Democracy

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Modern democracy is the outgrowth of many ancient theories and more recent practices. In its ancient form, characterized by direct participation of all citizens in legislation, it is found in some of the Swiss cantons and in New England town meetings. In its modern form as a representative system, it is not more than a century and a half old. Many of the theories underlying democracy have been used in other times and under other systems in which democracy itself has been rejected; but as both the political responsibility of men and the vital functions of GOVERNMENT have increased, the demand for governmental responsibility to the popular will has been irresistible. Faith in majority rule under a regime of universal suffrage has spread throughout the Western world since the English revolutions of the 17th century. Whatever religious practices may have been, religious thought has supplied many of the fundamental principles upon which the democratic order is built: the dignity of man, the equality of men in the sight of God, the responsibility of man for his acts, the rights of the human person; all of these have been fundamental in the long struggle for popular government. Pius XII went so far as to say, "If, then, we consider the extent and nature of the sacrifices demanded of all citizens, especially in our day when the activity of the state is so vast and decisive, the democratic form of government appears to many as a postulate of nature imposed by reason itself" [Benignitas et humanitas; Acta Apostolicae Sedis 37 (1945) 13].

Democracy has come to prevail not alone because of the inadequacies of alternatives, but also through the ever-expanding numbers of educated citizens and the facilities offered by modern communications. Although these causes have also served the interests of totalitarianism, it is certain that without them the democratic order could not flourish. Medieval men knew and espoused most of the theories on which democratic polity is built, but they lacked an educated electorate and the material means of making the theories effective.

Greek Beginnings. The development of democratic theory involves the whole history of political philosophy; and without some understanding of that development, the theory of democracy can be only partially comprehended. "As for democracy," said the brilliant but traitorous Alcibiades, toward the end of the Peloponnesian War, "why should we discuss acknowledged madness?" He was expressing a point of view that Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.) must have held. According to Plato, under a democratic regime insolence is termed breeding; anarchy, liberty; waste, magnificence; and impudence, courage:

The teacher in such case fears and fawns upon the pupils and the pupils pay no heed to the teacher or to their overseers either. And in general the young ape their elders and vie with them in speech and action, while the old, accommodating themselves to the young, are full of pleasantry and graciousness, imitating the young for fear they may be thought disagreeable and authoritative….Without experience of it no one would believe how much freer the very beasts subject to men are in such a city than elsewhere. The dogs literally verify the adage and "like their mistresses become." And likewise the horses and asses are wont to hold on their way with

the utmost freedom and dignity, bumping into everyone who meets them and who does not step aside. And so all things everywhere are just bursting with the spirit of liberty…. And do you note that the sum totalof all these items when footed up is that they render the souls of the citizens so sensitive that they chafe at the slightest suggestion of servitude and will not endure it? For you are aware that they finally pay no heed even to the laws written or unwritten, so that forsooth they may have no master anywhere over them…. This, then, my friend… is the fine and vigorous root from which tyranny grows. [Republic 563.]

Although for Plato democracy ranked next to the lowest political phenomenon (tyranny), for Pericles (d. 429 B.C.) it was the best of all forms. According to Thucydides, Pericles gave, in the famous funeral oration, the reverse point of view on democracy when he said:

We live under a form of government which does not emulate the institutions of our neighbours; on the contrary, we are ourselves a model which some follow, rather than the imitators of other peoples. It is true that our government is called a democracy, because its administration is in the hands, not of the few, but of the many; yet while as regards the law all men are on an equality for the settlement of their private disputes, as regards the value set on them it is as each man is in any way distinguished that he is preferred to public honours, not because he belongs to a particular class, but because of personal merits; nor, again, on the ground of poverty is a man barred from a public career by obscurity of rank if he but has it in him to do the state a service. And not only in our public life are we liberal, but also as regards our freedom from suspicion of one another in the pursuits of every-day life; for we do not feel resentment at our neighbour if he does as he likes, nor yet do we put on sour looks which, though harmless, are painful to behold. But while we thus avoid giving offence in our private intercourse, in our public life we are restrained from lawlessness chiefly through reverent fear for we render obedience to those in authority and to the laws, and especially to those laws which are ordained for the succour of the oppressed and those which, though unwritten, bring upon the transgressor a disgrace which all men recognize. [Thucy. 2.37.]

