Some Doubts About Democracy:
How The Modern State Is Evolving

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Since I am not familiar with Turkey, nor Turkey with me, let me devote this first paragraph to personal remarks. I am a conservative, a liberal, a democrat, and a philosopher. I am a conservative because I believe that initiative in society should generally rest with the people rather than the state, and this is also the reason I am a democrat. I am a liberal because I believe that freedom - responsible freedom - is a value in itself, quite apart from its advantages. But today I am here as a philosopher.

Philosophy is the intellectual discipline that searches for the coherence in things, and today I want to engage this intellectual discipline in order to make some sense out of the idea of democracy. And my particular method is to begin by taking my bearings from the changes I see around me.

(1) Democratic Salvationism.

The way democracy works depends largely on the ideas we have about it, and the dominant idea at the moment is that the more perfectly democratic we become, the better our civil and social life will be. In other words, many and perhaps most problems in politics are ultimately problems of democracy, or more precisely, of imperfect democratisation. We may call this idea "democratic salvationism", as long as we remember that we are here dealing with rhetoric and justification rather than the realities of politics. One interesting - and indeed rather odd - implication of democratic salvationism is the historical thesis that mankind has for many thousands of years been blundering around (except perhaps for a brief episode in Athens) in search of the proper way of conducting its public business, and only in the last two centuries have we discovered the one true political system. It does sound rather unlikely; it certainly exhibits the arrogance of our epoch.

Democracy is thus thought to solve most if not all problems, especially the problem of war and other forms of conflict. A belief has spread among political scientists that democracy is, for example, the key to peace, because (so it is said)

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there is no record of democracies ever going to war with each other. In Time of Sept. 11, 2002, John Mccain (p. 98) argues that "The only way to defeat terrorism is to fight for democracy everywhere, including in Iraq." Mccain's argument poses a causal relationship: "The more countries are governed with the consent of the governed, the fewer there will be where resentment caused by corrupt rulers can be misdirected towards the U.S." Here in journalistic form is the idea that democracy brings peace. The general idea, however, can be found at all levels of articulation. In the work of Amartya Sen, for example, we find in highly technical guise the parallel argument that democracy prevents famine, and it may be that Africa is currently a confirmation of this view. Sen belongs in the company of normative political philosophers ranging from Jurgen Habermas and Seyla Benhabib who search for the democratic norms that could create a better, or even perhaps a perfect society. For Professor Ben Barber, democracy is the way to a better community, understood in terms of an active citizenry. Normative political philosophy, then, presents democracy as the criterion of a better society, and this idea has filtered down, as philosophical ideas do, to practical life. It is a belief in the wisdom of deciding public issues by public debate. The more we talk, it seems, the more democratic our politics will be.

One issue raised by democratic salvationism is one logical. The classic political wisdom of the West identified a good constitution with balance between the various powers in a constitution. The English constitution was from early days regarded as a historical development which happened to correspond to the classical idea that politics was a balance between the one (usually the king) the few (the aristocracy) and the many (the people, or in English politics, the Commons). Each element contributed its own value to the process of deciding what should be done. The later theory of the separation of powers was a version of political wisdom understood as a balance between the element in the state. Today, in modern salvationism, we have the very different idea that it is not a balance of principles but the universalisation of one principle which will provide wisdom and justice in the state.

Democratic salvationism is a version of the wider doctrine that constitutions determine policy. Philosophers will remember that Immanuel Kant laid down the principle that monarchy was the cause of war, because kings were the owners of the state and could go to war without any threat to their own lives, their banquets, or their courtly pleasures. In a republic, however, where everyone was a citizen, and a decision for war would threaten all with loss of property and prospect of death. The project of abolishing war thus required that every state should become a republic. Kant was no friend of democracy, but the current optimism about the effects of wider democracy in the world is recognisably a descendent of Kantian thinking. Republics will deal peaceably with each other for the same reason as today political scientists think democracies will be peaceful.

