

On Democracy

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Modern liberal democracy encompasses two different schools of thought, each of which has its own approach to structuring societies and systems of governance. These two systems, liberalism and democracy, each have varying traits and characteristics that ascribe different values to the economic, social, and political factors they are implemented to regulate. These differences compose a fundamental paradox, a paradox that requires those charged with governance to find ways to reconcile incompatible beliefs. No system of modern democratic government can fully function without addressing the conflicting directions of the forces that animate it, and to fail to understand the contradicting forces of liberalism and democracy is to consign a country to strife.

As a logical starting point, it is necessary to define both liberalism and democracy in order to describe the values they prioritize. To begin with, the democratic school of thought is founded on principles that promote equality, fairness, and the decentralization of decision-making power. Fundamentally, democratic ideas are based on the premise that all people, regardless of ability, should be equally able to access resources, be treated with respect, and have access to representation that they can either directly participate in or will accurately reflect their desires. Fairness is key to this understanding, as each person must be treated equitably for the system to function legitimately. Any system of economics, culture, or politics that discriminates or disadvantages those willing and able to participate in the process is inherently unjust, and therefore should have no mandate to govern the lives of citizens. Representation, to the democratic thinker, must fundamentally allow for the interests of the governed to influence policy directions. The key takeaway here is that a vote or majority rule are not indicators of fair representation. The truly important factor in deciding if a system is representative is if all who

wish to participate have had their voices heard and have been seriously considered. Fair and accurate representation is much more about the process of deliberation than the resulting policy, and a system that clothes itself in the trappings of democracy without ever allowing everyone to fully participate has failed to live up to the promise of democratic representation. Chantal Mouffe explains democratic thought best when she states, “The basis of legitimacy in democratic institutions derives from the fact that those who claim obligatory power do so on the presumption that their decisions represent an impartial standpoint which is equally in the interests of all. If this presumption is to be fulfilled, those decisions must be the result of appropriate public processes of deliberation,” (Mouffe, 47). The three key ideals of equality, fairness, and the decentralization of decision-making power are fundamental to the democratic school of thought, and directly influence the policies, decisions, and desires of those who practice it. A system of government based around democracy in the modern world would most likely involve a large and active government, as ensuring that all people are represented equitably and given equal opportunity would take an amount of resources impractical for private citizens to fulfill. To safeguard the principles they value most, democratic thinkers necessarily empower centralized forms of governance to protect and promote the fair treatment and equality of persons.

In contrast to democratic thought, liberalism promotes the values of individual liberty, maximization of freedoms, and a desire to allow individuals to identify and achieve their full potential. To the liberal thinker, the rights of individuals are critical to ensuring the continued growth and development of a society. Each person is assumed to have differing capabilities and natural talents that make them better suited towards certain roles in society, and as such the best course of action is to allow every citizen to pursue the paths they think will yield the best results.

Should this result in mild inequality of material situation or opportunity, it is of no great concern to the government as a whole since these variations are merely a reflection of individual's choices, proclivities, and abilities. The maximization of freedom is also critical in a liberal system of thought, since by granting individuals greater influence over their own lives they will naturally be able to pursue those opportunities that appeal to them and exploit their natural capabilities. Limiting the choices that individuals can make must inevitably prevent the best outcome possible for society, since it will prevent some citizens from pursuing that which they would be most capable of doing. In this way, liberalism inherently desires each individual to achieve the maximum that they can. Regardless of whether it results in varying outcomes, ensuring that each person can use their capabilities to the greatest degree possible should produce the greatest net benefit for society. Liberalism naturally seeks to promote more limited forms of governance, since restrictions on the individual would prevent the full exercise of each person's rights. Albert Jay Nock explains this concept, differentiating between a positive government and a negative state, when he says, "... , Government secures those rights to the individual by strictly negative intervention, making justice costless and easy to access; and beyond that it does not go. The State, on the other hand, both in its genesis and by its primary intention, is purely anti-social. It is not based on the idea of natural rights, but on the idea that the individual has no rights except those that the State may provisionally grant him," (Nock, 49-50). To protect those values which they hold dear, liberal thinkers necessarily empower the individual and grant them the greatest freedoms possible so as to unlock each person's full potential.