Classification of Governments. To Plato is owed the classic threefold division of constitutions: MONARCHY, a rule of one in accordance with law; ARISTOCRACY, a rule of a few in accordance with law; polity, a rule of the many in accordance with law. The opposite forms are TYRANNY, the lawless rule of one; oligarchy, the lawless rule of a few; democracy, the lawless rule of the many. Plato departed from this order, however, in his description of the degeneration of forms of government. His ideal best is an aristocracy, a rule by philosophers in

which justice is the aim of the rulers. This form degenerates into a timocracy, a rule of a few with honor and glory being the motivating principle. The next stage is oligarchy, in which money and material wealth determine the goal of the rulers. This is followed by democracy, where no one standard guides either the rulers or society. Out of this develops the arbitrary rule of one man, tyranny. Thus each form of government has a guiding principle, and each in departing from that principle degenerates into a lower form. It seems that to the Greeks, with their cyclical idea of history, no form of government could be lasting, and change lurked behind every political institution. Each form contained the seed of its own destruction.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) appears less dogmatic than either Plato or Pericles. Though asserting that monarchy is ideally the best form of government, he believed that a mixture of the three possible forms is best practically, i.e., a combination of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy; and he even granted that the people as a whole possess a political wisdom in judging their rulers that may not be lightly put aside. His preference was for a middle-class class polity uncontrolled by forces of great wealth or military power.

Greek Practice. To all Greeks democracy meant a form of direct government and control by free citizens, obviously excluding foreigners and slaves. Thus the Greek citizen took part in the deliberations of the assembly and activities of the courts, and much of his time was taken up by these. Plato's attitude toward the democratic order may be explained by his feeling that the misfortunes of Athens in the Peloponnesian War were due largely to the absence of strong leadership and the mistakes of popular direction in the area of military requirements. Added to this, the condemnation of his mentor, SOCRATES (c. 470–399 B.C.), by one of the popular courts caused him to have little faith in the judgments of the populace. Democracy in Athens suffered as much from the loss of prestige resulting from its humiliating defeat at the hands of oligarchic Sparta as it did from the internal weaknesses of its system of government.

From Greek times until the present era, Pericles had far less influence in shaping the reputation of democracy than Plato and the cautious Aristotle. Democracy was commonly regarded as rule by the mob, or the least worthy and the least prepared for sober rule. Even when, in succeeding centuries, democracy was seriously advocated as a partial element in a stable regime, it was understood that democracy would be checked by monarchical and aristocratic forms. Thus the ideal regime that Polybius recognized in the Roman Republic was composed of the monarchical element (two consuls), the aristocratic (the Senate), and the democratic (the assembly of the plebeians). The prevalence of any one form meant the early destruction of the regime. So monarchy degenerated into tyranny, aristocracy into oligarchy, and democracy into irresponsible mob rule.

Roman Theory. The Romans devoted themselves more to jurisprudence than to philosophy, either pure or practical, and contented themselves with liberal borrowing from the Greeks. Their forms of government were largely ad hoc arrangements that met special situations as they arose. Political structures that no longer served a purpose very often continued to exist theoretically although effective power no longer inhered in them. The political history of Rome suggests gradual development rather than periodic wholesale renovations. Yet the legal basis of these forms remained.

Even under the most tyrannical emperors the theory in law remained that ultimate power inhered in the populace. At some time, in some form, the power of the emperors was conferred by the Senate and the people. This was historically true, whatever the existing situation, and despite the inadequate way in which power was conferred. However dimly realized at times, the Roman maxim "Salus populi, suprema lex" (the welfare of the people is the supreme law) remained firmly set in Roman law. The standards carried into battle with SPQR ("Senatus populusque Romanus") emblazoned on them meant that even conquest had popular approval. Even the phrase frequently quoted in later centuries in defense of absolute royal power has reference to a popular grant: "quod principi placuit, legis habet vigorem: cum lege regia, quae de eius imperio

lata est, populus ei, et in eum, omne imperium suum et potestatem concedat" (the ordinance of the prince hath also the force of a law; for the people, by the lex regia, make a concession to him of their whole power—Dig. 1.2.6).

