415015431 (ePub3) | ISBN 9780367235048 | ISBN 9780367235048(Hardback) | ISBN 9780367235055(Paperback) | ISBN 9780429286827(E-Book)

Subjects: LCSH: Political science—History. | Ideology. | Right and left (Political science)

Classification: LCC JA81 (ebook) | LCC JA81 .I34 2019 (print) | DDC 320.5—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019006462>

ISBN: 978-0-367-23504-8 (hbk)  
ISBN: 978-0-367-23505-5 (pbk)  
ISBN: 978-0-429-28682-7 (ebk)

Typeset in Galliard  
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

To  
*Jonathan and Stephen Ball,*  
and  
*Emily and Elizabeth Dagger,*  
and  
*Cassidy and Jackson O'Neill*



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# PREFACE TO THE ELEVENTH EDITION

More than twenty-five years ago we decided to collect readings from primary sources into an anthology for courses in political ideologies and modern political thought. We knew that we faced difficult choices—what to put in, what to leave out—but we believed that we could compile a set of readings that would be comprehensive and rigorous enough to meet instructors’ standards while satisfying students’ desires for a readable and reasonably accessible “reader.” The fact that we are now issuing an eleventh edition of this book suggests that our belief was not ill-founded. Since the sociopolitical world keeps changing, the thrust and contents of this anthology must change, too, and this eleventh edition is no exception to that rule.

## NEW TO THIS EDITION

The eleventh edition includes the following additions:

- Alexander Keyssar, “Voter Suppression, Then and Now” (a distinguished historian traces the tawdry history of attempts, successful and unsuccessful, to disenfranchise voters).
- Andrew Sullivan, “Democracies End When They Are Too Democratic” (an eminent conservative commentator and author argues that, under certain circumstances, democracies pose a danger to their very existence).
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- Josephine Livingstone, “The Task Ahead for Feminism” (the author argues that much remains to be done after the #MeToo movement).

## **FEATURES**

As in the previous editions, we have been guided by our sense that an ideal anthology for this subject would combine four features. First, it would present a wide range of alternative ideological visions: right, left, middle, and unorthodox. Second, it would include a generous sampling of key thinkers in the different ideological traditions, old and new alike. Third, an ideal anthology would, when necessary, modernize the prose of thinkers long dead. Fourth, and finally, it would supply the student with some sense of the intellectual and political context within which these thinkers thought and wrote.

In this eleventh edition of *Ideals and Ideologies* we have tried once again to satisfy these four criteria. First, we have attempted to cover the broad canvas of contemporary political ideologies, from the standard categories of liberalism-conservatism-fascism-socialism to a broader range of newly emerging ideological alternatives. Among these are the “liberation” ideologies, including indigenous or native people’s liberation, an ecological or “green” ideology, and the ideology of radical Islamism. Second, we have tried to supply a fairly generous and reasonably representative sample of alternative ideological views, including those not represented in any other anthology. Third, we have, wherever possible, simplified the prose of older thinkers, in several instances providing our own translations of works not written in English. And finally, we have provided brief introductions and added explanatory notes to place these selections and their authors in their political and historical contexts.

We have tried, in short, to supply the student with an accessible and readable anthology of original sources. The result does not necessarily make for easy reading. But as we remind our students, the old adage “No pain, no gain” applies to the building not only of muscles but also of minds. We have merely attempted to remove some of the unnecessary strain from a profitable, if sometimes taxing, exercise.

The present volume is paired with the new eleventh edition of our *Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal*, also published by Routledge. Although each book stands alone, each complements and can be used in combination with the other.

We should note, finally, that many of the readings included here easily fall under more than one heading. For example, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s 1932 Commonwealth Club Address could as easily fit into Part 2 (“The Democratic Ideal”) as under Part 3 (“Liberalism”). And black liberation theologian James H. Cone’s “Whose Earth Is

It, Anyway?” could as well be included in Part 8 (“Liberation Ideologies”) as in Part 9 (“‘Green’ Politics”). There are, in short, many combinations, and many ways to use this book. But whatever the preferred combination may be, the aim is always the same: to convey to the student-citizen a vivid sense of the centrality and ongoing importance of ideas, ideals, and ideologies in modern politics.

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# INTRODUCTION

The world in which we live continues to be shaped and scarred by political ideologies. Indeed, the truth of the old saying “ideas have consequences” must now be evident to everyone. And the most consequential are those embedded in those systems of ideas called *ideologies*. It was, in reality, ideas that toppled the Twin Towers in New York City and brought down two other hijacked airliners on September 11, 2001; the terrorists were merely the carriers or agents of the ideas—the ideology—that motivated them. The same is true of the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013, the Russian airliner bombed by ISIS in 2015, the deadly terrorist attacks in Paris, Mali, and California in 2015, and many others elsewhere. The Great Recession that began in 2007 exposed and deepened divisions between those who believe that government has a duty to regulate the economy and those who hold that government “interference” in markets is dangerous and counterproductive. For better or for worse, the twenty-first century, like the one that preceded it, is a century of ideas—and particularly of those clusters or systems of ideas called “ideologies.” These ideologies have raised hopes, inspired fear, and drawn blood from millions of human beings. To study political ideologies, then, is not to undertake a merely “academic” study. It is to dissect and analyze the tissue of our times.

During the second decade of the twenty-first century, some ideologies, such as the Marxist-Leninist version of socialism, are clearly in eclipse, while others—such as radical Islamism and a newly emerging ecological or “green” ideology—appear to be gaining in influence and importance. Yet despite their differences, these ideologies are similar in at least one respect: they all have their histories. All, that is, have emerged out of particular historical contexts and have changed in response to changing conditions and circumstances. And all have been formed from the ideas of thinkers old and new. As the economist John Maynard Keynes observed in the 1930s, when Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, and Joseph Stalin all held power, “madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.”

This book is about, and by, those “academic scribblers”—and a number of those “madmen in authority” as well. Their ideas have formed the ideologies and fueled the conflicts that shaped and reshaped the political landscape of the twentieth—and now the twenty-first—century. We live in the shadow, and under the influence, of these scribbles and madmen. To be ignorant of their influence is not to escape it. By tracing modern ideologies back to their original sources, we can see more clearly how our own outlooks—and those of our enemies—have been shaped by earlier thinkers. To return

to and read these authors is to gain some insight into the shaping of the modern political mind—or rather minds, plural, since ideological disagreement continues unabated.

Some modern commentators have claimed—wrongly, we believe—that ideological disagreements are at last coming to an end. The age of ideology, they say, is over. As evidence, they cite the end of the Cold War, the emancipation of Eastern Europe, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the democratizing of former dictatorships. Important as they are, however, these events do not presage “the end of ideology.” Rather, they suggest that ours is an age of important ideological realignments. Marxism-Leninism may be dead in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, but other versions of it linger on in the politics of China, Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba. Radical Islamism is increasingly influential in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere. And, of course, ideological conflict persists as conservatives, liberals, and socialists continue to disagree with one another, animal liberationists fight for animal rights, gays advocate for gay rights, and Greens campaign to protect the environment. The worldwide financial crisis that began in 2007 cast grave doubt on the deregulation of markets championed by libertarians and modern conservatives whose movements are, for the moment at least, in partial eclipse. Other movements, motivated by other ideologies, are poised to challenge and perhaps replace them.

Like it or not, in short, ours is likely to remain an age of ideological diversity and disagreement. Anyone who hopes to understand this diversity and disagreement will benefit, we believe, from a careful reading of the selections that follow, which provide a generous sampling of some of the writings that have helped to form the ideologically varied political terrain of the small planet on which we dwell together, if not always, alas, in peace and harmony.

*Terence Ball*

*Richard Dagger*

*Daniel I. O’Neill*

# THE CONCEPT OF IDEOLOGY

That ideologies and ideological conflict have persisted throughout modern history should come as no surprise to anyone. Ideologies are born of crisis and feed on conflict. People need help to comprehend and cope with turbulent times and confusing circumstances, and—for better or worse—ideologies provide this help. An ideology does this by performing four important and perhaps indispensable functions for those who subscribe to it. First, it *explains* political phenomena that would otherwise remain mysterious or puzzling. Why are there wars and rumors of war? Why are there conflicts between nations, between classes, and between races? What causes depressions? The answer that one gives to these and to many other questions depends to some degree on one's ideology. A Marxian socialist will answer one way, a fascist another, and a feminist yet another.

Second, an ideology provides its adherents with criteria and standards of *evaluation*—of deciding what is right and wrong, good and bad. Are class differences and vast disparities of wealth good or bad things? Is interracial harmony possible, and, if so, is it desirable? Is censorship permissible, and, if so, under what conditions? Again, the answers one gives will depend on which ideology one subscribes to.

Third, an ideology *orients* its adherents, giving them a sense of who they are and where they belong—a social and cultural compass with which to define and affirm their individual and collective identity. Fascists, for example, will typically think of themselves as members of a superior nation or race. Communists will see themselves as people who defend the working class against capitalist oppression and exploitation. Animal liberationists will identify themselves as defenders of animals that are unable to protect themselves against human abuse and exploitation.

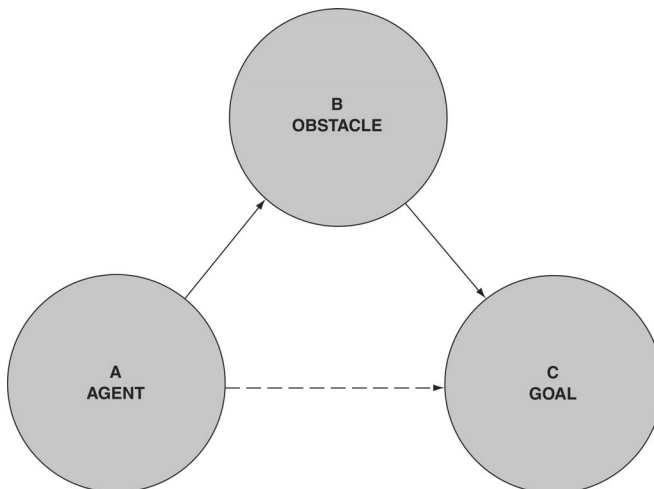
Fourth and finally, an ideology supplies its adherents with a rudimentary political *program*. This program provides an answer to the question posed by the Russian revolutionary Lenin, among many others: What is to be done? And, no less important: Who is to do it? With what means? A Marxist-Leninist, for instance, will answer these questions as follows: The working class must be emancipated from capitalist exploitation by means of a revolution led by a vanguard party. Fascists, feminists, Greens, liberals, conservatives, and others will, of course, propose other—and very different—programs of political action.