From these two definitions, clear tensions exist between the two theories inherent to modern democratic systems. On one hand, proponents of democratic theory argue that some rights must inherently be limited to allow for all citizens to function and be represented as

equals. This fundamentally conflicts with the desire of liberalism to expand the rights of each individual to its maximum potential. To the liberal thinker, constraining the freedoms of an individual is fundamentally unfair since it potentially prevents that person from achieving the zenith of their capabilities. To the democratic thinker, however, the expansion of individual rights can become unfair when it results in an individual possessing greater status, representation, or access to resources than another. These varying understandings of fairness are of serious concern to governments and political philosophers since they create serious conflicts. Any policy proposal that limits the rights of an individual too greatly would be patently unacceptable to a liberal thinker, and any consideration of the expansion of individual rights that would result in inequality or inequity would be similarly unacceptable to a proponent of democratic theories. Mouffe explains this concept in great detail when she states, “The democratic logic of constituting the people, and inscribing rights and equality into practices, is necessary to subvert the tendency towards abstract universalism inherent in liberal discourse. But the articulation with the liberal allows us to constantly challenge – through reference to ‘humanity’ and the polemical use of ‘human rights’ – the forms of exclusion that are necessarily inscribed in the political practice of installing those rights,” (Mouffe, 45). In this regard, the conflict between the two systems of thought sets boundaries that define acceptable topics of discussion within a society. Serious problems occur when the boundaries of either system draw too far apart from the other side. When one side no longer recognizes the values of the other as legitimate, the fabric of democracy itself is threatened.

Another point of conflict between the two theories regards the role and appropriate size of government systems. This area of disagreement is a result not necessarily of the direct theories of liberalism and democracy themselves, but rather arise as a result of those theories requiring

specific forms of power and governance to safeguard the values that they deem most important. To the democratic thinker, a system of government must exist that can protect the rights of all people to participate equally, be adequately represented, and ensure that individuals do not exercise their rights in such a way as to compromise the level political field. Such a structure of governance would necessarily have to be rather far reaching and hold substantial power, as it would not be able to ensure the fair and equal treatment of its citizens without the capabilities to monitor, evaluate, and encourage public participation. David Held, explaining Rousseau's position on democratic government, best explains this concept when he says, "In Rousseau's account, the idea of self-rule is posited as an end in itself; a political order offering opportunities for participation in the arrangement of public affairs should not just be a state, but rather the formation of a type of society: a society in which the affairs of the state are integrated into the affairs of ordinary citizens," (Held, 45).

On the other hand, a liberal system of governance must ensure that all individuals can fully and freely exercise their rights to the greatest extent possible, while at the same time ensuring to stay out of the way of the free exercise of personal ambition. Such a government would inherently limit itself, since to grow too large would be to infringe upon the affairs of its citizens. Rather than be an integral part of everyday life, the government must serve as a neutral arbiter of rights disputes and little more. Held, analyzing Locke's approach to government, exemplifies this ideal when he states, "Government exists to safeguard the rights and liberties of citizens who are ultimately the best judges of their own interests; and that accordingly government must be restricted in scope and constrained in practice in order to ensure the maximum possible freedom of every citizen," (Held, 64-65). These separate conceptions of the role of government constitute another point of tension between liberal and democratic systems of

thought. The role of government is fundamentally that of a neutral arbiter, a referee who steps in as needed to ensure the system continues to function. One side argues in favor of an active referee who works to ensure the game is played as equally as possible but must restrict some players in order to do so. The other side believes that the referee only need intervene in serious matters between individual players, and that the players themselves be allowed to do as they wish so long as they avoid the injury of another.

A final point of contention between liberalism and democratic thought is a more fundamental one: how each theory shapes the society it operates in. Democratic theory is inherently a levelling or flattening pressure on societies. Democratic thinkers seek to minimize the classification of groups of people or the creation of hierarchies within the societies they live in. Rather, democracy demands that people as a whole be represented equitably and have access to equal opportunity. While this does require the limitation of some individual rights, this is both necessary and worthwhile to achieve a society in which people are treated and represented without too much distinction. In contrast to this, liberalism can be thought of as acting as an expansionary or hierarchizing pressure on societies. To the liberal thinker, individuals will naturally arrive at different levels of ability, reputation, and power due to their varying skills and circumstances. These inherent differences are not negative traits to be eliminated, but rather representations of each individual's inherent capabilities. As such, attempting to make individuals equal in a society will inevitably result in lost liberty for the society as a whole, since each person may not exercise their rights to the greatest degree possible. Arguments of this nature can be traced back to the beginning of democracy as a system of government. Paul Woodruff presents the difficulty of this same tension in ancient Athens when he says, "In what ways are the citizens of Athens equal? They all know what it means to be an Athenian, because

of their common culture, but they are not equal in education. At the same time, Athenians believe that they all have the same human nature, but not that they are equal in strength or intelligence. What is left to be the meaning of their belief in natural equality?" (Woodruff, 132).

For as long as democracy has existed, the problem of how to structure a viable democratic society has vexed individuals and systems of governance alike. If we have previously set up the boundaries and the referee for the democratic game, then this point of conflict defines the playing field itself. The democratic thinker argues in favor of a level playing field, where each athlete is tested by the same measure. To the liberal thinker though, the playing field should not be modified from its natural state. Changing the field only disadvantages those who were capable of playing on the field already, while promoting the abilities of those who cannot.