Kant was writing in 1795, and his doctrine was at that very moment being refuted by the ferocity of the revolutionary wars, and the point would be reinforced by democratic and nationalist wars in the next two centuries. One remembers the Paris mob at the end of Emile Zola's novel Nana rushing through the streets unwisely shouting "A Berlin. A Berlin!" The people are by no means immune to bellicose enthusiasms. And the Americans were pretty enthusiastic about fighting Spain in 1898, the British about fighting the Boers in 1899.

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We may perhaps universalise this point by saying that no constitutional settlement entails any particular public policy. Constitutions are abstract things, and how they work will depend on circumstances as much as on formal structures. This is an important point, but for our present argument, it merely shifts the question back to what we mean by "democracy." The term refers in the first place to a specific type of constitution in which the ruled are somehow involved in government, but there can be immense variation in the details. Do we then simply mean by "democracy" a set of fundamental laws, or are we suggesting that once the people have been accorded some rights in determining how they are ruled, a new social and moral as well as a new political situation comes into being. This was certainly the view Alexis de Tocqueville took as far back as the 1830s as he analysed the customs and practices of those he called the "Anglo-Americans."

There are, then, two versions of the doctrine we are considering. In the old Kantian version of the doctrine, a constitutional change (the movement to a republic, or to a democracy) would change the terms of politics, but this would require no essential change in human nature. It would still be "men as they are, and laws as they ought to be" as Rousseau once put it. The second version invokes a causal chain in which democracy changes human nature, which then causes an aversion to war. In Kant's version, the causal relation between republicanism and peace was a priori. The modern doctrine is largely based on the inductive observation that we don't (so far) have much experience of democracies going to war with each other. The old doctrine (constitutions determine policy) was false, but the new doctrine verges of tautology. It is no doubt true that good tolerant wise peoples will only go to war against others when some dire necessity forces them to do so. The problem is how to get people to be wise and tolerant.

And the answer would have to be, I think, that if it can be done at all, it certainly cannot be done quickly. It is true that democracies don't go to war with each other, but some countries that have recently been democracies can certainly be very warlike indeed. Germany before 1933 and Italy before 1922 were technically democracies, but both turned into dictatorships (with it seems wide popular approval) and both turned into bellicose monsters. The idea that democracy prevents war, then, has as one of its minimal conditions, that the democratic constitution has operated over a long period of time. Democracy makes demands on people. It

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requires tolerance of other ways of life. It requires a society in which any person will cooperate with any other citizen on the basis of the other's personal qualities, not his or her social status, tribal allegiance, religious affiliation or any other divisive test. It requires habits of self control that allow passionate issues to be discussed without coming to blows. These are characteristics without which democratic constitutions will clearly soon fail, and which democratic constitutions encourage. They are immensely difficult, and countries, or parts of them, often slip back into old bad habits - as has happened in Britain with the long-standing problem in Ireland. Democratic stability is never to be taken for granted.

Indeed, even more dangerous than taking it for granted is imagining that we know what it is. The external tests of democracy require some kind of constitution, elections, freedom of association and speech and vigorous public discussion. Few countries in the world currently lack some of these external marks of democracy, but the inner reality is often very different. That a practice is called an "election", or an institution a "parliament" is a very poor guide to politics. In any case, democratic salvationism assumes that democracy is something fixed and known. But as we also know, nothing in human affairs is immune to change.

The central problem in a democratic constitution is that of getting government to respond to the will of the people. This is a problem so intractable that new ideas about it, and new demands on democracy will in each generation have the consequence of changing, often quite radically, the way the thing we call "democracy" actually works. And if we grasp this point fully, we shall find, I suggest, that democracy over the last two centuries in Europe has been a transitional phase between monarchy at the beginning, and some new form of liberal oligarchy in the present period. The paradox is that democratic salvationism is putting all its faith in a political form that no longer corresponds to political reality.