To summarize, a political ideology is a more or less systematic set of ideas that performs four functions for those who hold it: the explanatory, the evaluative, the orientative, and the programmatic. By performing these functions, an ideology serves as a guide and compass through the thicket of political life.

There are, as we shall see, many different political ideologies in the modern world. But what of democracy? Is it an ideology? In our view, democracy is not an ideology but an *ideal* that different ideologies interpret in different ways. For the ancient Greeks, who coined the word, democracy (*demos-kratein*) meant rule by, and in the interest of, the common people. In the modern world, some Marxists have insisted that a “people’s democracy,” in which the leaders of a revolutionary party rule in the name of the masses, is the best way to serve the interests of the common people. For liberals, however, democracy means “liberal democracy”—that is, majority rule, but with ample provision for the protection of minority rights. For most modern environmentally oriented Greens, democracy means decentralized “participatory” or “grassroots” democracy. Other ideologies interpret the democratic ideal in other ways. Democracy, then, is an ideal that most ideologies claim to strive for, but it is an ideal whose meaning they vigorously contest.

As with “democracy,” so too with “freedom.” What “freedom” means for liberals is something quite different from what it means for fascists, for example. We can see this more clearly by thinking of freedom (or liberty) as a triadic or three-sided relation among an *agent*, a *goal*, and any *obstacle* standing between the agent and the goal that he, she, or they seek to achieve. We represent this relationship in the following diagram (Figure 1.1).

Every ideology identifies the three elements of the triad in its own way. A liberal will typically identify the agent as an individual, the goal as the satisfaction of an individual’s own preferences or desires, and the obstacle as any unreasonable restraint or restriction on such “want satisfaction.” A Marxist, by contrast, will characteristically identify the agent as an entire class—the working class or “proletariat”—that struggles to overcome capitalist exploitation in order to achieve a classless communist society. A fascist will conceive of the agent as a whole nation or race attempting to overcome so-called inferior nations or races in a collective search for racial or national supremacy and purity. And other ideologies conceive of freedom in still other ways. Understanding how they conceive of freedom is, in fact, one of the best ways to understand the differences that separate any political ideology from its ideological rivals.



**FIGURE 1.1** The Triadic Model of Freedom

# Ideology: The Career of a Concept

TERRELL CARVER

The concept of ideology has undergone dramatic changes in meaning since the term *idéologie* was first coined in late eighteenth-century France. In the following essay, the Anglo-American political theorist Terrell Carver (1946–) traces these changes, concluding with a critical consideration of the ways in which the term “ideology” is used today.

## IDEOLOGY: THE CAREER OF A CONCEPT

As a coined word, the term “ideology” has a precise origin in the era of the French Revolution. The decisive shifts in its meaning, moreover, have been associated with some of the most colorful and influential figures in modern history: Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), Karl Marx (1818–1883), Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), and V. I. Lenin (1870–1924). From its very inception, in fact, ideology has been associated with highly abstract philosophy and forceful, even brutal, political repression.

Behind the term “ideology” are the familiar features of politics: ideas and power. Philosophers have not been conspicuous for their participation in politics, but through the actions of others they have been influential at times. Improving the connection between philosopher and politician to extend this influence was one of the main concerns of Antoine Louis Claude Destutt, Comte de Tracy (1754–1836), one of the Enlightenment *philosophes*. De Tracy coined the term “ideology” during the wild revolutionary decade in France when ideas inspired many thousands to test their powers in politics and to put their immediate material interests, and even their lives, at risk. Although the substance of de Tracy’s thought drew on the specific philosophies of Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715–1780) and John Locke (1632–1704), among others, his work was explicitly directed toward political action. He assumed that criteria for the truth and falsity of ideas could be established and definitively employed, and that there was a point to doing so. That point was overtly political.

De Tracy and his colleagues aimed to promote progress in all areas of human endeavor, theoretical and practical, by reforming elite and middle-class opinion. Their Institut de France was established by the Convention in 1795 to disseminate higher learning as the savants of the revolution defined it. Their work began with three assumptions: that progress in social life is desirable; that progress comes only from correct ideas; and that incorrect ideas must be resisted, especially in the schools. In opposition to the traditions of the Catholic Church and to the

personal authority of anointed monarchs, de Tracy and his colleagues in the Institut favored the ideals of the new science associated with Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), René Descartes (1596–1650), and other thinkers who espoused rational inquiry into the natural and social world. The rationalism of the Institut was especially hostile to religious thought if conceived mystically.

In 1796 a British commentator reported that de Tracy had read a paper at the Institut in which he proposed to call the philosophy of mind “ideology.” Five years later, in his *Elements of Ideology* (1801; translated into English by Thomas Jefferson for an edition of 1817), de Tracy summarized the results of his logic within a “plan of the elements of ideology . . . to give a complete knowledge of our intellectual faculties, and to deduce from that knowledge the first principles of all other branches of our knowledge.” Without these first principles, “our knowledge” could “never be founded on any other solid base.”<sup>1</sup> With correct ideas would come a correct psychology or theory of human behavior, and with that the justification for such political prescriptions as intellectuals might devise and enlightened politicians might enforce.

De Tracy’s system, while sweeping, was disarmingly simplistic, dismissive of skepticism, and surprisingly concise. Even at the time it must have raised some strong doubts among philosophers. Indeed, the association of ideology with intellectual shortcuts, oversimplification, and distortion seems inherent in de Tracy’s original conception. That de Tracy also associated his ideology with a political program and authoritarian politics provides further clues to the way the concept has functioned since his day.

There are three important features of de Tracy’s conception of ideology: (1) the explicit linkage between logic, psychology, and politics, set down in a “table” of simple propositions and backed up with more extensive observations; (2) the assumption that intellectuals discover the truth and that well-advised political authorities implement policies to match; and (3) the claim

that logic, psychology, and politics, as linked, are coincident with science and history, properly understood.

In 1797 Napoleon Bonaparte, the leading general of the revolutionary army, became an honorary member of the Institut, and his fellow “ideologues” supported the coup d’état by which he seized power in 1799. With their boundless faith in reason, the “ideologues,” de Tracy among them, expected to achieve the same success in psychology, morality, social and economic relations, and politics that the new “natural philosophers” had achieved in studying planetary and terrestrial motion, optics, and mathematics. Such was their certainty that they committed themselves to an administrative structure to promote their ideas and to discourage what they termed prejudices—and with that, they necessarily engaged in politics. As their concept of truth presupposed the authority of the intellectual (validated by the “correct” assumptions and methods), so their politics created no great obstacles to authoritarian rule—provided, of course, that the authority had proper intellectual guidance. There was little in the doctrines of the “ideologues” to favor the unenlightened intellect or to afford it any great role in decision-making. Because politics was supposed to be subject to the new science, democracy with its popular decision-making would have little to recommend itself to the Enlightenment intellectual unless it were properly guided. Tutoring rulers was obviously the easier and more immediately efficacious task. With Napoleon a member of the Institut, furthermore, the “ideologues” could expect enlightenment and progress to spread all the more quickly throughout France and beyond its borders. The forces of reaction were to be swept away by the enlightened use of political power as the resources of the state were made available to the intellectual elite.

The crucial event in the development of the concept of ideology came when Napoleon turned against the “ideologues” and decisively reversed their interpretation of the proper relationship between intellectuals and rulers, philosophers and politicians. Around 1812 he dismissed de Tracy’s work and the work of the Institut de

France as “ideology, that sinister metaphysics.” This hostility to the “ideologues” apparently reflected a shift in Napoleon’s political tactics, from alliance with the rationalists of the Institut against religion and the Church to the reverse. Eradicating what the “ideologues” saw as prejudice was politically costly, and Napoleon sought to increase his personal power by making peace with the Church and allying himself with other conservative forces.<sup>2</sup>

About thirty years later, the German Communist Karl Marx seized on “ideology” as a term of abuse. He criticized German intellectuals whose philosophy and politics displeased him by dismissing them as “ideologists,” proponents of “the German ideology.” He and Friedrich Engels co-authored a manuscript of that name which remained unpublished as a whole until 1932, although sections of the large work appeared in excerpts from 1903 onward.<sup>3</sup> In other published works that circulated during his lifetime and in his private correspondence, Marx used the term “ideology” in ways that drew on the more extensive airing he had given the concept in *The German Ideology*.

Ideologies and ideologists arise in class-divided societies, according to Marx. In particular, “the class which has the means of material production at its disposal consequently also controls the means of mental production.” Thinkers are “producers of ideas,” in other words, while ruling classes regulate “the production and distribution of the ideas of their age.” Thus “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force.” Within the ruling class the division of labor divides mental from material tasks, so that

inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptualizing ideologists, who make the formation of the illusions of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood), while the other’s attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of this class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves.<sup>4</sup>



The German ideology was to be explained, Marx argued, “from its connection with the illusion of ideologists in general, e.g., the illusions of the jurists, politicians (including practical statesmen), from the dogmatic dreamings and distortions of these fellows.” All those illusions and distortions were “explained perfectly easily from their practical position in life, their job, and the division of labour.”<sup>5</sup> In this realm of jobs and economic activity Marx introduced a notion of material interest which made illusions demonstrably functional for some individuals and classes in societies as they pursued economic advantages for themselves at others’ expense. Some of these useful illusions were dressed up as claims about nature or God—for example, “some people are slaves by nature,” “God made woman to serve man”—and some were more elaborately cloaked in a universalism that Marx dismissed as spurious. He argued, for example, that the “rights of man and the citizen” proclaimed in the French Revolution ultimately worked for the benefit of owners of private property at the expense of workers, who had no property to sell but their own labor. Thus in Marx’s analysis, an ideology came to mean not just a body of ideas that conformed to certain formal characteristics, such as those of de Tracy’s system, but any ideas, however unsophisticated, that gave apparent validity and assumed authority to the claims that members of different classes might make when they pursued their various interests. Those who characteristically made such claims were deemed “ideologists”; others merely repeated in their speech or reflected in their behavior an “ideology.”