With these issues defined, it becomes important to examine the ultimate goal of a democracy. To address this question, it is helpful to consider the distinction between a finite and infinite game. A finite game is one in which there exists a defined objective that all parties involved in the game are striving against each other to achieve. Whether attempting to score the most points, bankrupt the competition, or earn the highest grade, a finite game necessarily constitutes an antagonistic relationship. One side has to achieve their desired objective, and in doing so will complete the game. In contrast to this is the idea of an infinite game. The goal of an infinite game is not to win, but rather to continue playing in perpetuity for as long as possible. The other players in an infinite game are not antagonists, but rather adversaries with a shared set of fundamental values. Instead of defeating or eliminating their adversaries, a player in an infinite game seeks to triumph over the ideals of their opponent in such a way that their adversary has a fair chance to triumph themselves. All victories in a democracy must allow for compromise, and all losses must come with the caveat that the losing side will not be out of

power forever. Neither side is seeking policies or programs that destroy the other side, but rather wish to implement their vision of a set of shared values. Chantal Mouffe clarifies this idea when she states, “The aim of democratic politics is to construct the ‘them’ in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an ‘adversary’, that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question,” (Mouffe, 102). The differences between liberal and democratic systems of thought can be quite serious, but for an effective democratic government to function it must fundamentally act as an infinite game. By failing to treat the other side as an adversary, the democratic process is destroyed as both sides try to eliminate the other. Only by continuing to play are the voices and opinions of every citizen respected, and only by continuing to play are the freedoms and rights of individuals protected. To play a finite game is to put an expiration date on the ability of a democracy to function and to cost its citizens both their liberty and equality. To triumph completely over one’s opponent in a democracy does not ensure stability – it eliminates the ability of the democracy to function. When one side cannot be heard or their ideas are not represented, the system inevitably ceases to function as a liberal democracy.

When a democracy functions well, it manages the pressures and conflicting values of its citizens in a way that allows for them to agree on the fundamental aspects of conduct and governance that are necessary for a society to operate. However, a democracy that fails to manage the paradoxical elements of liberalism and democracy inevitably creates serious issues that radiate into the economic, political, and social spheres. These issues act both as stressors and warning signals for a democracy, flashing lights in the control room of government. Without serious effort and thoughtful work to correct the errors in a malfunctioning democratic society, the system begins to crumble and collapse. Torn in two by paradoxical forces and values, a

democracy that fails to manage the competing forces of liberalism and democracy well cannot sustain itself.

Economically, modern democracies face many challenges that take their root in a fundamental state of over-capitalization. Years of triumph by liberal and neoliberal thinkers in the economic sphere have created a system solely based on the primacy of market forces and the presumption of their ability to solve all problems. This creates a problem for a modern democracy both because it negates democratic values in an important domain of citizen life, and it annihilates the possibility that an economy should function for any purpose other than that of allowing market forces to act. This marketization is examined by Wendy Brown when she states, “This is the central paradox, perhaps even the central ruse, of neoliberal governance: the neoliberal revolution takes place in the name of freedom – free markets, free countries, free men – but tears up freedoms grounding in sovereignty for states and subjects alike. States are subordinated to the market, govern for the market, and gain or lose legitimacy according to the market’s vicissitudes; states also are caught in the parting ways of capital’s drive for accumulation and the imperative of nation economic growth,” (Brown, 108). The dominance of the market for the sake of the market is a sure warning sign of a democracy failing to manage its conflicting pressures, as it presages the growing over-influence of liberal values over democratic ones. In failing to accord the market a partial, as opposed to complete, share of the economic sphere, a modern democracy inevitably allows the market to rampage unchecked through the lives of its citizens. Economic problems are not solely the problems of the market. How to distribute public goods, in what ways to assist those who cannot help themselves, and the humanitarian endeavors that a society could pursue all do not function on market principles but are an important aspect of how an economy functions. When an economic system fails to

consider these problems seriously, it creates a presumption that only those actions whose benefits can be measured in currency should be considered. Rather than consider the long term health and wellbeing of its population, the economic sphere becomes constrained to narrow issues of profit and cost. Far from guaranteeing freedom as liberalism should, it instead allows freedom to be destroyed in the name of market forces. An over-bearing focus on economic success in solely monetary terms prevents the citizens of a democracy from pursuing those agendas that would benefit them, unless they can prove that course of action results in a cost saving or profit. The marketization of economic life artificially restricts citizens from taking those course of actions that are in their own best interest.