Although it is not to be assumed that in strict practice democratic procedure in the modern sense operated at all times in the making of law, the theory always held in Rome that in some manner law emanated from the people or with their approval. Whether enunciated by Gaius ("law is what the people orders") or by CICERO ("power is in the people") or by JUSTINIAN, it is always accepted that the people are the source of law. Accepted by authorities in the Middle Ages, this principle has come to form a basic standard of the democratic order in modern times. It forms a fundamental part of constitutionalism restrictive of arbitrary governmental action for all time.

Medieval Developments. The Middle Ages provided many of the theories on which later defenders of democracy built their philosophy. Theories of individual rights, political and juridical; theories of limited executive power; theories of representative government; and theories of constitutional government developed during this period. Absence of institutional arrangements and sanctions prevented a full realization of the theories in universal practice. Few questioned the doctrine, inherited from Roman law, that law and governmental power stem from the people. How to apply this theory, and who were the people, were questions on which the medievals found no uniform agreement.

Influence of the Church. The recurring crises between the Church and the political order tended in the main to restrict governmental operation. Earlier medieval theories held that the political order was a device for the restriction of evil and a retribution for man's sins. As contrasted with the Church, it was not a holy order. Some went so far as to call political power an invention of the devil. The tendency was to restrict political operation and particularly the power of kings. At the same time the necessity of curbing the disorders of the time called forth other theories that, referring to certain scriptural passages, required the recognition of the king as worthy of respect and obedience. Passages from St. Paul were most frequently used: "he who resists the authority, resists the ordinance of God" (Rom 13.2). Kings were referred to as God's vicars and as holding a "priestly office." Contemporary paintings of Charlemagne showed him clothed in priestly vestments.

From the earliest period of the Middle Ages, however, the king was held to be bound by his coronation oath, by custom, by Scripture, and by the natural law. No king was absolute, and no responsible teaching of the Middle Ages held him to be so. Violation by a king of any of the rules that bound him placed him in the position of an outlaw against whom penalties both of excommunication by the Church and of rebellion by his subjects might be used. The general lack of institutions (outside of the Church) for judging the king's conduct left open to the king's opponents no course other than military action.

Feudal System. From FEUDALISM the idea of a contractual relationship between king and subject arose. Under this complicated system of interrelationships, kings were generally bound in some form of service to overlords or other monarchs or popes. The feudal world was one of contractual agreements. Under these circumstances, the theory of agreement by contract readily entered the realm of political theory.

Rise of Representative Government. From a principle of Roman private law medieval thinkers drew a theory of responsible government that in future years was to play a large part in struggles against ABSOLUTISM: "quod omnes tanget debet ab omnibus approbari" (what touches all should be approved by all—Corpus iuris civilis, Codex Iustinianus, ed. P. Krueger 5.59.5). In no sense was this applied in the broad meaning that the phrase might imply. Nevertheless, the constant use of the phrase and its actual application in the religious orders gave the theory a lasting prominence and importance in the development of representative government. Because of this principle, Henry III of England in 1254 could "cause to come before the King's Council two good and discreet Knights of the Shire, whom the men of the country shall have chosen for this purpose instead of all and each of them, to consider along with the Knights of other shires what aid they will grant to the King." While such assemblies were meeting in England to form the first Parliaments, similar assemblies were meeting in Spain and France. The feudal system itself strengthened the representative idea in that overlords in council represented their tenants to such a degree that unanimity was required in some cases in the proceedings of such assemblies. This was especially the case when one lord might represent such military power that he could not be controlled by a majority vote.