(2) Actualising the Popular Will.

Democracy is government by the will of the people, with the implication that the people in a democracy ought to get what they want, and that this is what in fact happens. This definition, however, is less part of the essence of democracy than part of its public relations. For one thing, the definition is merely formal. The people are very various and modern states are full of different ideas about how we ought to live. There has to be some way by which the will of the people (by contrast with the discordant clamour of what is called "public opinion") can be revealed. The entire theory of democracy consists in giving some account of how we might move from "the people" as a rather inchoate mass to "the government" which articulates rational public policies. E pluribus unum, as the Americans optimistically put it.

One popular mistake used to be the belief that ideally the people should assemble together in the agora, discuss issues and perhaps vote, as they may have done in

classical Athens. On this view, representative democracy is a second-best system resulting from the size and complexity of modern states. The dream of Athens inspires theorists of participatory democracy who hope that getting people together to discuss things leads to popular consensus. Even in this simple model, majority rule can become a problem, and so also can the changeable character of the demos - as for example when the Athenians voted differently on different days about how to treat the city of Mytilene which had risen in revolt against them.

We today have representative democracy, in which the people vote for a parliament of representatives to do the public business for them. But again, by what electoral system can we transmit the will of the people so that it becomes the will of the government? There are many competing views and practices. One of them is the British "first past the post system", which works well in Britain but has the disadvantage that an opinion that has no more than a minimal level of support will not be represented in parliament. This is a system that forces parties to compromise their principles in orders to gain wide support. No such party corresponds precisely to what anybody wants, but those policies that are supported at least have reasonably wide support. This system has the further problem that it can hardly work except in reasonably homogeneous societies. .

Alternatively, democracies may solve this problem by making provision for the representation of quite small bodies of opinion - those which can in aggregate command about 5% of the vote are often in Europe accorded parliamentary recognition. This seems preferable, and is certainly often advanced as being more democratic on the ground that more popular opinion will find expression in parliament. Alas, at this point we are forced to recognise that we are dealing with a field in which every solution turns into another problem. If there are many parties in a legislature, no government can be formed without extensive post-electoral negotiations, and the result is that the policy of the emerging coalition may bear very little resemblance to what the electorate thought it was voting for. And there is a further shadow over even this democratic advantage, since it is often the case that small extremist groups will benefit from this system of election. This is the kind of politics often called "populist". Populism is democracy you don't like.

In federal states, these problems can to some extent be finessed by having one governing body elected by individuals and the other by provinces or states. This solves problems resulting from antagonisms between elements in a dispersed population, but can result in deadlock when the two assemblies disagree, as happens every so often in Australian federalism.

The mechanics of popular representation are a familiar problem to game theorists aware, for example, that an electoral system will not preserve the transitivity of preferences found among rational voters. (the Condorcet problem, for example). These technical questions amuse specialists, but they have little light to shed on

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much more fundamental questions such as whether it is possible to discover a firm line distinguishing those things that governments ought legitimately to regulate (concerning public goods, for example) and those things which ought to belong in the discretion of the individuals themselves. This problem, which in one of its forms might be solved by a system of entrenched rights, is itself a political question, likely to be solved politically in terms of the interests of assemblies and bureaucrats rather than any direct declaration of the popular will. The dilemma of democracy thus surfaces in a new form. Either the people speak directly, which is impossible in large modern states, or they speak through representatives, in which case the representatives (and the bureaucrats through whom they often work) may develop interests and ideas at variance with the popular will.

And to reinforce the point that democracy is not a single constitutional model to be copied, but a constantly changing historical experience, we may cite a new version of the problem of actualising the democratic will. As with many changes of political consciousness, it can first be detected in a shift of vocabulary, according to which the term representation comes to signify less a process by which an elected person speaks for constituents than a doctrine that the composition of parliaments ought to correspond to the composition of the population at large - as indicated by gender, ethnic identity and whatever other natural characteristic should make a bid to this kind of status as a kind of constituency. The political process of elections is overshadowed by an insistence on distorting the terms of the election so as to ensure that rainbow societies should generate rainbow parliaments.