Another essential problem that modern democracies face in the economic sphere is the corruption of economic agencies for political means. Forcing onerous regulations on an enemy's principal business, keeping their opponents under constant audit, and pressuring banks to deny their rivals services or loans are all ways in which crafty leaders tilt the economic table in their favor. Canny politicians, driven by polarized values that demand victory at all costs, overrule what should be neutral arbiters of economic activity to target opponents and enforce their own agenda. This is fundamentally why the economic health of a country is usually closely correlated to how independent its financial institutions are, since those agencies that are subject to political interference often make detrimental economic decisions for the sake of political expediency. The corruption of economic entities is demonstrated by Levitsky and Ziblatt, who write, "Capturing the referees provides the government with more than a shield. It also offers a powerful weapon, allowing the government to selectively enforce the law, punishing opponents while protecting allies. Tax authorities may be used to target rival politicians, businesses, and media outlets," (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 78). When economic entities fail to act as independent arbiters, the

freedom and equality of citizens in a democracy vanishes. Only with truly non-partisan referees can an economic system function, since allowing political pressure to enter into the equation distorts the long-term health of an economy. Instead of achieving objectives that benefit all stakeholders in an economic system, individuals and firms are influenced by the prevailing political sentiment. This is a severe detriment to the health of a market system, and it eliminates the possibility for the free and equal exercise of a person's abilities within the economic sphere.

Perhaps one of the most difficult economic questions that modern democracies must confront is the question of wealth. On one hand, wealth can bring many positives to a community and a country as a whole. When exercised well, wealth can help guarantee that a nation maintains the resources to complete complex projects and protect its citizens from harm. By the same token, however, wealth is often self-reinforcing in ways that can create discord, exacerbate pre-existing tensions, and undermine democracy. Paul Woodruff makes this case clearly, using the United States as an example, when he states, "Wealth in the United States buys better education for its children, while poor education holds people back. Through education, wealth reinforces class lines, and creates artificial differences between races," (Woodruff, 223). This strikes at the fundamental problem of managing wealth in a society. While the profits of labor and enterprise are important to the sustainability of a nation, the accumulation of wealth quickly snowballs by providing compounding advantages to the rich and ever-increasing disadvantages to the poor. Allowing the economic prosperity of a minority to grow unchecked can eventually cause serious problems in a society, since the wealthy rapidly gain access to tools to exclude and limit the ability of others to participate in a society's governance. A democracy must then find a way both to allow for wealth and prosperity to exist while also ensuring that the power of wealth is not so extreme that it influences the functioning of a democracy itself. Finding the event

horizon of wealth management is critical since this economic issue can quickly spiral into a political and social problem when reasonable limits are not identified and enforced.

Another warning sign that a democracy is failing to manage its internal tensions is the marketization of human beings. When the citizens of a democracy must justify their every action in terms of costs saved or profits made, they are forced to ignore those courses of action that might benefit them most in favor of the options that make money. Brown makes this case when she says, "Rather than a creature of power and interest, the self becomes capital to be invested in, enhanced according to specified criteria and norms as well as available inputs. On the other hand, this conversion reorients the relationship of the state to the citizen. No longer are citizens *most importantly* constituent elements of sovereignty, members of publics, or even bearers of rights," (Brown, 110). As market forces consume the individual, they reshape citizens as responsible for both their own well-being and the well-being of the state. Rather than created as a social contract to provide services that citizens cannot provide for themselves, democracies now force citizens to act in the interests of the state. The economic sphere fundamentally subsumes the political, and individuals no longer have license to act in any manner that might reduce their personal capital. Those skills that fail to provide a material or economic benefit are cast aside, and as such the economic sphere ceases to consider any objective that does not contribute towards an entrepreneurial goal. A democracy cannot function when the only concern of its citizens is to make money. This sort of being, driven wholly by market forces, has no ability to consider those courses of action that do not result in a profit. Freedom is once again subsumed by the overreach of liberalism, as the excesses it permits force individuals into rigid courses of action that limit their rights.

This is the fundamental contradiction inherent to liberalism: by permitting absolute or unchecked freedom, it reduces the freedom of some for the benefit of others. Liberalism therefore judges the freedom of some persons to be fundamentally worth more than that of others, since restricting any person's rights necessarily implies a calculation of value based on the rights being restricted or permitted. This tension, found across many liberal systems of thought, is explained by Nock when he argues, "Every positive intervention that the State makes upon industry and commerce has a similar effect. When the State intervenes to fix wages or prices, or to prescribe the conditions of competition, it virtually tells the enterpriser that he is not exercising social power in the right way," (Nock, 7). By this argument, state intervention must necessarily be a fundamentally unjust exertion of economic rights. But at the same time, state action that creates multiple freedoms for many others at the expense of a single individual's rights could be justified. To the liberal thinker, the utility of freedom must play a role in the evaluation of what restrictions of rights are allowable. Inevitably, there is a gray area amongst liberal thought that allows for restrictions of rights in some situations and not others. When the enterpriser is allowed to exercise all of his rights fully, he may purposefully or accidentally restrict the rights of others. When others' freedoms are prioritized, the enterpriser has suffered a loss of rights. How these rights are to be valued is of critical importance to liberalism, since it delineates the acceptable range of economic actions that government can take against its citizens. From this perspective, it becomes clear that even within liberal thought there is great debate about the appropriate extent of rights to be granted within the economic sphere and others as well.