The class structure of medieval society prevented any overall egalitarian idea of representation. According to the medieval notion, not only quantity, but also quality, formed the basis of representation. Even MARSILIUS OF PADUA (c. 1290–1343)—erroneously held by some to be the forerunner of modern democracy—held to the notion of a representation of "the wiser and better part," a phrase common in the Middle Ages. A man's equality consisted in his equality with his peers by birth and status. A knight was not equal to a prince; nor could he be judged by a prince. Early, however, in England the interests of the nobility came to diverge to such a degree from those of people of lower status that two groups of representatives came to form two separate houses in the Parliament. By the 16th and 17th centuries the expanding economy of Europe and the rise of a new merchant class gave the lower house a power first equal to and then greater than that of the house representative of the peer-age.

Contribution of St. Thomas Aquinas. St. THOMAS AQUINAS (c. 1225–74) has frequently been interpreted as a partisan of popular government. A thorough examination of his writings, however, fails to show that he was much in advance of his time in propounding theories basic to democratic thinking. Much is made of his use of a quotation from St. Augustine (Lib. arb. 1.6) in one paragraph of the Summa: "If a people have a sense of moderation and responsibility, and are most careful guardians of the common weal, it is right to enact a law allowing such a people to choose their own magistrates for the government of the commonwealth. But if, as time goes on, the same people become so corrupt as to sell their votes, and entrust government to scoundrels and criminals, then the right of selecting their public officials is rightly forfeit to such a people, and the choice devolves to a few good men" (Summa theologiae 1a2ae, 97). He even discusses, without in any sense condemning, the three classical forms of constitutions—monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy—and a regime composed of the three. His preference throughout, however, is for "pure monarchy"—the beneficent rule of one man holding absolute power, who holds himself bound by natural, divine, and customary laws. If he holds with most medievals that the king is in some way the choice of the people, this in no way signifies popular election, even though he prefers elective monarchy to hereditary monarchy. So in De regimine principuum he remarks that "the common natural rule is by one" (1.2). St. Thomas shows no preference for self-

government. His conception of a ruler is one of great power. He does consider that a ruler might be checked by public authority in unusual cases, if, obviously, such an authority exists; however, he does not look upon this as a case likely to arise. If, unhappily, an unjust tyrant rules, the sinfulness of the people has brought this about. Tyrannicide is not permissible.

If one contribution to later democratic thought is provided in St. Thomas, it is in his discussion of LAW, particularly in his consideration of natural law as an unwritten check on all human action, whether public or private. Natural reason supplies the end and goal of the political order, which is the common good toward which men are directed by the natural law. Following Aristotle, St. Thomas asserts that the political order is a good (not a necessary evil or primarily a divine remedy for sin) and that it has a positive end of protection of citizens and the promotion of their welfare. The natural-law theory not only provides the ends and limits of government, but gives the basis for the obligations and rights of the people that come to form a part of the democratic theory of later years.

Early Modern Developments. The RENAISSANCE and the Protestant REFORMATION had varying effects on the relation of the individual to governing authorities. For the most part, the Renaissance with its secular leanings gave little heed to the restriction on rulership provided by divine law, and its general disregard of the philosophical found no bar to tyranny in natural law. The general attitude of Renaissance man was one of lack of concern for things either religious or political. He desired a regime of peace, no matter how absolute, that afforded opportunity to pursue the new learning. So far as politics was concerned, the grandeur of imperial Rome was his ideal. The Renaissance world has its typical representative in Niccolò MACHIAVELLI (1469–1527). A pure pragmatist in advancing the test of workability as the standard for judging all institutions, he nevertheless in the Discourses shows a distinct preference for a republic as against a princedom. Freedom of discussion, freedom of choosing officials by the people, and freedom for wide participation of the citizenry in affairs of state are characteristics of a republic, which is the reward of a brave, patriotic, and self-sacrificing people. The ancient republic of Rome is the ideal, but most people are not worthy of it.