In Marx’s view, ideologies could be reactionary, conservative, reformist, or revolutionary, depending on the way that material interests (typically the use and control of resources, goods, and services) were pursued by individuals and then protected socially and politically. In keeping with his depiction of history as the history of class struggles, now hidden, now open, Marx defined ideologies as the “legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short, ideological—forms” in which people become conscious of class conflict “and fight it out.”<sup>6</sup> In that way, “the existence of revolutionary ideas in

a particular period,” he wrote, “presupposes the existence of a revolutionary class.”<sup>7</sup>

Marx thus extended de Tracy’s term “ideology” to cover ideas that reflected, and were somehow useful in pursuing, the material interests of classes. But his own work was supposed to identify, explain, and promote working-class interests in current political struggles. It might seem, therefore, to be ideological itself. Marx did not refer to his work in those terms, however, or to the pursuit of working-class politics as requiring an ideology. He identified the working class as a revolutionary class, but one distinguished from previous revolutionary classes in that it was becoming a majority and already expressed “the dissolution of all classes, nationalities etc., within present society.”<sup>8</sup> A revolutionary class was to overthrow a ruling class, as had already happened many times, but with the *proletarian* revolution would come the abolition of class society altogether. This could happen, Marx said, because the interest of the proletariat coincides with the interests of all individuals “as individuals.”<sup>9</sup>

Marx’s arguments for the proletariat’s abolition of class-divided society are sketchy and unconvincing, but they are quite distinct from the views he described as ideological. His communism, and the theory behind it, were not ideologies on his definition, because the formal properties and political reference were profoundly different. Instead, Marx considered his work to be scientific, taking due regard for the historical character of the social phenomena under investigation. It was also supposed to have political significance in the struggle for socialism. But it was not formally identical to the pattern for an “ideology” established by de Tracy because there was no Marxian logic and psychology from which his politics were deduced. Rather he worked from a less comprehensive conception, that of economic activity (“so-called material interests”), toward prescriptions that could be useful, so he argued, in proletarian politics.<sup>10</sup> The role of the theoretically informed individual or group was said, in the *Communist Manifesto* and elsewhere, to be advisory, not authoritative. Marx contemptuously dismissed sects and other ways in which ideals were supposed to be imposed on people so that reality could be created, in a sense,

by ideas. Communism, he claimed, was a “real movement” already in existence, to which his science was intended to contribute.<sup>11</sup>

Friedrich Engels was the architect of a Marxism that fitted the formal requirements of an ideology, though he himself dismissed ideology all too simplistically as mere “false consciousness,” a phrase not used by Marx.<sup>12</sup> While he did not term Marx’s work an ideology, but a science—namely, “scientific socialism”—Engels elaborated a view that Marx’s science had specified fundamental laws of dialectics in the realm of “thought” (presumably a protopsychology), in the development of human behavior in history, and in the matter-in-motion of the universe itself. Engels’s widely circulated *Anti-Dühring* (1878) advertised those pretensions, producing extended discussions of historical and contemporary economic development that were supposed to substantiate his claims for a materialistic dialectic in logic. These were repeated in his later *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1888) and the posthumously published *Dialectics of Nature* (1925), edited from notebooks largely contemporary with *Anti-Dühring*.

Whether Marx shared Engels’s views is a matter of controversy.<sup>13</sup> There is no explicit endorsement of them in his works. Indeed, as I am arguing here, the way that Marx identified such logico-deductive constructions as “ideological” suggests that he could not have agreed with Engels’s views without major inconsistency.

Thus Marx’s followers did their best to make his ideas fit the formal and political definitions of ideology that Marx himself had applied to other systems of ideas. In doing so, his followers seemed to undermine the pejorative connotations of the term. This introduced an obvious contradiction between Marx’s own consistently pejorative usage with respect to German ideologists and other apologists for the ruling classes on the one hand, and his followers’ use of the term in an approving sense on the other, to identify his work as a comprehensive system that promoted the interests of one particular class in society—the working class. This working-class or proletarian “ideology” was a science, Marx’s followers said, precisely because it was a body of thought

reflecting proletarian interests. As a result we have Marxism identified by Soviet philosophers and many others as a “scientific ideology”—a contradiction in terms from Marx’s own point of view.

The Russian revolutionary Lenin (pseudonym for Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov) followed Engels in identifying Marxism as a comprehensive science derived from an abstract logic, thus accepting it formally as an ideology. While this identification was merely tacit in Engels’s case, Lenin made it specific and went one stage further in his highly influential *What Is to Be Done?* (1902). Citing Engels on the necessity for political, economic, and theoretical struggle in pursuing working-class interests, Lenin concluded very generally and with particular reference to Russia that “without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice.” “Modern socialist consciousness,” he wrote, “can only arise on the basis of profound scientific knowledge.”<sup>14</sup>

Lenin identified this science as “socialist ideology” and claimed that the only political choice available in his time was between the bourgeois ideology and the socialist one. He thus defined ideologies as doctrines reflecting class interests that were in some sense products of theoretical thinking, not the commonplace consciousness of class members themselves. For the working class this was crucial in Lenin’s eyes, because he viewed them as likely victims of bourgeois ideology (or unwitting servants of it via “trade union consciousness”), unless socialist intellectuals and party workers, using the “socialist ideology,” awakened the workers to the “irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system.”<sup>15</sup> On this view it was a matter of fact that science served proletarian interests because it revealed the true character of class antagonism in capitalist society, the very truth that bourgeois ideology had veiled in illusions, such as “self-help,” “parliamentary democracy,” “market forces,” and so on.

Presumably Lenin’s use of “ideology” to include science, as well as the interest-serving mystifications Marx had loosely identified as ideologies, was a kind of shorthand. Lenin conceived of a “scientific ideology” opposed to unscientific ones, all serving different class interests. In that

political sense—ideology as ideas serving class interests—Lenin made Marxism ideological. By the early twentieth century, then, ideology had wandered in meaning from a science of ideas, to a sinister metaphysics, to class-serving illusions, to false consciousness as opposed to scientific socialism, to scientific socialism as one ideology competing with others.

The “science” within the socialism of Engels and Lenin was very vulnerable to criticism, as the first principles of their dialectical materialism were incomplete and unconvincing. But the insight, derived ultimately from Marx, that ideas serve the interests of individuals, groups, and classes, and that individuals, groups, and classes often generate and defend the ideas that do this, has made a systematic sociology of consciousness possible. This project was set out by the German sociologist Karl Mannheim (1893–1947), who explained that the principal thesis of his “sociology of knowledge” is that there are modes of thought that cannot be adequately understood as long as their social origins are obscured. In his view, the study of these “ideologies” involves unmasking the more or less conscious deceptions and disguises of interest groups, particularly those of political parties.<sup>16</sup> For Mannheim, “ideology” was a name for two related conceptions which he distinguished as “particular” and “total”:

The particular conception of ideology is implied when the term denotes that we are skeptical of the ideas and representations advanced by our opponent. They are regarded as more or less conscious disguises of the real nature of a situation, the true recognition of which would not be in accord with his interests.

“This conception of ideology,” wrote Mannheim, “has only gradually become differentiated from the commonsense notion of the lie.” It was “particular” by comparison with the more inclusive “total” conception of ideology:

Here we refer to the ideology of an age or of a concrete historico-social group, e.g., of a class, when we are concerned with the characteristics and composition of the total structure of the mind of this epoch or of this group.<sup>17</sup>

Mannheim argued that this total conception of ideology raised the problem of “false consciousness” as “the totally distorted mind which falsified everything.” The possibility that our whole conception of reality might be systematically distorted and continuously distorting had “a special significance and relevance for the understanding of our social life.” From the awareness of this possibility arose a “profound disquietude” that Mannheim felt very deeply.<sup>18</sup>

De Tracy confidently described his ideology, a general grammar and logic, as a science about whose methods, truth, and timelessness he had no doubts. Since the time of the *philosophes* confidence has given way to skepticism, and the term “ideology” has reflected this exactly. When there was certainty about truth and science, a new word, “ideology,” was coined. This fell victim to a vengeful politics when Napoleon dismissed it as “sinister metaphysics,” and the term came to stand for illusion as opposed to science. Because of Marx’s attacks on the elitism of the philosopher-politicians and his pithy theorizing on the origins of ideas in class-divided societies, the concept has almost become synonymous with ax-grinding. Engels’s “scientific socialism” and Lenin’s “proletarian ideology” reincarnate de Tracy’s confidence, but to less than universal satisfaction, as modern skepticism about truth admits no conclusive grounds for the judgments that those doctrines claim to justify. Ideology has thus been moved from denoting the elements of a comprehensive, programmatic politics to functioning as an element in a supremely doubtful academic taxonomy. It is confused to the point of babel, as it variously signifies unambiguous truth, myth or illusion, false consciousness, scientific socialism, and ideas that distort and conceal a dynamically changing social reality.

This has not stopped contemporary writers from trying to extract order from chaos. Malcolm B. Hamilton has formulated no fewer than 27 “definitional elements” of the concept from no fewer than 85 sources. His own selective synthesis is as follows:

An ideology is a system of collectively held normative and reputedly factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social

relationships and arrangements, and/or aimed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct, which its proponents seek to promote, realize, pursue or maintain.<sup>19</sup>

Hamilton recommends this definition for purposes of “empirical application and research,” and so he excludes some of the “definitional elements” that have historically been important to participants in and theorists of political action. Hence the association of ideology with class interest that has been so important to Marxist politics is rejected, as is the whole question of the relationship between ideology and science. Indeed, a number of other issues that have been famously explored in discussions about what ideology is and what are examples of it are rather flippantly discarded, as if specialists in epistemology or philosophy of science were the only ones competent to “settle” such questions. These include the way that ideas are determined in society, the distinction between descriptive and explanatory claims, the relationship between political advocacy and social science, and the way in which ideas are or are not “functional.” In justifying his exclusions Hamilton appeals to a realm of “reason, logic or . . . evidence” that he believes is independent of the interests of the human beings who use such concepts.<sup>20</sup> One can argue, however, that this claim is not only impossible to sustain, but that it lays the author open to the very kind of scrutiny in which the term “ideology” has figured. What exactly are the interests of social scientists? Are these not reflected in their concept of an “empirical fact”? Can they escape their own social and political context so easily by modeling themselves on what they take to be the natural sciences? Can they appeal so conveniently to what philosophers term reason and logic?

Ideology, in sum, is not a concept that denotes some particular phenomenon in the world. It is not a template against which something is or is not an ideology, nor is it a recipe stating how to make an ideology correctly. Rather it is an agenda of things to discuss, questions to ask, hypotheses to make. We should be able to use it when considering the interaction between ideas and politics, especially systems of ideas that make claims, whether justificatory or hortatory. Cutting the concept off from its history, even if historically it

has been used in contradictory ways, is no service. Political theory is not an exercise in grave-digging so that inconvenient problems can “disappear.” Instead, it provides a wealth of critical perspective, if only we are prepared to use it.

## NOTES

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# THE DEMOCRATIC IDEAL: HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Some politicians, scholars, and journalists speak of democracy as if it were an ideology distinct from and in opposition to other ideologies—especially communism and fascism. But this is mistaken. Democracy is not itself an ideology but an *ideal* that different ideologies define and pursue (or reject) in different ways and for different reasons. Everyone agrees that “democracy” means “rule by the people,” of course, but what *is* rule by the people? Who are *the people*, and *how* are they to rule? On these points there is little agreement because each ideology answers these questions in its own way. With the exception of fascism, Nazism, and radical Islamism, however, all major or mainstream ideologies now agree that democracy is certainly the most desirable form of government—an ideal toward which all societies should strive.