While the economic issues that endanger a democracy are serious, it is also important to examine the political problems that afflict liberal democracies. Perhaps one of the most obvious

signs of a democracy in the throes of paradox is the breakdown of mutual toleration amongst its political parties. When opponents in a democracy cease to see each other as adversaries and begin to perceive their opponents as outright enemies, a severe breakdown in the health and ability of a democracy to function quite often follows. There is perhaps no better example of this than the early years of democracy in the United States, when the Federalists and Republican parties fundamentally viewed each other as threats to democracy itself. Levitsky and Ziblatt make this point when they say, “Throughout history, opposition to those in power had been considered treason, and indeed, the notion of legitimate opposition parties was still practically heretical at the time of America’s founding. Both sides in America’s early partisan battles – John Adams’s Federalists and Thomas Jefferson’s Republicans – regarded each other as a threat to the republic,” (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 102-103). Given the extreme animosity that existed between the two parties, it should be no surprise that the time period surrounding the election of 1800 was one of the most dangerous for American democracy. Adams passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, which gave the president unprecedented undemocratic powers, when he began to perceive his political opponents as threats to his administration. While the election itself ended in the peaceful transition of power from the Federalists to the Republicans, this was far from the guaranteed outcome. The devolution of norms and standards between the two parties tore a rift in the American electorate and divided the public in a way that the new country had not seen in recent memory. The election was unquestionably chaotic and exposed a massive number of flaws within the system itself, leading directly to the passage of the twelfth amendment. Only when both sides acknowledged their shared interests and values could the system function and address the issue at hand. It took concerted effort and a great deal of understanding to correct the obvious

problem within American society at the time. When mutual toleration falls apart, it threatens the very foundation of a deliberative democracy.

Another political issue of paramount concern to the operation of a democracy is to ensure that governments are given a popular mandate to rule over the citizens who elected them. There is perhaps no situation more dangerous to a democracy than a politician or party that uses a quirk in the system, divided opposition, or other procedural trick to secure the government with a minority of the vote. One particularly vivid example of this danger presents itself in the election of Abraham Lincoln. De Mesquita and Smith make this situation clear when they state, “With competitors Breckenridge and Bell contesting the presidency, Douglas lost his opportunity to the Southern vote, dooming him – and his democratic rivals – to defeat, even though Lincoln’s vote total was slim. Lincoln beat the divided Democrats with less than 40 percent of the popular vote and almost no votes in the South,” (De Mesquita and Smith, 45-46). While the election of Abraham Lincoln was doubtless a positive development for the United States, it should be emphasized that Lincoln’s election was the flashpoint that began the Civil War. With more than half of the country voting for other candidates, it should be no surprise that many throughout the United States believed Lincoln to be an illegitimate president. Lincoln had not won a convincing mandate to govern, and the consequences were bloodshed and strife for years to come. For a democratic leader to legitimately govern, they must be able to convince a majority of the population that they represent their interests. Winning by a plurality, as Lincoln did, can only create a stable system of government when parties do not view each other as opponents to be vanquished. A functional democracy must assure voters that any loss is temporary through real and substantial limits on elected officials to take undemocratic actions, and must further foster a culture of mutual understanding and tolerance. In any democratic system where the issue of the

day is as divisive as slavery was at that time, only a politician who can win a complete mandate can hope to provide peace, stability, and prosperity.

Related to this problem is the issue of selecting leaders who are competent and capable of performing the duties of their office. A democracy must possess a system of vetting its future leaders, lest it empower the criminal or negligent. At the same time, a democratic system must respect the choices of its citizens and allow their input to guide the ultimate direction of policy and governance. Alexis de Tocqueville assesses this problem most accurately when he says, “Democracy is not only deficient in that soundness of judgement which is necessary to select men really deserving of its confidence, but it has neither the desire nor the inclination to find them out. It cannot be denied that democratic institutions have a very strong tendency to promote the feeling of envy in the human heart; not so much because they afford to every one the means of rising to the level of any of his fellow-citizens, as because those means perpetually disappoint the persons who employ them,” (de Tocqueville, 195). Not only are democratic institutions not ideally suited to finding those who would exercise power best, they also fail to ensure that the average citizen can make rational and effective choices as to the best person to lead them. The citizens of a democracy, as is necessary for the government to function, must make informed decisions about the direction of their country. If this is not the case, then a democracy fundamentally fails to be representative of its citizens’ desires. A democratic nation fails in its duties to its citizens when it allows the appointment of someone patently and obviously unfit for office. By the same token though, to disallow someone chosen by the people to serve in office would be extremely undemocratic. This is one of the key contradictions inherent to democratic thought: it must allow anyone to be elected yet cannot survive the appointment of the unprepared or dangerous. As de Tocqueville points out, the citizens of a democracy cannot always elect the

person who is most competent for the job. At the same time, the democratic system should respect the will of the people and allow their choices to have a real impact. The democratic thinker must necessarily be willing to allow the voices of the citizens of a democracy to create lasting impacts on the system but must also find a way to prevent the desires of the voting public that directly undermine democracy.

