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## The Democratic State

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Democracy is a word of many meanings. Some of them are of such a broad social and moral import as to be irrelevant to our immediate theme. But one of the meanings is distinctly political, for it denotes a mode of government, a specified practice in selecting officials and regulating their conduct as officials. This is not the most inspiring of the different meanings of democracy; it is comparatively special in character. But it contains about all that is relevant to political democracy. Now the theories and practices regarding the selection and be-

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havior of public officials which constitute political democracy have been worked out against the historical background just alluded to. They represent an effort in the first place to counteract the forces that have so largely determined the possession of rule by accidental and irrelevant factors, and in the second place an effort to counteract the tendency to employ political power to serve private instead of public ends. To discuss democratic government at large apart from its historic background is to miss its point and to throw away all means for an intelligent criticism of it. In taking the distinctively historical point of view we do not derogate from the important and even superior claims of democracy as an ethical and social ideal. We limit the topic for discussion in such a way as to avoid "the great bad" the mixing of things which need to be kept distinct.

Viewed as a historical tendency exhibited in a chain of movements which have affected the forms of government over almost the entire globe during the last century and a half, democracy is a complex affair. There is a current legend to the effect that the movement originated in a single clear-cut idea, and has proceeded by a single unbroken impetus to unfold itself to a predestined end, whether triumphantly glorious or fatally catastrophic. The myth is perhaps rarely held in so simple and unmixed a form. But something approaching it is found whenever men either praise or damn democratic government absolutely, that is, with-

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out comparing it with alternative polities. Even the least accidental, the most deliberately planned, political forms do not embody some absolute and unquestioned good. They represent a choice, amid a complex of contending forces, of that particular possibility which appears to promise the most good with the least attendant evil.

Such a statement, moreover, inmensely oversimplifies. Political forms do not originate in a once for all way! The greatest change, once it is accomplished, is simply the outcome of a vast series of adaptations and responsive accommodations, each to its own particular situation. Looking back, it is possible to make out a trend of more or less steady change in a single direction. But it is, we repeat, mere mythology to attribute such unity of result as exists (which is always easy to exaggerate) to single force or principle. Political democracy has emerged as a kind of net consequence of a vast multitude of responsive adjustments to a vast number of situations, no two of which were alike, but which tended to converge to a common outcome. The democratic convergence, moreover, was not the result of distinctively political forces and agencies. Much less is democracy the product of democracy, of some

inherent nisus, or immanent idea. The temperate generalization to the effect that the unity of the democratic movement is found in effort to remedy evils experienced in consequence of prior political institutions realizes that it proceeded step by step, and that each

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step was taken without foreknowledge of any ultimate result, and, for the most part, under the immediate influence of a number of differing impulses and slogans.....

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In any case, the complexity of the historic events which have operated is such as to preclude any thought of rehearsing them in these pages, even if I had a knowledge and competency which are lacking. Two general and obvious considerations need» however, to be mentioned. Born in revolt against established forms of government and the state, the events which finally culminated in democratic political forms were deeply tinged by fear of government, and were actuated by a desire to reduce it to a minimum so as to limit the evil it could do.

Since established political forms were tied up with other institutions, especially ecclesiastical, and with a solid body of tradition and inherited belief, the revolt also extended to the latter. Thus it happened that the intellectual terms in which the movement expressed itself had a negative import even when they seemed to be positive. Freedom presented itself as an end in itself, though it signified in fact liberation from oppression and tradition. Since it was necessary, upon the intellectual side, to find justification for the movements of revolt, and since established authority was upon the side of institutional life, the natural recourse was appeal to some inalienable sacred authority resident in the protesting individuals. Thus "individualism" was born, a theory which endowed singular persons in isolation from any associations, except those

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which they deliberately formed for their own ends, with native or natural rights. The revolt against old and limiting associations was converted, intellectually, into the doctrine of independence of any and all associations.