The popularity of democracy in our time is extraordinary not only because so many people of such different views claim to be democrats but also because democracy was long regarded as a bad or corrupt form of government. The word “democracy” itself first came into use in ancient Greece, where a conflict developed between those who favored democracy—rule by the *demos* or the common people—and those who preferred aristocracy—literally, “rule by the best.” In Athens in the fifth century BCE, the *demos* found a leader in Pericles, whose famous “Funeral Oration” was one of the first defenses of democracy as a way of life. The Athenian democracy was short-lived, however, and philosophers such as Plato (c. 428–348 BCE) and Aristotle (384–322 BCE) concluded that democracy is inherently unstable. The common people, Plato argued, are simply too shortsighted and too unruly to govern wisely. Democracy will soon descend into anarchy, a lawless condition that will lead the people to call for a strong leader to restore law and order. But that strong leader will be a despot who subjects everyone else to slavery. From democracy, according to Plato, it is but a short step to despotism, the worst of all forms of government.

Like Plato, his pupil Aristotle regarded democracy as a selfish or corrupt form of government. Democracy is “rule by the many” in the selfish interest of the common people as a distinct class, he said, not rule in the interest of the community as a whole.



But Aristotle also noted that democracy has some desirable features, and he went further to argue that rule by many in the interests of the whole community is not only possible but probably the best of all forms of government.

Aristotle called this best form of government a polity, but it later became better known by the Roman name of “republic,” from the Latin *res publica* (meaning “public thing” or “public business”). The republican idea was that the forms of government must be mixed in such a way that some power is in the hands of the common people, some in the hands of the aristocratic few, and some in the hands of a single person. Because each element of society would have some power, but not enough to rule without the cooperation of the other two elements, a system of checks and balances would lead to a government that ruled in the common interest. It would then be a popular government because the people (*populus*) would have a significant voice, but it would not be a democracy. In a republic the power of the people would be tempered and guided by the wisdom of the few.

For centuries, the republic, and not democracy, was considered the ideal form of popular government. Its supporters included Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) and John Adams (1735–1826), the second president of the United States. But in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries sentiment began to shift in favor of democracy. Exactly why this happened is not clear. But with the growth of cities and industry came increasing literacy and improved means of communications, and the nineteenth century soon came to be known as the age of “the common man.” In the United States this change was associated with Jacksonian democracy, as the period of Andrew Jackson’s presidency (1829–1837) was called. Democracy was taken to be a means of expression or self-government for the common man, as well as a device by which he could protect his rights and interests. But “rule by the people” did not include women and members of other groups, such as slaves in the United States, who were not yet counted among “the people.”

Some observers saw the rise of democracy as a mixed blessing. Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859), a French aristocrat who traveled throughout the United States in the 1830s, welcomed the increased opportunities that democracy brought to the common people. In his *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville particularly praised the opportunities for participation in local government that democracy made possible. But he also worried that democracy placed so much emphasis on equality that a new form of tyranny would emerge: the “tyranny of the majority.” The emphasis on equality will lead to the pressure to conform, Tocqueville feared, so that people will be afraid to think and act for themselves. In England, John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) reached much the same conclusion. The old days of tyrannical rule by kings and emperors were vanishing, he wrote in *On Liberty*, but now the individual’s ability to think and live freely was subject to “the moral coercion of public opinion” (see the selection from Mill’s *On Liberty* in Part 3). Like Tocqueville, Mill welcomed the increased opportunities for political participation that democracy opened, for he saw participation as a way of educating and improving men and women. But he also suggested that it might be prudent, at least temporarily, to give the wiser, better-informed, and more responsible members of society more votes than the common person.

Despite these concerns, democracy became more widespread throughout the nineteenth century. Voting rights were extended to almost all adult males in the industrialized countries of Europe and North America by the end of the century, and were then extended to women in the early or middle years of the twentieth century. Fascism reacted against this democratic trend in the years following World War I, but

the defeat of Germany, Italy, and Japan in World War II seems, for a time, to have crushed fascism as a significant antidemocratic force. Now, throughout most of the world, democracy is recognized rhetorically—if not always in practice—as the best of all forms of government.

But “democracy” means different things to different people. In particular, three conceptions of democracy competed with one another in the twentieth century. The most familiar in the English-speaking world is *liberal democracy*. For liberals like Mill, democracy is indeed government by the people, but the people must be willing to respect the rights and liberties of the individuals who compose society. In liberal democracy, then, the chief concern is to prevent majority rule from becoming majority tyranny. The advocates of *social democracy* accept the need to protect individual rights, but they argue that some of these rights—especially the right to own and dispose of property—may be used to frustrate true democracy. That is why social democrats typically take the socialist point of view that property ought to be controlled more or less directly for the public good, not for the private benefit of individuals. Property and wealth are forms of power, they say, and no society can be truly democratic when some people have considerably more power than others. Social democrats thus stress the importance of equality for democracy, with equality understood as a roughly equal chance to influence the decisions that govern one’s society. A not-so-distant echo of this theme is often heard in debates over campaign financing, in which critics complain that the campaign contributions of wealthy citizens and special interest groups buy them political influence that ordinary or poor citizens can never achieve.

The third conception of democracy that vied for acceptance in the twentieth century—but with little success in recent years—is *people’s democracy*. This view is linked most closely with communism, or Marxism-Leninism. In this view, democracy is rule by, or *in the interests of*, the common people, which means that it is possible for a single group, such as the Communist Party, to wield power democratically so long as it acts to promote the interests of the working class or proletariat. Democracy and dictatorship are compatible with each other, in other words, as the Chinese leader Mao Zedong (1893–1976) insisted in his essay “On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship” (in Part 6 of this book).

As we end, the second decade of the twenty-first century, the idea of “people’s democracy” seems to have few adherents outside the ranks of the Chinese Communist party and Communist parties in Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam. But democracy in general is more popular than ever, and the question we now face is whether liberals and socialists will continue to quarrel over the proper definition of democracy, or whether they will find enough common ground to satisfy—and perhaps unite—the two groups. The twenty-first century has also seen the rise of “illiberal democracy,” which rejects the idea of inviolable individual rights and the rule of law in favor of a majority-take-all view of democracy. Illiberal democracy holds that the majority must rule more or less absolutely. But the voice of this majority is typically taken to be a particular party and its popular leader. Such a leader rules by decrees that the majority subsequently ratifies or otherwise approves. This type of democracy has taken root in Hungary, Poland, Turkey, India, and the Philippines, and threatens the United States (critics say) under the presidency of Donald Trump.





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# Democracy and Despotism

## EURIPIDES

The Greeks of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE in Athens took pride in a form of government that they had invented: democracy (from *demos*, meaning “people” or “common people,” and *kratein*, meaning “rule”). While other peoples chafed under the rule of despots, the Athenians ruled themselves. In his play *The Suppliants*, first performed in 422 BCE, Euripides (c. 485–407 BCE) contrasts democratic and despotic government, celebrating the former while condemning the latter. The occasion of the following exchange is the arrival in Athens of an envoy from Thebes, which was then ruled by the tyrant Creon. The envoy cannot quite believe that the people are capable of ruling themselves. The Athenian leader Theseus replies with a resounding defense of democracy.

## THE SUPPLIANTS

Theban Messenger: Who is the tyrant who rules this land?  
To whom must I deliver my message  
from Creon, ruler of Thebes?

Theseus: Esteemed visitor, your speech proceeds from a false premise. No tyrant rules here, for this city is free. Here the people rule, each taking his turn without respect of wealth or poverty.

Theban Messenger: Surely you jest. The city from which I come is ruled not by the gullible multitude but by one man only. No one there uses high-sounding words to pander to the crowd, manipulating them for his own advantage while cloaking his crimes and failures in fair-sounding phrases. So I ask you: Since the common people [*demos*] are such poor judges of everything, how can they possibly govern the city? They have neither the time nor the talent to understand the intricacies of politics. Even if he had been educated, a poor working stiff would have no time or energy left over from his labors to learn about political affairs. Besides, wiser and better people would recoil from a system in which such a man might, through his own way with words, fool the people and rise from being a nobody to occupy a position of political prominence.

Theseus: You yourself have a way with words and would, if you could, fool us with your kit of clever verbal tricks. But since you have chosen to play this game of words, permit me to take my turn while you listen. Nothing is worse for a city than a tyrant. Wherever he rules, the law does not. In his hands there is no law that rules over all alike. But where the laws [*nomoi*]

rule, all—rich and poor, powerful and weak—are equal before them. There the poor are able to speak the same language as the strong—the language of law and justice. If his cause be just, the poor man can prevail against a wealthy adversary. The hallmark of freedom is this: Anyone having good advice to give to the city should be heard, and anyone with nothing to say may choose to remain silent. What greater equality [*isonomia*] can exist in a city? Where all the citizens rule, they take pride in their young people. But where a tyrant rules, he fears them, and, seeing the most talented among them as a threat to his own power, he puts them to the sword. How can the city survive and prosper, where its ruler stifles all initiative and uses his sword like a scythe, cutting down its youths like the flowers of spring? Why work and save for the sake of your children, only to have the tyrant take it all away? Why raise your daughters to be virtuous, when they can be ravished at whim by a lustful tyrant while their tearful parents are powerless to prevent it? I would rather die than have my children be subjected to such arbitrary power!

This thunderbolt I hurl in answer to your words. . . . If you weren't a messenger and therefore under the protection of the law, you would pay dearly for your outrageous remarks. It is the messenger's duty to deliver one message and to return with another. So take this reply back to Creon: Next time, send to our city a messenger who talks less foolishly than this one.

# Funeral Oration

## PERICLES

After defeating the numerically larger forces of the despotic Persian Empire in 480 BCE, democratic Athens assumed a preeminent position among the city-states of Greece. But other Greek city-states grew wary of Athens' power and angry at its arrogance. Led by Athens's chief rival, Sparta, they waged war—the Peloponnesian War—against Athens. In his famous “Funeral Oration” (430 BCE), Pericles (c. 495–429 BCE) commemorates the sacrifice of the Athenians who died in battle in the first years of the war and celebrates the ideals of Athenian democracy.

*Source:* Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 2nd ed., revised, vol. 1, translated by Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), pp. 126–135. The editors have altered the translation slightly for purposes of clarity.