Once leaders have been elected in a democracy, the next political challenge is for these politicians to exercise their power with restraint. Institutional forbearance, the act of not exercising one's political rights when doing so would damage the underlying democratic system, is key to maintaining a democratic system of government. When those in power exploit every opportunity for partisan advantage without regard for the consequences of their actions, a dangerous precedent emerges that allows any action no matter how destructive or undemocratic. Levitsky and Ziblatt explain this problem best when they state, "Divided government can easily bring deadlock, dysfunction, and constitutional crisis. Unrestrained presidents can pack the Supreme Court or circumvent congress by ruling via decree. And an unrestrained Congress can block the presidents every move, threaten to throw the country into chaos by refusing to fund the government, or vote to remove the president on dubious grounds," (Levitsky and Ziblatt 108-109). Any branch of government failing to act with institutional forbearance poses a severe threat to a democracy, as those who push the limits of their power and play political hardball end up creating a vicious cycle of destabilization. So long as one side is trying to tip the scale in their favor, their opponents will have a massive incentive to engage in the same behavior. Cheating or ruling by legalisms in a democracy is much like a virus. As soon as it is introduced to the system, it is likely to spread and multiply with startling efficiency. For a democratic system to truly be effective, there must be a deeply rooted culture that respects and abides by the spirit of

governmental limits. These limits must clearly protect the rights, values, and representation of the citizens in a democracy. Norms, values, and ethics must be the bedrock standard for democratic governance. When these ideals are ignored or eliminated, a crisis of confidence in a democratic system is sure to follow.

Even when politicians are willing to respect the norms, ethics, and values of a democratic society, they still must be able to resist the siren song of popular but unwise political positions. This is one of the main troubles with democracy, a problem that must be managed but can never be eliminated. Even when politicians practice their craft with honor and respect, there is no guarantee that those who elect them will desire the same. H. L. Mencken, speaking of politicians in relation to their supporters, makes this point well when he says, "He must regard its sensitiveness on points of morals, and get what advantage he can out of his anesthesia on points of honor. More, he must make terms with the mob-masters already performing on its spines, chiefly agents of prehensile minorities. If he neglects these devices he is swiftly heaved over the fence, and his career in statecraft is at an end," (Mencken, 117). Democracy struggles mightily when its citizens desire those actions and policies that are directly harmful to the continued existence of the system designed to represent them. According to the central tenets of democracy, the decisions and preferences of voters are meant to be both respected and implemented. At the same time, the voters in a democratic system of government may simply not know or care that the policies they wish to see implemented are dangerous, destructive, or worse. A balance must be found that manages to both respect the citizens of a democracy while not allowing them to decimate the system with decisions that dismantle the very government that protects their liberty and equality. Any system that does not prevent the worst impulses of its citizens and fails to uphold the best and brightest will quickly find itself lost in a sea of bad

decisions and poor direction. Citizens within a democracy must be educated on the important points of good government, and representatives must be incentivized to both respect the will of their voters while still considering the long term health of the political system. Finding representatives who can withstand the pressures of their office to make choices in the best interest of their constituents is of extreme importance within a democratic system. If elected officials do not have the courage to stand up to the basest demons of those who elect them, they will inevitably accede to dangerous and damaging policies that destroy the system they are intended to safeguard.

A final political issue of great importance is the importance of understanding the legitimate role of conflict and disagreement within a democracy. Far from guaranteeing political harmony, a truly democratic system allows for a wide variety of policies, implementations, and ideas about how a just system should function. Liberalism and democratic thought can only function and coexist when both sides can express and communicate their differences effectively. Far from advocating a conflict free politics, a healthy democracy encourages productive discussion and competition to the benefit of all. Chantal Mouffe explains the dangers of removing conflict from political systems when she states, “A lack of democratic contestation over real political alternatives leads to antagonisms manifesting themselves under forms that undermine the very basis of the democratic public sphere. The development of a moralistic discourse and the obsessive unveiling of scandals in all realms of life, as well as the growth of various types of religious fundamentalism, are too often the consequence of the void created in political life by the absence of democratic forms of identification informed by competing political values,” (Mouffe, 114-115). Far from ensuring harmony, a political system that suppresses or eliminates all forms of dissent creates discord in the economic and political spheres