Thus the practical movement for the limitation of the powers of government became associated, as in the influential philosophy of John Locke, with the doctrine that the ground and justification of the restriction was prior non-political rights inherent in the very structure of the individual. From these tenets, it was a short step to the conclusion that the sole end of government was the protection of individuals in the rights which were theirs by nature. The American revolution was a rebellion against an established government, and it naturally borrowed and expanded these ideas as the ideological interpretation of the effort to obtain independence of the colonies. It is now easy for the imagination to conceive circumstances under which revolts against prior governmental forms would have found its theoretical formulation in an assertion of the rights of groups, of other associations than those of a political nature. There was no logic which rendered necessary the appeal to the individual as an independent and isolated being. In abstract logic, it would have sufficed to assert that some primary groupings had claims which the state could not legitimately encroach upon. In that case, the celebrated modern antithesis of the Individual and Social, and

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the problem of their reconciliation would not have arisen. The problem would have taken the form of defining the relationship which non-political groups bear to political union. But, as we have already

remarked, the obnoxious state was closely bound up in fact and in tradition with other associations, ecclesiastic (and through its influence with the family), and economic, such as guilds and corporations, and, by means of the church-state, even with unions for scientific inquiry and with educational institutions. The easiest way out was to go back to the naked individual, to sweep away all associations as foreign to his nature and rights save as they proceeded from his own voluntary choice, and guaranteed his own private ends.

Nothing better exhibits the scope of the movement than the fact that philosophic theories of knowledge made the same appeal to the self, or ego, in the form of personal consciousness identified with mind itself, that political theory made to the natural individual, as the court of ultimate resort. The schools of Locke and Descartes, however much they were opposed in other respects, agreed in this, differing only as to whether the sentient or rational nature of the individual was the fundamental thing. From philosophy the idea crept into psychology, which became an introspective and introverted account of isolated and ultimate private consciousness. Henceforth moral and political individualism could appeal to "scientific" warrant for its tenets and employ a vocabulary made current by psy-

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chology:—although in fact the psychology appealed to as its scientific foundation tras its own offspring.

The "individualistic" movement finds a classic expression in the great documents of the French Revolution, which at one stroke did away with all forms of association, leaving, in theory, the bare individual face to face with the state. It would hardly have reached this point, however, if it had not been for a second factor, which must be noted. A new scientific movement had been made possible by the invention and use of new mechanical appliances—the lens is typical which focused attention upon tools like the lever and pendulum, which, although they had long been in use, had not formed points of departure for scientific theory. This new development in inquiry brought, as Bacon foretold, great economic changes in its wake. It more than paid its debt to tools by leading to the invention of machines. The use of machinery in production and commerce was followed by the creation of new powerful social conditions, personal opportunities and wants. Their adequate manifestation was limited by established political and legal practices. The legal regulations so affected every phase of life which was interested in taking advantage of the new economic agencies as to hamper and oppress the free play of manufacture and exchange. The established custom of states, expressed intellectually in the theory of mercantilism against which Adam Smith wrote his account of "The (True) Wealth of Nations," prevented the expansion

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of trade between nations, a restriction which reacted to limit domestic industry. Internally, there was a network of restrictions inherited from feudalism. The prices of labor and staples were not framed in the market by higgling but were set by justices of the peace. The development of industry was hampered by laws regulating choice of a calling, apprenticeship, migration of workers from place to place,—and so on.

Thus fear of government and desire to limit its operations, because they were hostile to the development of the new agencies of production and distribution of services and commodities, received powerful reinforcement. The economic movement was perhaps the more influential because it operated, not in the name of the individual and his inherent rights, but in the name of Nature. Economic „laws“ that of labor springing from natural wants and leading to the creation of wealth, of present abstinence in behalf of future enjoyment leading to creation of capital effective in piling up still more wealth, the free play of competitive exchange, designated the law of supply and demand,

were 'natural' laws. They were set in opposition to political laws as artificial, man-made affairs. The inherited tradition which remained least questioned was a conception of Nature which made Nature something to conjure with. The older metaphysical conception of Natural Law was, however, changed into an economic conception ; laws of nature, implanted in human nature, regulated the production and exchange of goods

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and services, and in such a way that when they were kept free from artificial, that is political, meddling, they resulted in the maximum possible social prosperity and progress. Popular opinion is little troubled by questions of logical consistency. The economic theory of laissez-faire, based upon belief in beneficent natural laws which brought about harmony of personal profit and social benefit, was readily fused with the doctrine of natural rights. They both had the same practical import, and what is logic between friends? Thus the protest of the utilitarian school, which sponsored the economic theory of natural law in economics, against natural right theories had no effect in preventing the popular amalgam of the two sides.....