## FUNERAL ORATION

Most of those who have spoken here before me have commended the lawgiver who added this oration to our other funeral customs; it seemed to them a worthy thing that such an honor should be given at their burial to the dead who have fallen on the field of battle. But I should have preferred that, when men's deeds have been brave, they should be honored in deed only, and with such an honor as this public funeral, which you are now witnessing. Then the reputation of many would not have been imperiled on the eloquence or want of eloquence of one, and their virtues believed or not as he spoke well or ill. For it is difficult to say neither too little nor too much; and even moderation is apt not to give the impression of truthfulness. The friend of the dead who knows the facts is likely to think that the words of the speaker fall short of his knowledge and of his wishes; another who is not so well informed, when he hears of anything which surpasses his own powers, will be envious and will suspect exaggeration. Mankind are tolerant of the praises of others so long as each hearer thinks that he can do as well or nearly as well himself, but, when the speaker rises above him, jealousy is aroused and he begins to be incredulous. However, since our ancestors have set the seal of their approval upon the practice, I must obey, and to the utmost of my power shall endeavor to satisfy the wishes and beliefs of all who hear me.

. . . But before I praise the dead, I should like to point out by what principles of action we rose to power, and under what institutions and through what manner of life our empire became great. For I conceive that such thoughts are not unsuited to the occasion, and that this numerous assembly of citizens and strangers may profitably listen to them.

Our form of government does not enter into rivalry with the institutions of others. We do not copy our neighbors, but are an example to them. It is true that we are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few. But while the law secures equal justice to all alike in their private disputes, the

claim of excellence is also recognized; and when a citizen is in any way distinguished, he is preferred to the public service, not as a matter of privilege, but as the reward of merit. Neither is poverty a bar, but a man may benefit his country whatever be the obscurity of his condition. There is no exclusiveness in our public life, and in our private intercourse we are not suspicious of one another, nor angry with our neighbor if he does what he likes; we do not put on sour looks at him which, though harmless, are not pleasant. While we are thus unconstrained in our private intercourse, a spirit of reverence pervades our public acts; we are prevented from doing wrong by respect for the authorities and for the laws, having an especial regard to those which are ordained for the protection of the injured as well as to those unwritten laws which bring upon the transgressor of them the reprobation of the general sentiment.

And we have not forgotten to provide for our weary spirits many relaxations from toil; we have regular games and sacrifices throughout the year; our homes are beautiful and elegant; and the delight which we daily feel in all these things helps to banish melancholy. Because of the greatness of our city the fruits of the whole earth flow in upon us; so that we enjoy the goods of other countries as freely as of our own.

Then, again, our military training is in many respects superior to that of our adversaries. Our city is thrown open to the world, and we never expel a foreigner or prevent him from seeing or learning anything of which the secret if revealed to an enemy might profit him. We rely not upon management or trickery, but upon our own hearts and hands. And in the matter of education, whereas they from early youth are always undergoing laborious exercises which are to make them brave, we live at ease, and yet are equally ready to face the perils which they face. And here is the proof. The Lacedaemonians [i.e., Spartans] come into Attica [i.e., Athenian territory] not by themselves, but with their whole confederacy following; we go alone into a neighbor's country; and although our opponents are

fighting for their homes and we on a foreign soil, we have seldom any difficulty in overcoming them. Our enemies have never yet felt our united strength; the care of a navy divides our attention, and on land we are obliged to send our own citizens everywhere. But they, if they meet and defeat a part of our army, are as proud as if they had routed us all, and when defeated they pretend to have been vanquished by us all.

If then we prefer to meet danger with a light heart but without laborious training, and with a courage which is gained by habit and not enforced by law, are we not greatly the gainers?

... For we are lovers of the beautiful, yet simple in our tastes, and we cultivate the mind without loss of manliness. Wealth we employ, not for talk and ostentation, but when there is a real use for it. To avow poverty with us is no disgrace; the true disgrace is in doing nothing to avoid it. An Athenian citizen does not neglect the state because he takes care of his own household; and even those of us who are engaged in business have a very fair idea of politics. We alone regard a man who takes no interest in public affairs, not as a harmless, but as a useless character; and if few of us are originators, we are all sound judges of a policy. The great impediment to action is, in our opinion, not discussion, but the want of that knowledge which is gained by discussion preparatory to action. For we have a peculiar power of thinking before we act and of acting too, whereas other men are courageous from ignorance but hesitate upon reflection. And they are surely to be esteemed the bravest spirits who, having the clearest sense both of the pains and pleasures of life, do not on that account shrink from danger. In doing good, again, we are unlike others; we make our friends by conferring, not by receiving, favors. Now he who confers a favor is the firmer friend, because he would fain by kindness keep alive the memory of an obligation; but the recipient is colder in his feelings, because he knows that in requiting another's generosity he will not be winning gratitude but only paying a debt. We alone do good to our neighbors not upon a calculation of interest, but in the confidence of freedom and in a frank and fearless spirit. To sum up: I say that Athens is

the school of Hellas [i.e., Greece], and that the individual Athenian in his own person seems to have the power of adapting himself to the most varied forms of action with the utmost versatility and grace. This is no passing and idle word, but truth and fact; and the assertion is verified by the position to which these qualities have raised the state. For in the hour of trial Athens alone among her contemporaries is superior to the report of her. No enemy who comes against her is indignant at the reverses which he sustains at the hands of such a city; no subject complains that his masters are unworthy of him. And we shall assuredly not be without witnesses; there are mighty monuments of our power which will make us the wonder of this and of succeeding ages; we shall not need the praises of Homer or of any other panegyrist whose poetry may please for the moment, although his representation of the facts will not bear the light of day. For we have compelled every land and every sea to open a path for our valor, and have everywhere planted eternal memorials of our friendship and of our enmity. Such is the city for whose sake these men nobly fought and died; they could not bear the thought that she might be taken from them; and every one of us who survive should gladly toil on her behalf.

I have dwelt upon the greatness of Athens because I want to show you that we are contending for a higher prize than those who enjoy none of these privileges, and to establish by manifest proof the merit of these men whom I am now commemorating. Their loftiest praise has been already spoken. For in magnifying the city I have magnified them, and men like them whose virtues made her glorious. And of how few Hellenes [i.e., Greeks] can it be said as of them, that their deeds when weighed in the balance have been found equal to their fame! I believe that a death such as theirs has been given the true measure of a man's worth; it may be the first revelation of his virtues, but is at any rate their final seal. For even those who come short in other ways may justly plead the valor with which they have fought for their country; they have blotted out the evil with the good, and have benefited the state more by their public services than they have injured her

by their private actions. None of these men were weakened by wealth or hesitated to forgo the pleasures of life; none of them put off the evil day in the hope, natural to poverty, that a man, though poor, may one day become rich. But, deeming that the punishment of their enemies was sweeter than any of these things, and that they could fall in no nobler cause, they determined at the hazard of their lives to be honorably avenged, and to leave the rest. They resigned to hope their unknown chance of happiness; but in the face of death they resolved to rely upon themselves alone. And when the moment came they were minded to resist and suffer, rather than to flee and save their lives; they ran away from the word of dishonor, but on the battle-field their feet stood fast, and in an instant, at the height of their fortune, they passed away from the scene, not of their fear, but of their glory.

Such was the end of these men; they were worthy of Athens, and the living need not desire to have a more heroic spirit, although they may pray for a less fatal result. The value of such a spirit is not to be expressed in words. Any one can talk to you forever about the advantages of a brave defense, which you know already. But instead of listening to him I would have you day by day fix your eyes upon the greatness of Athens, until you become filled with the love of her; and when you are impressed by the spectacle of her glory, reflect that this empire has been acquired by men who knew their duty and had the courage to do it, who in the hour of conflict had the fear of dishonor always present to them, and who, if ever they failed in an enterprise, would not allow their virtues to be lost to their country, but freely gave their lives to her as the fairest offering which they could present at her feast. The sacrifice which they collectively made was individually repaid to them; for they received again each one for himself a praise which grows not old, and the noblest of all sepulchers—I speak not of that in which their remains are laid, but of that in which their glory survives, and is proclaimed always and on every fitting occasion both in word and deed. For the whole earth is the sepulcher of famous men; not only are they commemorated by columns and

inscriptions in their own country, but in foreign lands there dwells also an unwritten memorial of them, graven not on stone but in the hearts of men. Make them your examples, and, esteeming courage to be freedom and freedom to be happiness, do not weigh too nicely the perils of war. The unfortunate who has no hope of a change for the better has less reason to throw away his life than the prosperous who, if he survives, is always liable to a change for the worse, and to whom any accidental fall makes the most serious difference. To a man of spirit, cowardice and disaster coming together are far more bitter than death striking him unperceived at a time when he is full of courage and animated by the general hope.

Wherefore I do not now commiserate the parents of the dead who stand here; I would rather comfort them. You know that your life has been passed amid many great changes; and that they may be deemed fortunate who have gained most honor, whether an honorable death like theirs, or an honorable sorrow like yours, and whose days have been so ordered that the term of their happiness is likewise the term of their life. I know how hard it is to make you feel this, when the good fortune of others will too often remind you of the gladness which once lightened your hearts. And sorrow is felt at the want of those blessings, not which a man never knew, but which were a part of his life before they were taken from him. Some of you are of an age at which they may hope to have other children, and they ought to bear their sorrow better; not only will the children who may hereafter be born make them forget their own lost ones, but the city will be doubly a gainer. She will not be left desolate, and she will be safer. For a man's counsel cannot have equal weight or worth, when he alone has no children to risk in the general danger. To those of you who have passed their prime, I say: "Congratulate yourselves that you have been happy during the greater part of your days; remember that your life of sorrow will not last long, and be comforted by the glory of those who are gone. For the love of honor alone is ever young, and not riches, as some say, but honor is the delight of men when they are old and useless."

To you who are the sons and brothers of the departed, I see that the struggle to emulate them will be an arduous one. For all men praise the dead, and, however preeminent your virtue may be, hardly will you be thought, I do not say to equal, but even to approach them. The living have their rivals and detractors, but when a man is out of the way, the honor and good which he receives is unalloyed. And, if I am to speak of womanly virtues to those of you who will henceforth be widows, let me sum them up in one short admonition: To a woman not to show more weakness than is natural to her sex is a great glory, and not to be talked about for good or for evil among men.

I have paid the required tribute, in obedience to the law, making use of such fitting words as I had. The tribute of deeds has been paid in part; for the dead have been honorably buried, and it remains only that their children should be maintained at the public charge until they are grown up: This is the solid prize with which, as with a wreath, Athens crowns her sons living and dead, after a struggle like theirs. For where the rewards of virtue are greatest, there the noblest citizens are enlisted in the service of the state. And now, when you have duly lamented, every one his own dead, you may depart.