of life. The political sphere should be the first and most appropriate forum for disagreements about the nature and direction of a society. Democratic political systems are built and designed to channel conflict into a productive growth of ideas and an honest discussion of values. When the political sphere becomes hostile to disagreement, the citizens of a democracy seek other outlets for their competing definitions and understandings of the world around them. Only by working to channel a nation's conflicts into the productive and reflective exercise of political power can a democracy hope to sustain itself. A democracy must accommodate discussion and debate that meaningfully reflects the conflicting values of its citizens, as otherwise it simply redirects those underlying disagreements into more dangerous and less appropriate spheres of life.

A democracy that fails to manage its paradoxical tensions creates problems beyond the political and economic spheres, unfortunately. The social sphere is the final key realm that serious problems can arise within, adding to the devastating issues that can arise from a democratic system that does not address the conflicting pressures that lie at its heart. One of the key issues that democracy faces is how to approach the education of its citizens. A society that fails to find value in the betterment of its citizens is inevitably doomed to failure, for it is the citizens in a democracy who must participate, make decisions, and guide the state as best they know how. The dismissal of knowledge and the championing of ignorance are important indicators that a democracy is not balancing liberalism and democratic thought, as both sides push for a strictly limited or even uneducated populace so that they can exercise their agendas free from citizen concern or interference. Woodruff makes this key argument clear when he states, "In democracy, every adult citizen is called upon to assist in managing public affairs. Therefore, the democracy should see that every citizen has the ability to do so. Citizen wisdom is common human wisdom, improved by education," (Woodruff, 156). Citizens in a democracy

need not be experts in governance from birth, for there are very few humans who can claim to possess an innate ability for statecraft. Rather, a democracy must encourage and cultivate those passions in its citizens that allow for them to make good judgements and positively contribute to the functioning of a system of government. A democracy must fundamentally be run by the people, for the people, and no liberty or equality can ever be preserved by hiding the skills needed to run a government from those same people. Only by empowering every citizen to make the decisions that they believe are in the best interests of their own communities and families can a democracy continue to function. Condemning democracy to rule by expert politicians or an ignorant mob is not truly liberal or democratic. Only by creating an informed and educated base of citizens who are empowered to make carefully considered decisions can a healthy democracy hope to survive and continue to grow.

Another fundamental issue at the heart of every democracy is how to unite its citizens and create jointly shared basic values. Often culture serves this function, but a democracy can draw its unity of sentiment from a wide variety of sources including education, social institutions, and other widely shared experiences. Only when this unity begins to fracture does the underlying democracy begin to fracture as well, creating rifts that work to tear a country apart. De Tocqueville best explains this when he states, "A government retains its sway over a great number of citizens, far less by the voluntary and rational consent of the multitude, than by that instinctive, and to a certain extent involuntary agreement, which results from similarity of feelings and resemblances of opinion. I will never admit that men constitute a social body, simply because they obey the same head and the same laws," (De Tocqueville, 362). From this perspective, it becomes clear that it is imperative that the citizens of a democracy do not simply belong to the same state. Rather, a society is only created when individuals share enough

common ground to come together and compromise on the essential issues that require the focus of an entire society. Even beyond shared norms and values, the citizens of a democracy must agree on the basic duties they owe to each other and to the state. Only when the members of a nation agree on the values they need to possess and the work they must put into their democracy can the system truly function. These shared values can be instilled through a variety of institutions, but education is perhaps one of the most important as mentioned above. When the institutions of a society reinforce the shared cultural values that encourage participation, respect, and other democratic ideals the resulting society will much more easily compromise and be willing to pass the baton amongst differing ideologies. In this way, the creation of shared values helps to develop the conditions necessary for democracy to thrive. When the institutions, cultural pressures, and other sources of values differ greatly, the result is inevitably disagreement and discord.

A further social issue that can arise within democracies is the deterioration of citizens' awareness of their own rights. Liberty is lost, not in an overnight coup, but rather from an apathetic lack of knowledge. Worse than this, those who lose sight of their rights often just as easily forget that others have rights as they do, leaving them to encourage undemocratic behavior so long as they are not the ones suffering the assault. H. L. Mencken examines this issue through the lens of prohibition, stating, "The city workman, oppressed by prohibition, mourns the loss of his beer, not the loss of his liberty. He is ever willing to support similar raids upon the liberty of the other fellow, and he is not outraged when they are carried on in gross violation of the most elemental principles of justice and common decency," (Mencken, 59). The citizen who does not believe in his own liberty is that much more likely to lead the charge against the liberty of others, seeking to curtail something they do not understand. A society made up of those who do not

know their rights is inevitably easily corrupted, as those wise or wily enough to take advantage of the people's lack of focus can contort the desires of the majority in destructive ways. The person who has no conception of their own freedoms can be taken advantage of much more easily than the person who has a firm grasp on the liberties they possess. In this way, if the citizens of a democracy lack a keen awareness of their rights, they both lose those rights and are used to take away the rights of others. Only when the citizens of a democracy are well informed of their freedoms, both through education and the broader institutions of a nation, can a democracy guarantee the liberties it promises. Without serious work to educate the citizens of their rights, a democratic system inevitably begins to fall apart.