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The essential problem of government thus reduces itself to tMs: What arrangements will prevent rulers from advancing their own interests at the expense of the ruled? Or, in positive terms, by what political means shall the interests of the governors be identified with those of the governed?

The answer was given, notably by James Mill, in a classic formulation of the nature of political democracy. Its significant features were popular election of officials, short terms of office and frequent elections. If public officials were dependent upon citizens for of ficial position and its rewards, their personal interests would coincide with those of people at large—at least of industrious and property-owning persons. Officials chosen by popular vote would find their election to office dependent upon presenting evidence of their zeal and skill in protecting the interests of the populace. Short terms and frequent elections would ensure their being hdd to regular account; the polling-booth would

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constitute their day of judgment. The fear of it would operate as a constant check.

Of course in this account I have oversimplified what was already an oversimplification. Tlie dissertation of James Mill was written before the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832. Taken pragmatically, it was an argument for the extension of the suffrage, then largely in the hands of hereditary landowners, to manufacturers and merchants. James Mill had nothing but dread of pure democracies. He opposed the extension of the franchise to women.^ He was interested in the new "middle-class" forming under the influence of the application of steam to manufacture and trade. His attitude is well expressed in his conviction that even if the suffrage were extended downwards, the middle-class "which gives to science, art and legislation itself its most distinguished ornaments, and which is the chief source of all that is refined and exalted in human nature, is that portion of the community of which the influence would ultimately decide." In spite, however, of oversimplification, and of its special historic motivation, the doctrine claimed to rest upon universal psychological truth ; it affords a fair picture of the principles which were supposed to justify the movement toward democratic government. It is unnecessary to indulge in extensive criticism. The differences between the conditions postulated by the theory and those

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which have actually obtained with the development of democratic governments speak for themselves. The discrepancy is a sufficient criticism. This disparity itself shows, however, that what has happened sprang from no theory but was inherent in what was going on not only without respect to theories but without regard to politics: because, generally speaking, of the use of steam applied to mechanical inventions.

It would be a great mistake, however, to regard the idea of the isolated individual possessed of inherent rights "by nature" apart from association, and the idea of economic laws as natural, in comparison with which political laws being artificial are injurious (save when carefully subordinated), as idle and impotent. The ideas were something more than flies on the turning wheels. They did not originate the movement toward popular government, but they did profoundly influence the forms which it assumed. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that persistent older conditions, to which the theories were more faithful than to the state of affairs they professed to report, were so reenforced by the professed philosophy of the democratic state, as to exercise a great influence. The result was a skew, a deflection and distortion, in democratic forms. Putting the "individualistic" matter in a gross statement, which has to be corrected by later qualifications, we may say that "the individual," about which the new philosophy centered itself, was in process of complete submergence in fact at the very time in which he was

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being elevated on high in theory. As to the alleged subordination of political affairs to natural forces and laws, we may say that actual economic conditions were thoroughly artificial, in the sense in which the theory condemned the artificial. They supplied the man-made instrumentalities by which the new governmental agencies were grasped and used to suit the desires of the new class of business men.

Both of these statements are formal as well as swearing. To acquire intelligible meaning they must be developed in some detail. Graham Wallas prefixed to the first chapter of his book entitled "The Great Society" the following words of Woodrow Wilson, taken from *The New Freedom*: "Yesterday and ever since history began, men were related to one another as individuals. . . . Today, the everyday relationships of men are largely with great impersonal concerns, with organizations, not with other individuals. Now this is nothing short of a new social age, a new age of human relationships, a new stage-setting for the drama of life." If we accept these words as containing even a moderate degree of truth, they indicate the enormous iniquity of the individualistic philosophy to meet the needs and direct the factors of the new age. They suggest what is meant by saying the theory of an individual possessed of desires and claims and endowed with foresight and prudence and love of bettering himself was framed at just the time when the individual was counting for less in the direction of social affairs, at a

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time when mechanical forces and vast impersonal organizations were determining the frame of things.