Opposition to Absolutism. The immediate effect of the Reformation, despite the emphasis of the reformers on religious individualism, was to strengthen the power of kings in both Catholic and Protestant lands and to give emphasis to the Roman concept that the monarch is outside the law (legibus solutus). The period of absolutism gave rise to a whole literature challenging the concept of absolute rulership. The challenge arose mainly from an attempt on the part of rulers to impose their religious views on dissenting groups. Foremost among the critics of absolute kingly power were the Calvinists and the Jesuits. The older idea of government as a contract between ruler and people had a rebirth and was used as an argument against arbitrary divine-right rule. Disregard of divine or natural law on the part of the ruler gave a right to withdrawal of obedience on the part of subjects and might justify rebellion and overthrow of a regime. Recourse was had to the older concept of power arising in the people. Among the Catholic controversialists, St. Robert BELLARMINE (1542–1621) asserted that power comes from God to the people who in turn may set up any kind of lawful regime that serves the purpose of the common good. Among the religious opponents of kingly power, however, there was no defense of religious toleration.

Religious Toleration. Toleration appeared more frequently as a thesis defended among secular writers such as Jean Bodin (1530–96), who, though asserting the rights of monarchs and their limitations, lays down the rule that religious uniformity is desirable, but that if the attempt to enforce it endangers the foundations of the political order, then toleration of religious dissent is to be preferred.

Social Contract Theories. The SOCIAL CONTRACT theory itself played an ever-increasing role in the defense of limited government. In one case, however, it was used by Thomas HOBBES (1588–1679) in his Leviathan to strengthen a defense of royal absolutism. It was significant in the theories of the American colonists in defense of their own revolution against the English Crown. In the case of the Americans, the theory was taken from John LOCKE (1632–1704), who in his Two Treatises on Government made use of the theory to defend limited monarchy. In brief, his theory of contract held that in the condition before the existence of civil society, man living in a state of nature had certain natural rights (life, liberty, and property) that were not conferred by government, but protected by government when political society came into being. The main purpose of government was the protection of rights, a protection guaranteed by contract between governors and governed. American revolutionists seeking justification for their revolt from the mother country found it—outside the British constitution itself—in Locke's theory of natural rights. Locke, however, was no defender of republican or democratic regimes; his ideal state was a middle-class constitutional monarchy of property holders. However, his theory of popular change of government, peaceful or revolutionary, came to be firmly established as part of the democratic philosophy of government.

Classical Republicans. Previous to Locke, in the 17th century a group of theorists defending the Puritan Revolution in England and the overthrow of the monarchy had written works that profoundly influenced the American revolutionists. This group, sometimes referred to as the Classical Republicans, defended not only revolutionary change, but also the substitution of republican government for monarchy. The best-known among them are John MILTON (1608–74), James Harrington (1611–77), and Algernon Sidney (1622–83). Their theories were based on the historical experience of republican Rome and the Republic of Venice. In addition, they made free use of Machiavelli's theory of republican government as constituting the best form of political regime. Before their time, the term republic was used to designate any type of regime; it simply meant a commonwealth, whether monarchical or non-monarchical. Plato's Republic described an aristocracy as an ideal form, but it also included variations from the ideal. In the 16th century, Bodin's Six Books of the Republic advocated consititutional monarchy as the best form of republic. The Classical Republicans, however, made a distinct differentiation between a regime, constitutional or otherwise, ruled by a lifelong monarch and a regime with an elective executive head, which to them was known as a republic. This differentiation has come down to contemporary times. The founders of the American Republic generally thought of a republic in these terms, the influence of Harrington being especially great among them, and they held the age-long prejudices against democracies, used in the sense of direct rule by the populace.

American Views. In the Federalist Papers (No. 10) James Madison wrote:

It may be concluded that a pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure

for the mischiefs of faction…. A republic, by which Imean a government in which the scheme of representation takes place, opens a different prospect, and promises the cure for which we are seeking…. The two great points of difference between a democracy and a republic are: first, the delegation of the government, in the latter, to a small number of citizens elected by the rest; secondly, the greater number of citizens, and greater sphere of country, over which the latter may be extended.