The final social issue that most impacts democracies is how power, once obtained in any sphere, tends to bring about unwarranted social power. Those who acquire economic or political power all too often turn that power towards the social sphere, attempting to reshape public policy for their own ends rather than the good of the whole. Mouffe demonstrates this problem when she states, "The important thing is not to violate the principles of distribution proper to each sphere and to preclude success in one sphere implying the possibility of exercising preponderance in others, as is now the case with wealth. It is essential in such a view that no social good be used as the means of domination and that concentration of political power, wealth, honor, and offices in the same hands should be avoided," (Mouffe, 125). From this perspective, power too concentrated across multiple spheres in a single individual or group presents dangerous opportunities for pet projects and personal issues to overtake problems that effect the entire nation. A democracy flooded with the personal whims of a few powerful people inevitably devolves into an embittered majority clamoring for much needed change while those at the levers of power do as they please. Despite democracies fundamentally being intended to represent the

will of the people, concentrated power too easily subverts this popular sovereignty and replaces it with an oligarchy in all but name. A society that does not adequately protect the social sphere from outside meddling is likely to find itself lost in a sea of issues that are ignored in favor of the interests of those who possess power that transcends a single locus of power. This is not to say that those who wield power should not be able to exercise it, but rather that a functional democracy must take steps to prevent those who possess expansive powers from subsuming the greater good for their individual interests. Simply because the businessman, senator, or celebrity desire a particular change does not mean the system must move to accommodate their whims. Only when policies have been thoroughly evaluated and judged to be widely beneficial should they be implemented, no matter how influential the individual pushing the idea. A democracy must prevent the powers afforded to those in the economic and political spheres from too heavily subverting the workings of the social sphere, as to do otherwise is to invite disaster.

The economic, political, and social issues that afflict a democracy fundamentally stem from an inherent tension between democratic and liberal ideologies. A democracy that does not manage the tensions between these two forces invites serious problems, which all too often undermine the very fabric of the democratic system. Democracies are at their best when they allow for creative, thoughtful, and respectful discussion of ideas while maintaining a shared set of principal values. This sort of functional democracy acknowledges that it needs both forces to survive, while making sure their tensions do not destroy the underlying systems that allow for the government to function in the first place. Both democratic and liberal forces can be taken to extremes, and both can be used for purposes that are detrimental to democracy. This is not to say, however, that a democracy should seek to eliminate these ideologies or allow one to win. Far from being inherently destructive, both democratic and liberal systems of thought are necessary

for a democratic nation to function. While the two ideologies may be fundamentally opposed and represent very different ideals, both help to make the democratic project function. Allowing an ideology to win the infinite game or removing both entirely fundamentally annihilates the core goals of a democracy. Freedom, equality, rights, and representation only function when there is a vigorous and real debate over how those inherent principles should be implemented. The extent, nature, and timing of these policies are left up to the people of a nation, and no one answer is correct. That is the inherent promise of a democracy: it is a great experiment in letting the people figure out what boundaries are right for them. Letting one side dictate terms or preventing either side from existing does not ensure peace: it only sets the stage for the end of the democratic system. The duty of a democracy is then to provide those conditions that allow for both ideologies to exist in more than token form while also preventing them from overwhelming the system. Democracy, when understood this way, is about elevating the angels of both systems of thought while preventing their demons from rising to power. Robust protections, most keenly in the form of shared values, education, sensible limitations on the power of individuals and institutions, and the emphasis of mutual tolerance help to prolong the life of a democracy and keep the infinite game going for as long as possible. While the democratic and liberal systems of thought may have fundamental disagreements about the direction of a society, both must acknowledge their fundamental need for each other and a shared set of values. A functional democracy does not necessarily care about what policies are implemented or how a government should be structured. Rather, true democracy seeks to ensure that everyone can be free, equal, and have their voices heard. While democracy contains many contradictory and even at times paradoxical elements, it fundamentally welcomes the disagreement. A democracy at its core requires that its citizens wish to build something together. Though they might not agree on how

or when or even why they are creating, democracy exists to allow that creative process to continue. Democracy is nothing if not a great and expansive project, a continuous attempt to build a society that encompasses the desires of its people while continuing itself in perpetuity.

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