The emergence of this new theory of representation brings into even clearer focus one of the many things that democratic theory cannot help but take for granted: namely, what do we mean by speaking of "the will of the people?" The will itself is a psychological organ more or less constructed out of Christian doctrine by Saint Augustine, and adapted by mediaeval jurists to a world of corporations. The will was the choosing branch of the self, and the self in modern Europe was no longer the rational entity theorised by the Greeks, but a coherence of thoughts and passions by which the individual responded to the changing world. Theologically speaking, the will revealed the moral character of the individual. Thomas Hobbes in Leviathan (1651) argued that the will was imply the last appetite following deliberation, but this reductive account was rejected, especially by French and German philosophers. Rousseau's general will (in The Social Contract , 1761) was a collective judgement resulting from citizens deliberating patriotically about the common good, and in Hegel's Philosophy of Right (1821) we find an attempt to combine reason and the will, in the idea of a rational will, as a progressive judgement emerging from the processes of history.

Democratic theorists have seldom risen to these heights, but they certainly regard the will of the people as more than the fragmented thing that Rousseau called "the

will of all." The reason is that popular opinion today emerges from discussion in which an educated electorate participates, and whatever form public policy takes in response to such discussion will have been formalised by politicians and civil servants who as a group have a generally superior understanding of the realities of politics. Thus the theory of deliberative democracy offers debate as an answer to the question of where political wisdom will be found - not in philosophy, as Plato perhaps suggested in The Republic but in a rhetorical process.

Here then is a familiar account of the terrain theorised by democrats. Does it correspond to any reality? Is it perhaps merely a dream emerging from normative theory of desirabilities ? The answer depends on which local and historical passages of democratic politics we are studying. Too much idealizing of democracy is foolish; democracy does not allow human beings to transcend the human condition. Too much cynicism fails to explain the enormous popularity of democracy today. But to understand the problems of democracy today one must understand a paradox: that while democracy is "about" actualising the will of the people, wise government is in many ways about frustrating them. One should never forget Churchill's remark: democracy is the worst of all forms of government - except for all the rest.

(3) Frustrating the Will of the People.

The problem with democracy is not merely that it is impossible to formulate any satisfactory way of actualising the will of the people, but that many people actively want to be able to frustrate that will. No one quite puts the matter in this way, but it certainly corresponds to the facts. Frustrating the will of the people sounds undemocratic, and indeed it is, but it responds to a real problem in politics. Let me explain.

A federal constitution, for example, is a device for making sure that the interests of various minorities - territorial or ethnic - cannot be overridden by a contingent, or especially, by an entrenched majority. Federalism protects the interests of the Quebequois in Canada, for example, just as the Senate in the United States protects small states against majorities in the more populous. This is the most elementary example of how and why the will of the people might be frustrated.

Again, the history of democracy suggests a steady decline in the sophistication of how elections are conducted. In American elections, the thousands of citizens who used in the nineteenth century to listen for hours to Lincoln and Douglas debating the issues of the day have now become the consumers of brief television commercials puffing one candidate or (more commonly) denigrating an opponent. In the German elections of 2002, according to The Times , the parties are vying for the youth vote with sexually suggestive posters - one for the current Chancellor's Party shows two lips pursed in a kiss, with the slogan: "That was just foreplay. The climax is yet to come." In Britain in the middle 1990s voters were asked, among