The Classical Republicans of England and their followers in America thought in terms of a suffrage restricted by property qualifications, since ownership of property in some way represented civic virtue, and also in terms of representation of property holders similarly restricted by property qualifications. Even while the authors of the Constitution of the United States deliberated, there were stirrings among the populace for a broader suffrage base, and the term democracy was beginning to lose its tarnished reputation. Vermont came into the Union in 1791 without property restrictions, and Delaware gave the ballot to all white men who paid taxes. During George Washington's administration, the country was shaken by news of the French Revolution, and the agricultural forces of the American frontier, heavily in debt to the powers of the East, were demanding greater political control of their government. In the cities along the Atlantic seaboard, mass meetings of workingmen demanded a vote in government. President Washington was warning that "the tumultous populace of large cities are ever to be dreaded." Even Thomas Jefferson referred to "the mobs of great cities" as "sores" on the body politic (Notes on the State of Virginia, Query 19). Jefferson thought that any orderly government of large cities was impossible. With the pressure for a universal manhood suffrage, the term democracy found more frequent usage as applied to the operation of government in America. This was particularly so with the sweep of the Jacksonian movement through the country. Thus in the 1830s Alexis de Tocqueville adopted The American Democracy as the title of his classic work on politics and society in the United States. The party of Jefferson took the name of the Democratic-Republican party, but by the Jacksonian period it had become the Democratic party. As the suffrage base was broadened, the term democracy came to be the usual designation for the form of government that existed in the United States.

Principle of Representation. In the thinking of the people of the time, the chief touchstone of a democracy was representative government. Not only was great faith placed in representative assemblies, but in the elective process itself more and more names of administrative and executive offices found their places on the ballot. Faith in the legislative process was accompanied by a fear of executive power, so that mayors and governors found themselves surrounded by innumerable checks in the exercise of their functions. In Europe, too, political reform emphasized the importance of suffrage for the agricultural and laboring classes, and more favorable representation of these groups. Influenced by the theories of the French Revolution, a strong emphasis on egalitarianism characterized all the democratic movements. Tocqueville feared that there was a tendency to overemphasize this in the America of the 1830s. It would have been difficult, however, in the America of that day, with its strong frontier attitudes, to find or defend any class divisions in society.

Democratic Ideology. Democracy both in the United States and abroad ceased to have either the form or the reputation that had characterized it in preceding centuries. It became the aim of all political reform both in the United States and in the Western world. The principal test of

democracy came to be universal manhood suffrage and equal representation for all classes in the legislature. Basic to all theoretical defenses of democracy were the ancient theories of political power emanating from the people, the medieval doctrine of "what touches all must be approved by all," the limitation of political power by unchanging laws of God and of nature, the determination of consent by majority, and the inherent worth of the individual soul derived from the ancient Judeo-Christian heritage. Some saw democracy as inevitable in a world built upon these principles.

Both in the United States and in England democratic movements had a strong evangelistic religious impetus. Although in America church attendance and adherence to religious groups fell to a low level during and immediately after the Revolution, a strong revivalist movement in the early 19th century brought religion to the forefront in American society. Religious groups, such as the Baptists and the Methodists, and a variety of splinter Protestant groups that followed the democratic form in the management of their churches combined their religious and egalitarian principles in advocating ever-increasing popular control. The same influences were at work in England, where the backbone of the democratic movement was found in the members of the so-called Free Churches. Much of the evangelistic fervor that spurred on the Jacksonians in the United States and the Chartists in England came from this source. On the Continent of Europe democratic movements had been influenced to a large degree by the theories of the French Revolution and were most frequently secular in tone and often inspired by anti-religious aims.

Growth of Executive Power. By mid-19th century faith in legislative bodies as representing the ideals and aspirations of the people suffered a reverse with the awareness that legislators were corrupted and election practices were a scandal. The belief came to be held that executives armed with proper authority, far from being a danger to the democratic form, constituted effective agents of the people's will. One governor or one president, it was recognized, more often represented the will of the electorate than scores of legislators, whether in a state capital or in Washington. Throughout the whole Western world the move toward concentration of greater powers in the hands of executives finds firm support even today among the most liberal defenders of democracy. The flexible provisions of the United States Constitution have lent themselves to an interpretation consistent with this demand for executive power and responsibility, particularly under strong presidents.