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## Democratic Judgment and the “Middling” Constitution

ARISTOTLE

Although critical of democracy as a form of government, the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE) nevertheless recognized the democratic principle that “many heads are better than one.” Just as a feast to which many people contribute is richer, more varied, and more nourishing than a meal prepared by one or a few, so a government that makes use of many talents and perspectives is wiser than one that does not. That is Aristotle’s argument in Book III, Chapter 11 of his *Politics*. But the best form of government, as he goes on to say in Book IV, Chapter 11, is not democracy but “polity,” that is, rule by the many in the interest of all. Aristotle thus anticipates the kind of popular self-rule that came to be called “republican.” On the republican form of government, see selections 2.5 and 2.6.

*Source:* Aristotle, *The Politics*, translated by Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885). The editors have altered the translation slightly for the sake of clarity.

## THE POLITICS: BOOK III

### Chapter 11

. . . The principle that the multitude ought to be supreme rather than the few best is one that is maintained, and, though not free from difficulty, yet seems to contain an element of truth. For the many, of whom each individual is but an ordinary person, when they meet together may very likely be better than the few good, if regarded not individually but collectively, just as a feast to which many contribute is better than a dinner provided out of a single purse. For each individual among the many has a share of virtue and prudence, and when they meet together, they become in a manner of speaking one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses. . . . Hence the many are better judges than a single man of music and poetry; for some understand one part, and some another, and among them they understand the whole. There is a similar combination of qualities in good men, who differ from any individual of the many, as the beautiful are said to differ from those who are not beautiful, and works of art from realities, because in them the scattered elements are combined, although, if taken separately, the eye of one person or some other feature in another person would be fairer than in the picture. Whether this principle can apply to every democracy, and to all bodies of men, is not clear. Or rather, by heaven, in some cases it is impossible of application; for the argument would equally hold about animals; and wherein, it will be asked, do some men differ from animals? But there may be bodies of men about whom our statement is nevertheless true. And if so, the difficulty which has been already raised, and also another which is akin to it—viz. what power should be assigned to the mass of freemen and citizens, who are not rich and have no personal merit—are both solved. There is still a danger in allowing them to share the great offices of state, for their folly will lead them into error, and their dishonesty into crime. But there is a danger also in not letting them share, for a state in which many poor men are excluded from office will necessarily be full of enemies. The only way of escape is to assign to them

some deliberative and judicial functions. For this reason Solon and certain other legislators<sup>1</sup> give them the power of electing to offices, and of calling the magistrates to account, but they do not allow them to hold office singly. When they meet together their perceptions are quite good enough, and combined with the better class they are useful to the state (just as impure food when mixed with what is pure sometimes makes the entire mass more wholesome than a small quantity of the pure would be), but each individual, left to himself, forms an imperfect judgment. On the other hand, government by the people involves certain difficulties. In the first place, it might be objected that he who can judge of the healing of a sick man would be one who could himself heal his disease, and make him whole—that is, in other words, the physician; and so in all professions and arts. As, then, the physician ought to be called to account by physicians, so ought men in general to be called to account by their peers. But physicians are of three kinds: there is the ordinary practitioner, and there is the physician of the higher class, and thirdly the intelligent man who has studied the art: in all arts there is such a class; and we attribute the power of judging to them quite as much as to professors of the art. Secondly, does not the same principle apply to elections? For a right election can only be made by those who have knowledge; those who know geometry, for example, will choose a geometrician rightly, and those who know how to steer, a pilot; and, even if there be some occupations and arts in which private persons share in the ability to choose, they certainly cannot choose better than those who know. So that, according to this argument, neither the election of magistrates, nor the calling of them to account, should be entrusted to the many. Yet possibly these objections are to a great extent met by our old answer, that if the people are not utterly degraded, although individually they may be worse judges than those who have special knowledge: as a body they are as good or better. Moreover, there are some arts whose products are not judged of solely, or best, by the artists

themselves, namely those arts whose products are recognized even by those who do not possess the art; for example, the knowledge of the house is not limited to the builder only; the user, or, in other words, the master, of the house will be even a better judge than the carpenter, just as the pilot will be a better judge of a rudder than the boat-builder, and the guest will be a better judge of a feast than the cook.

This difficulty seems now to be sufficiently answered, but there is another akin to it. That inferior persons should have authority in greater matters than the good would appear to be a strange thing, yet the election and calling to account of the magistrates is the greatest of all. And these, as I was saying, are functions which in some states are assigned to the people, for the assembly is supreme in all such matters. Yet persons of any age, and having but a small property qualification, sit in the assembly and deliberate and judge, although for the great officers of state, such as treasurers and generals, a high qualification is required. This difficulty may be solved in the same manner as the preceding, and the present practice of democracies may be really defensible. For the power does not reside in the juror, or senator, or assemblyman, but in the court, and the senate, and the assembly, of which individual senators, or assemblymen or jurors, are only parts or members. And for this reason the many may claim to have a higher authority than the few; for the people, and the

senate, and the courts consist of many persons, and their property collectively is greater than the property of one or of a few individuals holding great offices. But enough of this.

The discussion of the first question shows nothing so clearly as that laws, when good, should be supreme; and that the magistrate or magistrates should regulate those matters only on which the laws are unable to speak with precision owing to the difficulty of any general principle embracing all particulars. But what are good laws has not yet been clearly explained; the old difficulty remains. The goodness or badness, justice or injustice, of laws varies of necessity with the constitutions of states. This, however, is clear, that the laws must be adapted to the constitutions. But if so, true forms of government will of necessity have just laws, and perverted forms of government will have unjust laws.

## Chapter 12

In all sciences and arts the aim or end [*telos*] is a good, and the greatest good and in the highest degree a good is the most authoritative of all—this is the political science of which the good is justice, in other words, the common interest. All men think justice to be a sort of equality; and to a certain extent they agree in the philosophical distinctions which have been laid down by us about *Ethics*.<sup>2</sup> For they admit that justice is a thing and has a relation to persons, and that equals ought to have equality.

## THE POLITICS: BOOK IV

### Chapter 11

We have now to inquire what is the best constitution for most states, and the best life for most men, neither assuming a standard of virtue which is above ordinary persons, nor an education which is exceptionally favored by nature and circumstances, nor yet an ideal state which is an aspiration only, but having regard to the life in which the majority are able to share, and to the form of government which states in general can attain. As to those aristocracies, as they are called, of which we were just now speaking, they

either lie beyond the possibilities of the greater number of states, or they approximate to the so-called constitutional government [or polity], and therefore need no separate discussion. And in fact the conclusion at which we arrive respecting all these forms rests upon the same grounds. For if what was said in the *Ethics* is true, that the happy life is the life according to virtue lived without impediment, and that virtue is a mean between extremes, then the life which is in a mean, and in a mean attainable by everyone,

must be the best. And the same principles of virtue and vice are characteristic of cities and of constitutions; for the constitution is in a figure of speech the life of the city.

Now in all states there are three elements: one class is very rich, another very poor, and a third is a mean between those extremes. It is admitted that moderation and the mean are best, and therefore it will clearly be best to possess the gifts of fortune in moderation; for in that condition of life men are most ready to follow rational principle. But he who greatly excels in beauty, strength, birth, or wealth, or on the other hand who is very poor, or very weak, or very much disgraced, finds it difficult to follow rational principle. Of these two the one sort grow into violent and infamous criminals, the others into rogues and petty rascals. And two sorts of offenses correspond to them, the one committed from violence, the other from roguery. Again, the middle class is least likely to shrink from rule, or to be overambitious for it; both of which are injuries to the state. Again, those who have too much of the goods of fortune, strength, wealth, friends, and the like, are neither willing nor able to submit to authority. The evil begins at home; for when they are boys, by reason of the luxury in which they are brought up, they never learn, even at school, the habit of obedience. On the other hand, the very poor, who are in the opposite extreme, are too degraded. So that the one class cannot obey, and can only rule despotically; the other knows not how to command and must be ruled like slaves. Thus arises a city, not of freemen, but of masters and slaves, the one despising, the other envying; and nothing can be more fatal to friendship [*philia*] and good fellowship in states than this: for good fellowship springs from friendship; when men are at enmity with one another, they would rather not even share the same path. But a city ought to be composed, as far as possible, of equals and similars; and these are generally the middle classes. Wherefore the city which is composed of middle-class citizens is necessarily best constituted in respect of the elements of which we say the fabric of the state naturally consists. And this is the class of citizens which is

most secure in a state, for they do not, like the poor, covet their neighbors' goods; nor do others covet theirs, as the poor covet the goods of the rich; and as they neither plot against others, nor are themselves plotted against, they pass through life safely. Wisely then did [the poet] Phocylides pray—"Many things are best in the mean; I desire to belong to the middle class in my city."

Thus it is manifest that the best political community is formed by citizens of the middle class, and that those states are likely to be well-administered, in which the middle class is large, and stronger if possible than both the other classes, or at any rate than either singly; for the addition of the middle class tips the scale, and prevents either of the extremes from being dominant. Great then is the good fortune of a state in which the citizens have a moderate and sufficient property; for where some possess much, and the others nothing, there may arise an extreme democracy, or a pure oligarchy; or a tyranny may grow out of either extreme—either out of the most rampant democracy, or out of an oligarchy; but it is much less likely to arise out of the middle constitutions and those akin to them. I will explain the reason of this hereafter, when I speak of the revolutions of states. The mean condition of states is clearly best, for no other is free from faction; and where the middle class is large, there are least likely to be factions and dissensions. For a similar reason large states are less liable to faction than small ones, because in them the middle class is large; whereas in small states it is easy to divide all the citizens into two classes who are either rich or poor, and to leave nothing in the middle. And democracies are safer and more permanent than oligarchies, because they have a middle class which is more numerous and has a greater share in the government; for when there is no middle class, and the poor greatly exceed the rich in number, troubles arise, and the state soon comes to an end. A proof of the superiority of the middle class is that the best legislators have been of a middle condition; for example, Solon, as his own verses testify; and Lycurgus, for he was not a king; and Charondas, and almost all legislators.<sup>3</sup>

These considerations will help us to understand why most governments are either democratic or oligarchic. The reason is that the middle class is seldom numerous in them, and whichever party, whether the rich or the common people, transgresses the mean and predominates, draws the constitution its own way, and thus arises either oligarchy or democracy. There is another reason—the poor and the rich quarrel with one another, and whichever side gets the better, instead of establishing a just or popular government, regards political supremacy as the prize of victory, and the party of the poor sets up a democracy and the party of the rich establishes an oligarchy. Further, both the parties which had the supremacy in Hellas [Greece] looked only to the interest of their own form of government, and established in states, the one, democracies, and the other, oligarchies; they thought of their own class’s advantage, of the public not at all. For these reasons the middle form of government has rarely, if ever, existed, and among a very few only. One man alone of all who ever ruled in Hellas was induced to give this middle constitution to states. But it has now become a habit among the citizens of states, not even to care about equality [*isonomia*]; all men are seeking for dominion, or, if conquered, are willing to submit.