The statement that "yesterday and even since history began, men were related to one another as individuals" is not true. Men have always been associated together in living, and association in conjoint behavior has affected their relations to one another as individuals. It is enough to recall how largely human relations have been permeated by patterns derived directly and indirectly from the family; even the state was a dynastic affair. But none the less the contrast which Mr. Wilson had in mind is a fact. The earlier associations were mostly of the type well termed by Cooley "face-to-face." Those which were important, which really counted in forming emotional and intellectual dispositions, were local and contiguous and consequently visible. Human beings, if they shared in them at all, shared

directly and in a way of which they were aware in both their affections and their beliefs. The state, even when it despotically interfered, was remote, an agency alien to daily life. Otherwise it entered men's lives through custom and common law. No matter how widespread their operation might be, it was not their breadth and inclusiveness which counted but their immediate local presence. The church was indeed both a universal and an intimate affair. But it entered into the life of most human beings not through its uni-

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versality, as far as their thoughts and habits were concerned, but through an immediate ministration of rites and sacraments. The new technology applied in production and commerce resulted in a social revolution. The local communities without intent or forecast found their affairs conditioned by remote and invisible organizations. The scope of the latter's activities was so vast and their impact upon face-to-face associations so pervasive and unremitting that it is no exaggeration to speak of "a new age of human relations." The Great Society created by steam and electricity may be a society, but it is no community. The invasion of the community by the new and relatively impersonal and mechanical modes of combined human behavior is the outstanding fact of modern life. In these ways of aggregate activity the community, in its strict sense, is not a conscious partner, and over them it has no direct control. They were, however, the chief factors in bringing into being national and territorial states. The need of some control over them was the chief agency in making the government of these states democratic or popular in the current sense of these words.

Why, then, was a movement, which involved so much submerging of personal action in the overflowing consequences of remote and inaccessible collective actions, reflected in a philosophy of individualism? A complete answer is out of the question. Two considerations are, however, obvious and significant. The new conditions involved a release of human potentialities previously

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dormant. While their impact was unsettling to the community, it was liberating with respect to single persons, while its oppressive phase was hidden in the impenetrable mists of the future. Speaking with greater correctness, the oppressive phase affected primarily the elements of the community which were also depressed in the older and semi-feudal conditions. Since they did not count for much anyway, being traditionally the drawers of water and hewers of wood, having emerged only in a legal sense from serfdom, the effect of new economic conditions upon the laboring masses went largely unnoted. Day laborers were still in effect, as openly in the classic philosophy, underlying conditions of community life rather than members of it. Only gradually did the effect upon them become apparent; by that time they had attained enough power — were sufficiently important factors in the new economic regime—to obtain political emancipation, and thus figure in the forms of the democratic state. Meanwhile the liberating effect was markedly conspicuous with respect to the members of the „middle-class," the manufacturing and mercantile class. It would be short sighted to limit the release of powers to opportunities to procure wealth and enjoy its fruits, although the creation of material wants and ability to satisfy them are not to be lightly passed over. Initiative, inventiveness, foresight and planning were also stimulated and confirmed. This manifestation of new powers was on a sufficiently large scale to strike and absorb attention.

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The result was formulated as the discovery of the individual. The customary is taken for granted; it operates subconsciously. Breach of wont and use is focal; it forms "consciousness." The necessary and persistent modes of association went unnoticed. The new ones, which were voluntarily undertaken,

occupied thought exclusively. They monopolized the observed horizon. "Individualism" was a doctrine which stated what was focal in thought and purpose.

The other consideration is akin. In the release of new powers singular persons were emancipated from a mass of old habits, regulations and institutions. We have already noted how the methods of production and exchange made possible by the new technology were hampered by the rules and customs of the prior regime. The latter were then felt to be intolerably restrictive and oppressive. Since they hampered the free play of initiative and commercial activity, they were artificial and enslaving. The struggle for emancipation from their influence was identified with the liberty of the individual as such; in the intensity of the struggle, associations and institutions were condemned wholesale as foes of freedom save as they were products of personal agreement and voluntary choice. That many forms of association remained practically untouched was easily overlooked, just because they were matters of course. Indeed, any attempt to touch them, notably the established form of family association and the legal institution of property, were looked upon as subversive, as

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license, not liberty, in the sanctified phrase. The identification of democratic forms of government with this individualism was easy. The right of suffrage represented for the mass a release of hitherto dormant capacity and also, in appearance at least, a power to shape social relations on the basis of individual volition.....