Economic Democracy. Out of the Renaissance and Reformation periods there had developed a strong theory of individualism that affected religious, political, and economic life. The theory that man's unaided reason or divine illumination could lead him to his proper end—and in the political and economic spheres, to the best life for society—captured the minds of the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries. This blind faith in the infallible instinct of man in following his own interests was highlighted by a disregard of societal or communal obligations. If a man starved or failed in any sense, he had himself to blame, for within him existed all the necessary physical strength or natural reason for success. In the political sphere, governments were necessary, but necessary evils, for protection of life and limb alone. Leaders of democratic movements sought first the suffrage for the middle-and lower-middle-class groups, and then for the larger masses of the laboring people. It should be remembered that the early exponents of democracy had little faith in the masses and sought only a bourgeois commonwealth. By reason of their own theory of

man's rational nature, however, they had to face the necessity of extending the rights of citizens to an ever-increasing number of people.

The older theory of natural law with its emphasis on rights as proceeding from obligations had, following the theories of Locke and Hobbes, become largely a theory of rights alone. This attitude characterized particularly the economic life of the rapidly expanding industrial society. In exploitation not only of natural resources, but of men, the economically successful interpreted the doctrine of natural rights as complete, unhindered freedom in the pursuit of wealth. The great economic advance of the Western world was paid for in a frightening wastage of health and lives.

Pragmatic Trends. In recognition of a prevailing economic anarchy, there arose not only a demand for a greater voice of the working class in government, but also a demand for governmental regulation of economic activity. The use of the natural-rights doctrine in defense of economic exploitation gave place in democratic demands to a doctrine of social rights. The obviously just reminder that society too had rights was accompanied by the more dangerous doctrine that society, through organized government, conferred rights. The feeling existed that since the bulk of the male population controlled the action of government through suffrage and representation, fear of an overpowering or tyrannical political order was baseless. The amazing advances of science and the scientific method had the effect of reducing philosophy to a crude pragmatism that saw in immediate effects the justification of public activity. The cure for the ills of democracy was, it was claimed, more democracy. Speculative philosophy and theoretical justification of the system itself found little support among the intellectual leaders of the new industrial era. Use of a corrupted natural-rights doctrine in defense of the glaring evils of the industrial revolution had discredited philosophy itself.

Marxism. In the 19th and early 20th centuries certain schools of thought pointed out the weakness in political democracy and turned their attention to the operation of the economic system itself. The followers of Karl MARX (1818–83) based much of their philosophy on an ancient theory. Plato, Aristotle, and medieval and later theorists had pointed to the corrupting influences on stable forms of government of great accumulations of wealth in private hands. Machiavelli had written that under a good form of government, only the government should be rich. Plato would have had his rulers divested of all wealth, and the possessor of wealth debarred from active citizenship. Aristotle desired a middle-class regime with a wide dispersion of wealth. That the owners of vast economic power could control the possession of political power was not an original discovery of Marx. Nevertheless, Marxist thought turned in the direction of economic democracy as opposed to political democracy. The thoroughgoing Marxist renounced politics, warned against suffrage and reforms in representation, and condemned socialist participation in any government existing side by side with the capitalistic order. He believed that all political forms existing under capitalism were mere shams and agencies of exploitation by the owners of the means of production. Only where the workers owned and governed the means of production would genuine—or economic—democracy prevail.

Divergent Theories. Other schools of thought had turned their attentions in the same direction. Some, such as syndicalism and ANARCHISM, advocated violent revolution for the purpose of setting up self-governing federations of industrial groups. Others, such as guild socialism and

various schools of political pluralism, advocated guild associations of workers and employers with special parliaments representing trades and professions; but these were to be accomplished by peaceful means. Support for corporativist and pluralist ideas was found in the encyclicals of LEO XIII, PIUS XI, and PIUS XII. Unlike Fascism, which looked upon the state as the creator of economic associations, the encyclicals emphasized the necessity of the free formation of guilds, with the state as the general overseer of guild obligations and rights.