What then is the best form of government, and what makes it the best, is now clear; and of other constitutions, since we say that there are many kinds of democracy and many of oligarchy, it is not difficult to see which has the first and which the second or any other place in the order of excellence, now that we have determined which is the best. For that which is nearest to the best must of necessity be better, and that which is furthest from it worse, if we are judging absolutely and not relative to given conditions: I say “relative to given conditions,” since a particular form of government may be preferable for some people, but another form may be better for others.

## NOTES

1. Solon (c. 638–559 BCE) was the “legislator” or “lawgiver” who drafted the fundamental laws, or constitution, of Athens.—Eds.
2. Here Aristotle refers to his *Nicomachean Ethics* (especially Book V, Chapter 3).—Eds.
3. Like Solon in Athens, Lycurgus and Charondas were “legislators” who drafted the fundamental laws of their city-states: in Lycurgus’s case, Sparta; in Charondas’s, Catana, a Greek colony in what is now Sicily.—Eds.



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# What's Wrong With Princely Rule?

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI

The Italian Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw the rebirth of many of the ideals of classical Greece and Rome, including the ideal of self-government. Among those who celebrated the rebirth of “republican” government was Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). Machiavelli is best known as the author of *The Prince*, a short book in which he apparently advocates rule by a single person who should not hesitate to use cruelty and deceit to stay in power. In his longer book, *The Discourses*, however, he takes a very different position. In the following excerpt from *The Discourses*, Machiavelli criticizes the claim that the people, acting collectively, are less wise than a single king or prince.

*Source:* Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, translated by Christian Detmold (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1882), chap. 58, pp. 214–219.



## THE PEOPLE ARE WISER AND MORE CONSTANT THAN PRINCES

Titus Livius [or Livy]<sup>1</sup> as well as all other historians affirm that nothing is more uncertain and inconstant than the multitude; for it appears from what he relates of the actions of men, that in many instances the multitude, after having condemned a man to death, bitterly lamented it, and most earnestly wished him back. This was the case with the Roman people and Manlius Capitolinus, whom they had condemned to death and afterwards most earnestly desired him back, as our author [i.e., Livy] says in the following words: "No sooner had they found out that they had nothing to fear from him, than they began to regret and to wish him back." And elsewhere, when he relates the events that occurred in Syracuse after the death of Hieronymus, nephew of Hiero, he says: "It is the nature of the multitude either humbly to serve or insolently to dominate." I know not whether, in undertaking to defend a cause against the accusations of all writers, I do not assume a task so hard and so beset with difficulties as to oblige me to abandon it with shame, or to go on with it at the risk of being weighed down by it. Be that as it may, however, I think, and ever shall think, that it cannot be wrong to defend one's opinions with arguments founded upon reason, without employing force or authority.

I say, then, that individual men, and especially princes, may be charged with the same defects of which writers accuse the people; for whoever is not controlled by laws will commit the same errors as an unbridled multitude. This may easily be verified, for there have been and still are plenty of princes, and a few good and wise ones, such, I mean, as needed not the curb that controlled them. Amongst these, however, are not to be counted either the kings that lived in Egypt at that ancient period when that country was governed by laws, or those that arose in Sparta; neither such as are born in our day in France, for that country is more thoroughly regulated by laws than any other of which we have any knowledge in modern times. And those kings that arise under such constitutions are not to be classed amongst the number of those

whose individual nature we have to consider, and see whether it resembles that of the people; but they should be compared with a people equally controlled by law as those kings were, and then we shall find in that multitude the same good qualities as in those kings, and we shall see that such a people neither obey with servility nor command with insolence. Such were the people of Rome, who, so long as that republic remained uncorrupted, neither obeyed basely nor ruled insolently, but rather held its rank honorably, supporting the laws and their magistrates. . . .

Therefore, the character of the people is not to be blamed any more than that of princes, for both alike are liable to err when they are without any control. Besides the examples already given, I could adduce numerous others from amongst the Roman Emperors and other tyrants and princes, who have displayed as much inconstancy and recklessness as any populace ever did. Contrary to the general opinion, then, which maintains that the people, when they govern, are inconsistent, unstable, and ungrateful, I conclude and affirm that these defects are not more natural to the people than they are to princes. To charge the people and princes equally with them may be the truth, but to except princes from them would be a great mistake. For a people that governs and is well regulated by laws will be stable, prudent, and grateful, as much so, and even more, according to my opinion, than a prince, although he be esteemed wise; and, on the other hand, a prince, freed from the restraints of the law, will be more ungrateful, inconstant, and imprudent than a people similarly situated. The difference in their conduct is not due to any difference in their nature (for that is the same, and if there be any difference for good, it is on the side of the people); but to the greater or less respect they have for the laws under which they respectively live. And whoever studies the Roman people will see that for four hundred years they have been haters of royalty, and lovers of the glory and common good of their country; and he will find any number of examples that will prove both the one and the other. . . . But as regards prudence

and stability, I say that the people are more prudent and stable, and have better judgment than a prince; and it is not without good reason that it is said, "The voice of the people is the voice of God"; for we see popular opinion prognosticate events in such a wonderful manner that it would almost seem as if the people had some occult virtue, which enables them to foresee the good and the evil. As to the people's capacity of judging of things, it is exceedingly rare that, when they hear two orators of equal talents advocate different measures, they do not decide in favor of the best of the two; which proves their ability to discern the truth of what they hear. And if occasionally they are misled in matters involving questions of courage or seeming utility (as has been said above), so is a prince also many times misled by his own passions, which are much greater than those of the people. We also see that in the election of their magistrates they make far better choices than princes; and no people will ever be persuaded to elect a man of infamous character and corrupt habits to any post of dignity, to which a prince is easily influenced in a thousand different ways. When we see a people take an aversion to anything, they persist in it for many centuries, which we never find to be the case with princes. Upon both these points the Roman people shall serve me as a proof, who in the many elections of Consuls and Tribunes had to regret only four times the choice they had made. The Roman people held the name of king in such detestation, as we have said, that no extent of services rendered by any of its citizens who attempted to usurp that title could save him from his merited punishment. We furthermore see the cities where the people are masters make the greatest progress in the least possible time, and much greater than such as have always been governed by princes; as was the case with Rome after the expulsion of the kings, and with Athens after they rid themselves of Pisistratus;<sup>2</sup> and this can be attributed to no other cause than that the governments of the people are better than those of princes.

It would be useless to object to my opinion by referring to what our historian [i.e., Livy] has said in the passages quoted above, and elsewhere;

for if we compare the faults of a people with those of princes, as well as their respective good qualities, we shall find the people vastly superior in all that is good and glorious. And if princes show themselves superior in the making of laws, and in the forming of civil institutions and new statutes and ordinances, the people are superior in maintaining those institutions, laws, and ordinances, which certainly places them on par with those who established them.

And finally to sum up this matter, I say that both governments of princes and of the people have lasted a long time, but both required to be regulated by laws. For a prince who knows no other control but his own will is like a madman, and a people that can do as it pleases will hardly be wise. If now we compare a prince who is controlled by laws, and a people that is restricted by them, we shall find more virtue in the people than in the prince; and if we compare them when both are freed from such control, we shall see that the people are guilty of fewer excesses than the prince, and that the errors of the people are of less importance, and therefore more easily remedied. For a licentious and mutinous people may easily be brought back to good conduct by the influence and persuasion of a good man, but an evil-minded prince is not amenable to such influences, and therefore there is no other remedy against him but cold steel. We may judge then from this of the relative defects of the one and the other; if words suffice to correct those of the people, whilst those of the prince can only be remedied by violence, no one can fail to see that where the greater remedy is required, there also the defects must be greater. The follies which a people commits at the moment of its greatest license are not what is most to be feared; it is not the immediate evil that may result from them that inspires apprehension, but the fact that such general confusion might afford the opportunity for a tyrant to seize the government. But with evil-disposed princes the contrary is the case; it is the immediate present that causes fear, and there is hope only in the future; for men will persuade themselves that the termination of his wicked life may give them a chance of liberty. Thus we see the difference between the one

and the other to be, that the one touches the present and the other the future. The excesses of the people are directed against those whom they suspect of interfering with the public good; whilst those of princes are against apprehended interference with their individual interests. The general prejudice against the people results from the fact that everybody can freely and fearlessly speak ill of them en masse, even whilst they are at the height of their power; but a prince can

only be spoken of with the greatest circumspection and apprehension.

## NOTES

1. Titus Livius (59 BCE—CE 17), or Livy, was a Roman historian. Machiavelli's *Discourses* is, in part, a commentary on the first ten books of Livy's *History of Rome*.—Eds.
2. Pisistratus (?—527 BCE) was notorious for his long, tyrannical rule of Athens.—Eds.

# What Is a Republic?

JOHN ADAMS

The ideal of republican self-rule played an important part in the political struggles and debates of eighteenth-century America. Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson used republican arguments during the American Revolution to justify independence from Great Britain, and the Founding Fathers drafted a republican constitution in 1787. In 1776, when he was a member of the Continental Congress, John Adams (1735–1826) wrote the following selection, *Thoughts on Government*, in which he expounds and defends the principles of republican government.

## THOUGHTS ON GOVERNMENT

My Dear Sir,—If I was equal to the task of forming a plan for the government of a colony, I should be flattered with your request, and very happy to comply with it; because, as the divine science of politics is the science of social happiness, and the blessings of society depend entirely on the constitutions of government, which are generally institutions that last for many generations, there can be no employment more agreeable to a benevolent mind than a research after the best.

Pope<sup>1</sup> flattered tyrants too much when he said,

For forms of government let fools contest, That  
which is best administered is best.

Nothing can be more fallacious than this. But poets read history to collect flowers, not fruits; they attend to fanciful images, not the effects of social institutions. Nothing is more certain, from the history of nations and nature of man, than that some forms of government are better fitted for being well administered than others.

We ought to consider what is the end of government, before we determine which is the best form. Upon this point all speculative politicians will agree, that the happiness of society is the end of government, as all divines and moral philosophers will agree that the happiness of the individual is the end of man. From this principle it will follow, that the form of government which communicates ease, comfort, security, or, in one word, happiness, to the greatest number of persons, and in the greatest degree, is the best.

All sober inquirers after truth, ancient and modern, pagan and Christian, have declared that the happiness of man, as well as his dignity, consists in virtue. Confucius, Zoroaster, Socrates, Mahomet [i.e., Mohammed], not to mention authorities really sacred, have agreed in this.

If there is a form of government, then, whose principle and foundation is virtue, will not every sober man acknowledge it better calculated

to promote the general happiness than any other form?

Fear is the foundation of most governments; but it is so sordid and brutal a passion, and renders men in whose breasts it predominates so stupid and miserable, that Americans will not be likely to approve of any political institution which is founded on it.