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many other questions, how they had voted in the 1992 election which had been won by the Conservatives. A majority said they had voted Labour! Voters are, in other words, no more reliable about the past than they are in judging the future. In any case, it has long been observed that popular opinion changes dramatically in response to recent newspaper stories: a dramatic murder will have a notable effect on opinions about the death penalty. Indeed, the death penalty is a celebrated issue on which the opinions of the demos can differ dramatically from those of the elite. An Indonesian journal called "Tempo" reported a recent poll according to which 60% of the respondents favoured the introduction of the Sharia, yet only 30% approved of stoning as the punishment for adultery (though rather more approved of the Sharia punishment for theft). In other words, popular opinion is often a logic free zone. We might also note that some millions of electors suffer from problems of mental health, yet the British government not so long ago took steps to give the vote to those who had voluntarily entered homes for the psychiatric patients. In other words there is abundant evidence that might lead one to consider the demos a wild and irrational entity. Its wisdom often seems severely limited.

These points exemplify something that has long been known and discussed: namely that political opinion is subject to powerful irrational forces. No doubt the general will, or the rational will, are definitionally free of such blemishes, but they exist in a world of definitions, not in the world of empirical politics. And, as we have seen, it is virtually impossible to elicit such a will with any certainty. Part of the problem is that, most of the time, politics is a special taste, like an interest in ice hockey or opera; most people most of the time find it boring, and even more know little about it. This means that we must distinguish, as realists in political theory from Machiavelli to Schumpeter always have, between a minority of political enthusiasts (call them the "elite") and very many people largely indifferent (call them "masses").

This might seem to solve the problem of political wisdom. Should not politics be left to the elite, except for periodic elections, which are like consumer tests of products, in which the people can vote for a different product? It may indeed be the case that that this is what democracies are actually like, but it certainly does not deal with the theoretical problem. For the elite itself will contain some lunatics, some who are mentally ill, some fanatics, some profoundly stupid, some who use the theatre of politics as a stage on which to strike postures. Here is a problem about democracy on which nearly everybody will agree, whatever political tendency they belong to. Believers in the free market are inclined to regard socialists as dangerous, while liberals and socialists worry about xenophobia and nationalism on what it is conventional to call "the right". And many countries have their own specific version of this problem, Thus modern Turkey was based upon a rejection of the entire Ottoman system and was established, forcefully, by Kemal Attaturk who could not

have operated in terms of what the people wanted, and who certainly did not for a moment think of doing so.

The result of this democratic reality is that modern democratic governments (rightly called "liberal democracies" in testimony to their dual character) are in many respects strikingly oligarchic. And to understand this, one needs to look at characteristic devices of modern governments.

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(4) How to frustrate the will of the people.

The first of these is the practice of elevating those beliefs currently thought to be so fundamental that no one would reject them into unchangeable rules beyond the possibility of change through the ordinary political process. These are called "human rights". They are often presented as an extension of the freedom of citizens, since they are often formulated as limitations on government. On closer inspection, they will often be found, paradoxically, to have the general effect of extending, rather than diminishing, the power of the state. Some rights, for example, demand additional taxation, many of them requires the establishment of inspectorates to enforce them. They always involve more work for lawyers and judges.

A second device is for democratic governments to align themselves with grandiose international projects by signing up to international treaties. On such issues as environmental protection and international jurisdiction, states will often sign up to vague ethical desirabilities whose detailed implications can include decisions that a government could not have got through its own parliament. International agreements about modernisation (for example on trade unions, or on health) have a powerful attraction in many countries.

Each of these examples is an instance of a general principle at work. To be politically active in the modern world is commonly to support a modernising programme often hostile to nationalist projects, religious traditions, local customs and the situational responses of peoples in the third world. The place of women in different cultures is an important example. In one form or another, it can be possible for governments to establish regulatory agencies as the custodians of these policies, with powers to enforce social change going far beyond what would be approved by any elected parliament. This is certainly the case with many anti-discrimination agencies in the West. Whether such independence of parliament is good or bad no doubt depends on many questions. What is much less arguable is that this kind of "blue sky" policy is a way of frustrating the will of the people.