The opponents of popular government were no more prescient than its supporters, although they showed more logical sense in following the assumed individualistic premise to its conclusion: the disintegration of

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society. Carlyle's savage attacks upon the notion of a society held together only by a "cash-nexus" are well known. Its inevitable terminus to him was "anarchy plus a constable." He did not see that the new industrial regime was forging social bonds as rigid as those which were disappearing and much more extensive—^whether desirable ties or not is another matter.....

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Associated behavior directed toward objects which fulfill wants not only produces those objects, but brings customs and institutions into being. The indirect and unthought-of consequences are usually more important than the direct. The fallacy of supposing that the new industrial regime would produce just and for the most part only the consequences consciously forecast and aimed at was the counterpart of the fallacy that the wants and efforts characteristic of it were functions of "natural" human beings. They arose out of institutionalized action and they resulted in institutionalized action. The disparity between the results of the industrial revolution and the conscious intentions of those engaged in it is a remarkable case

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of the extent to which indirect consequences of conjoint activity outweigh, beyond the possibility of reckoning, the results directly contemplated. Its outcome was the development of those extensive and in visible bonds, those "great impersonal concerns, organizations," which now pervasively affect the thinking, willing and doing of everybody, and which have ushered in the "new era of human relationships."

Equally undreamed of was the effect of the massive organizations and complicated interactions upon the state. Instead of the independent, self-moved individuals contemplated by the theory, we have standardized interchangeable units. Persons are joined together, not because they have voluntarily chosen to be united in these forms, but because vast currents are running which bring men together. Green and red lines, marking out political boundaries, are on the maps and affect legislation and jurisdiction of courts, but railways, mails and telegraph-wires disregard them. The consequences of the latter influence more profoundly those living within the legal local units than do boundary lines. The forms of associated action characteristic of the present economic order are so massive and extensive that they determine the most significant constituents of the public and the residence of power. Inevitably they reach out to grasp the agencies of government; they are controlling factors in legislation and administration. Not chiefly because of deliberate and planned self-interest, large as may be its role, but because they

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are the most potent and best organized of social forces. In a word, the new forms of combined action due to the modern economic regime control present politics, much as dynastic interests controlled those of two centuries ago. They affect thinking and desire more than did the interests which formerly moved the state.

We have spoken as if the displacement of old legal and political institutions was all but complete. That is a gross exaggeration. Some of the most fundamental of traditions and habits have hardly been affected at all. It is enough to mention the institution of property. The naivety with which the philosophy of "natural" economics ignored the effect upon industry and commerce of the legal status of property, the way in which it identified wealth and property in the legal form in which the latter had existed, is almost incredible to-day. But the simple fact is that technological industry has not operated with any great degree of freedom. It has been confined and deflected at every point; it has never taken its own course. The engineer has worked in subordination to the business manager whose primary concern is not with wealth but with the interests of property as worked out in the feudal and semi-feudal period. Thus the one point in which the philosophers of "Individualism" predicted truly was that in which they did not predict at all, but in which they merely clarified and simplified established wont and use: whom, that is, they asserted that

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the main business of government is to make property interests secure. A large part of the indictments which are now drawn against technological industry are charged to the unchanged persistence of a legal institution inherited from the pre-industrial age. It is confusing, however, to identify in a wholesale way this issue with the question of private property. It is conceivable that private property may function socially. It does so even now to a considerable degree. Otherwise it could not be supported for a day. The extent of its social utility is what blinds us to the numerous and great social disutilities that attend its present working, or at least reconcile us to its continuation. The real issue or at least the issue to be first settled concerns the conditions under which the institution of private property legally and politically functions.

We thus reach our conclusion. The same forces which have brought about the forms of democratic government, general suffrage, executives and legislators chosen by majority vote, have also brought about conditions which halt the social and humane ideals that demand the utilization of government as the genuine instrumentality of an inclusive and fraternally associated public. "The new age of human relationships" has no political agencies worthy of it. The democratic public is still largely inchoate and unorganized.