Honor is truly sacred, but holds a lower rank in the scale of moral excellence than virtue. Indeed, the former is but a part of the latter, and consequently has not equal pretensions to support a frame of government productive of human happiness.

The foundation of every government is some principle or passion in the minds of the people. The noblest principles and most generous affections in our nature, then, have the fairest chance to support the noblest and most generous models of government.

A man must be indifferent to the sneers of modern Englishmen, to mention in their company the names of Sidney, Harrington, Locke, Milton, Nedham, Neville, Burnet, and Hoadly.<sup>2</sup> No small fortitude is necessary to confess that one has read them. The wretched condition of this country, however, for ten or fifteen years past, has frequently reminded me of their principles and reasonings. They will convince any candid mind, that there is no good government but what is republican. That the only valuable part of the British constitution is so; because the very definition of a republic is “an empire of laws, and not of men.” That, as a republic is the best of governments, so that particular arrangement of the powers of society, or, in other words, that form of government which is best contrived to secure an impartial and exact execution of the laws, is the best of republics.

Of republics there is an inexhaustible variety, because the possible combinations of the powers of society are capable of innumerable variations.

As good government is an empire of laws, how shall your laws be made? In a large society, inhabiting an extensive country, it is impossible that the whole should assemble to make

laws. The first necessary step, then, is to depute power from the many to a few of the most wise and good. But by what rules shall you choose your representatives? Agree upon the number and qualifications of persons who shall have the benefit of choosing, or annex this privilege to the inhabitants of a certain extent of ground.

The principal difficulty lies, and the greatest care should be employed, in constituting this representative assembly. It should be in miniature an exact portrait of the people at large. It should think, feel, reason, and act like them. That it may be the interest of this assembly to do strict justice at all times, it should be an equal representation, or, in other words, equal interests among the people should have equal interests in it. Great care should be taken to effect this, and to prevent unfair, partial, and corrupt elections. Such regulations, however, may be better made in times of greater tranquillity than the present; and they will spring up themselves naturally, when all the powers of government come to be in the hands of the people's friends. At present, it will be safest to proceed in all established modes, to which the people have been familiarized by habit.

A representation of the people in one assembly being obtained, a question arises, whether all the powers of government, legislative, executive, and judicial, shall be left in this body? I think a people cannot be long free, nor ever happy, whose government is in one assembly. My reasons for this opinion are as follows:

1. A single assembly is liable to all the vices, follies, and frailties of an individual; subject to fits of humor, starts of passion, flights of enthusiasm, partialities, or prejudice, and consequently productive of hasty results and absurd judgments. And all these errors ought to be corrected and defects supplied by some controlling power.
2. A single assembly is apt to be avaricious, and in time will not scruple to exempt itself from burdens, which it will lay, without compunction, on its constituents.
3. A single assembly is apt to grow ambitious, and after a time will not hesitate to

vote itself perpetual. This was one fault of the Long Parliament;<sup>3</sup> but more remarkably of Holland, whose assembly first voted themselves from annual to septennial, then for life, and after a course of years, that all vacancies happening by death or otherwise, should be filled by themselves, without any application to constituents at all.

4. A representative assembly, although extremely well qualified, and absolutely necessary, as a branch of the legislative, is unfit to exercise the executive power, for want of two essential properties, secrecy and despatch.
5. A representative assembly is still less qualified for the judicial power, because it is too numerous, too slow, and too little skilled in the laws.
6. Because a single assembly, possessed of all the powers of government, would make arbitrary laws for their own interest, execute all laws arbitrarily for their own interest, and adjudge all controversies in their own favor.

But shall the whole power of legislation rest in one assembly? Most of the foregoing reasons apply equally to prove that the legislative power ought to be more complex; to which we may add, that if the legislative power is wholly in one assembly, and the executive in another, or in a single person, these two powers will oppose and encroach upon each other, until the contest shall end in war, and the whole power, legislative and executive, be usurped by the strongest.

The judicial power, in such case, could not mediate, or hold the balance between the two contending powers, because the legislative would undermine it. And this shows the necessity, too, of giving the executive power a negative upon the legislative, otherwise this will be continually encroaching upon that.

To avoid these dangers, let a distinct assembly be constituted, as a mediator between the two extreme branches of the legislature, that which represents the people, and that which is vested with the executive power.

Let the representative assembly then elect by ballot, from among themselves or their constituents, or both, a distinct assembly, which, for the sake of perspicuity, we will call a council. It may consist of any number you please, say twenty or thirty, and should have a free and independent exercise of its judgment, and consequently a negative voice in the legislature.

These two bodies, thus constituted, and made integral parts of the legislature, let them unite, and by joint ballot choose a governor, who, after being stripped of most of those badges of domination, called prerogatives, should have a free and independent exercise of his judgment, and be made also an integral part of the legislature. This, I know, is liable to objections; and, if you please, you may make him only president of the council, as in Connecticut. But as the governor is to be invested with the executive power, with consent of council, I think he ought to have a negative upon the legislative. If he is annually elective, as he ought to be, he will always have so much reverence and affection for the people, their representatives and counsellors, that, although you give him an independent exercise of his judgment, he will seldom use it in opposition to the two houses, except in cases the public utility of which would be conspicuous; and some such cases would happen.

In the present exigency of American affairs, when, by an act of Parliament, we are put out of the royal protection, and consequently discharged from our allegiance, and it has become necessary to assume government for our immediate security, the governor, lieutenant-governor, secretary, treasurer, commissary, attorney-general, should be chosen by joint ballot of both houses. And these and all other elections, especially of representatives and counsellors, should be annual, there not being in the whole circle of the sciences a maxim more infallible than this, "where annual elections end, there slavery begins."

These great men, in this respect, should be, once a year,

Like bubbles on the sea of matter borne,  
They rise, they break, and to that sea return.

This will teach them the great political virtues of humility, patience, and moderation, without which every man in power becomes a ravenous beast of prey.

This mode of constituting the great offices of state will answer very well for the present; but if by experiment it should be found inconvenient, the legislature may, at its leisure, devise other methods of creating them, by elections of the people at large, as in Connecticut, or it may enlarge the term for which they shall be chosen to seven years, or three years, or for life, or make any other alterations which the society shall find productive of its ease, its safety, its freedom, or, in one word, its happiness.

A rotation of all offices, as well as of representatives and counsellors, has many advocates, and is contended for with many plausible arguments. It would be attended, no doubt, with many advantages; and if the society has a sufficient number of suitable characters to supply the great number of vacancies which would be made by such a rotation, I can see no objection to it. These persons may be allowed to serve for three years, and then be excluded three years, or for any longer or shorter term.

Any seven or nine of the legislative council may be made a quorum, for doing business as a privy council, to advise the governor in the exercise of the executive branch of power, and in all acts of state.

The governor should have the command of the militia and of all your armies. The power of pardons should be with the governor and council.

Judges, justices, and all other officers, civil and military, should be nominated and appointed by the governor, with the advice and consent of council, unless you choose to have a government more popular; if you do, all officers, civil and military, may be chosen by joint ballot of both houses; or, in order to preserve the independence and importance of each house, by ballot of one house, concurred in by the other. Sheriffs should be chosen by the freeholders of counties; so should registers of deeds and clerks of counties.

All officers should have commissions, under the hand of the governor and seal of the colony.

The dignity and stability of government in all its branches, the morals of the people, and every blessing of society depend so much upon



an upright and skillful administration of justice, that the judicial power ought to be distinct from both the legislative and executive, and independent upon both, that so it may be a check upon both, as both should be checks upon that. The judges, therefore, should be always men of learning and experience in the laws, of exemplary morals, great patience, calmness, coolness, and attention. Their minds should not be distracted with jarring interests; they should not be dependent upon any man, or body of men. To these ends, they should hold estate for life in their offices; or, in other words, their commission should be during good behavior, and their salaries ascertained and established by law. For misbehavior, the grand inquest of the colony, the house of representatives, should impeach them before the governor and council, where they should have time and opportunity to make their defence; but, if convicted, shall be removed from their offices, and subjected to such other punishment as shall be thought proper.

A militia law, requiring all men, or with very few exceptions besides cases of conscience, to be provided with arms and ammunition, to be trained at certain seasons; and requiring counties, towns, or other small districts, to be provided with public stocks of ammunition and intrenching utensils, and with some settled plans for transporting provisions after the militia, when marched to defend their country against sudden invasions; and requiring certain districts to be provided with field-pieces, companies of matrosses [i.e., gunners], and perhaps some regiments of light-horse, is always a wise institution, and, in the present circumstances of our country, indispensable.

Laws for the liberal education of youth, especially of the lower class of people, are so extremely wise and useful, that, to a humane and generous mind, no expense for this purpose would be thought extravagant.

The very mention of sumptuary laws [i.e., taxes on or prohibitions of luxury goods] will excite a smile. Whether our countrymen have wisdom and virtue enough to submit to them, I know not; but the happiness of the people might be greatly promoted by them, and a revenue saved sufficient to carry on this war [i.e., the

Revolutionary War] forever. Frugality is a great revenue, besides curing us of vanities, levities, and fopperies, which are real antidotes to all great, manly, and war-like virtues.

But must not all commissions run in the name of a king? No. Why may they not as well run thus, "The colony of . . . to A. B. greeting," and be tested by the governor?

Why may not writs, instead of running in the name of the king, run thus, "The colony of . . . to the sheriff," etc., and be tested by the chief justice?

Why may not indictments conclude, "against the peace of the colony of . . . and the dignity of the same?"

A constitution founded on these principles introduces knowledge among the people, and inspires them with a conscious dignity becoming freemen; a general emulation takes place, which causes good humor, sociability, good manners, and good morals to be general. That elevation of sentiment inspired by such a government, makes the common people brave and enterprising. That ambition which is inspired by it makes them sober, industrious, and frugal. You will find among them some elegance, perhaps, but more solidity; a little pleasure, but a great deal of business; some politeness, but more civility. If you compare such a country with the regions of domination, whether monarchical or aristocratical, you will fancy yourself in Arcadia or Elysium.<sup>4</sup>

If the colonies should assume governments separately, they should be left entirely to their own choice of the forms; and if a continental constitution should be formed, it should be a congress, containing a fair and adequate representation of the colonies, and its authority should sacredly be confined to these cases, namely, war, trade, disputes between colony and colony, the post-office, and the unappropriated lands of the crown, as they used to be called.

These colonies, under such forms of government, and in such a union, would be unconquerable by all the monarchies of Europe.

You and I, my dear friend, have been sent into life at a time when the greatest lawgivers of antiquity would have wished to live. How few of the human race have ever enjoyed an opportunity