New Problems. The Marxist still considers the true socialist regime a democracy, and the term has been freely appropriated by Communist regimes. The challenges offered by the emphasis on economic democracy, the catastrophic effects of the world Depression of the early 1930s, and the rise of totalitarian regimes of the right and left, offering both "security" and "freedom," caused the leaders of established democracies to reevaluate democracy in both its forms and its effects. The older democracies of the West had successfully withstood the assaults of the turbulent 20th century, but something more than a pragmatic defense of the system was called for. The Fascist and the National Socialist revolutions had themselves been called the pragmatic revolt in politics. Their leaders claimed that they offered new systems that "worked," whereas the democracies had failed in practice. More attention to an underlying philosophy of democracy was called for.

More serious attention, too, had to be given to the practical questions of the role of government, the practice of planning, the existence of poverty and slums, the problems of health and old age, the injustice of racial discrimination, the causes and cures of fluctuations in the economic order, and, after World War II, the adequate popular control of the vast scientific discoveries that spelled life or annihilation for large masses of people. A great number of new nations, only recently freed from colonial control, came into existence, each looking for the freedom that democracy promised, but lacking both economic resources and generations of politically educated populations on which to build stable governments. These people desired democracy, but held in low esteem its association with the capitalistic order, under which they believed they had until recently been exploited. Communism, because of its declared enmity to capitalism and its influence on economic democracy, seemingly held out greater promise to these people than did the established democracies. Some leaders of the Western world have advocated the use of the term welfare democracy and a playing down of the capitalist element in democracies of the past and present, in order to guard these new nations from Communist inroads. It is argued that, because of the complexity of modern economic life and the need for immediate relief from poverty, the individualism that in the span of centuries brought the Western world to its material eminence may not be counted on to solve the urgent problems of the new nations. Greater need, therefore, calls for more socialized forms of economic life.

A Catholic Appraisal. Recognized today as essential elements in democracy are universal adult suffrage; representation in a legislative body of a fair proportion of the electorate; decision by majority vote of the electorate in determination of major questions of policy; equality before the law; equality of opportunity; freedom of speech, press, and assembly; freedom from arbitrary arrest and punishment; freedom in the exercise of religion; and the largest possible exercise of individual activity consonant with social requirements. Catholic defenders of the democratic order point out that although by natural or divine law there is no one required form of government for all times and places, democracy best meets the requirements of the modern age and best fulfills the underlying principles inherent in Catholic teaching.

Catholic teaching incorporates certain basic principles underlying political relationships. Among these are: recognition of the political order as natural and necessary (not only a necessary evil); the common good as the end of that order; and the recognition of the dignity of the individual person, with respect for his rights and obligations as man and citizen. Defenders of the democratic system point out that since it is a form of government requiring the assumption by the citizen of the most important public decisions, it is therefore a system that has led to the steady broadening of educational opportunities for all. They would insist that the practice of the political art makes possible, although not inevitable, political maturity and political virtue. In no other form is the medieval principle that what touches all must be approved by all better realized.

The Catholic political theorist, however, would reject the purely relativistic theory held by some modern apologists for democracy that no natural-law standards exist to guide both the government and the governed or that decision by popular vote constitutes a guarantee of moral rectitude. Yet in the field of politics, the determination of right and wrong is rarely as clear as the distinction between true and false in mathematics or metaphysics. Government involves the application of objective principles to practical situations, and PRUDENCE plays the leading role. It is therefore essential that full discussion and deliberation, which democracy allows for, should precede all decisions. Defenders of democracy are aware that it has not yet realized its full promise and that the complexities of modern life place before it awe-inspiring problems to which answers must be given. Democracy is not a thing of perfection; but, to paraphrase a statement of Sir Winston Churchill, the alternatives to it are too horrible to contemplate.

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