A further aspect of the ways in which governments frustrate the will of the people is by managing the public perception of events - what is currently called "spin." Spin is a managerial technique relevant to the fact that modern states are constituted by the propensity of its people, or many of them, to focus their attention,

day to day, on the events that get into the news. These range from sporting events to political projects and other national events. The movement of political support depends to a large extent on the value placed on these events. Indeed, it often depends on the extent to which they are known and understood, which makes managing the media central to politics. Governments and newspapers have their own judgements of newsworthiness, and the working of democracy is powerfully influenced by it. In the world of advertising, public relations and politics, releasing news at the right moment and getting it interpreted in the right way is often thought to be a matter of life and death. .

We might sum these tendencies up by saying that the quality of public deliberation in modern democracies has become increasing verbal or pseudo-intellectual. To put it more brutally, modern politics facilitates persuasion by the glib, those who have plausible reasons for whatever they recommend. It is no place for the slow thinking person who has doubts about a policy but can't quite see how to formulate those doubts.. Modern politics is thus a good world for liberals, but not a good world for conservatives, or indeed for believers in religious doctrines, such as Islam, which constitute a complete and exclusive form of life.

(5) The Evolution of Democracy.

Modern Western states are commonly called "liberal democracies" and both words point to important features of political reality. What is not often realised is that they conflict with each other. A modern state is indeed genuinely democratic, and that is genuinely important, but democracy is, and perhaps must in some respects, be modified and frustrated. I am not concerned, of course, with arguing whether this is good or bad - merely to advance a hypothesis about the way in which the modern state is actually evolving. And for that purpose, I wish to suggest a three stage view of what is happening.

In doing so, I come into direct conflict with what I have called "democratic salvationism". This doctrine assumes that democracy is the last stage of historical evolution, and that the more democratic we become, the better our institutions will work. My view, on the other hand, is that democracy is, like everything else in human affairs, is part of a process of continual change, and that the modern state is democratic in its justificatory rhetoric and oligarchic in its actual operation. .

What we must remember is that democracy emerged in Western Europe as a powerful movement as late as the end of the eighteenth century. In the remaking of European institutions at the time of the French revolution and Napoleon, the sovereign powers that had largely been in the hands of kings came increasingly into the hands of parliaments. Democracy was, one might say, an optional extra for

modern consstitutios. Citizens acquired the right to vote, and traditional institutions adapted as best they could. Fashions change, as fashions will, even in politics. Balkan nationalists in the later nineteenth century commonly thought that independent statehood required a monarch, and Serbia and Greece and others imported such figures. But the First World War destroyed many monarchies, and few were left after 1945.

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We may therefore identify the first stage of democracy as that in which it modified the essentially monarchical institutions of Europe. The franchise was extended, the executive of most countries became, to some extent responsible to elected parliaments and much of politics revolved around extending citizenship to all. But even by the beginning of the twentieth century, authority remained royal and aristocratic. When Germany and France went to war in 1914, both had parliaments and indeed strong socialist parties with pacificist and internationalist inclinations, but it made no difference to the outcome. And the fragility of democratic institutions was further illustrated by the collapse of democracy in Italy in 1922 and Germany in 1933.

Nevertheless, one implication of democracy was that "the social question" came increasingly to dominate politics. What should be done about the urban poor? Bismarck in Germany between about 1870 and 1890 has sometimes been seen as the originator of the welfare state, but a similar movement for spending public money to equalise in some degree the condition of the poor was spreading over Europe and after 1945 it had become almost universal. Hence we may distinguish a second stage of democratic evolution, in which the arrival of a democratic constitution created a democratic society. It had taken time, indeed, but the coming of democracy in the end followed the developmental trajectory that would have been expected by Aristotle and other political philosophers reflecting on the experience of democratic Athens. The spearhead of this impulse was, of course, socialism, but the point is that egalitarian policies and egalitarian doctrines came increasingly to be universally current. In the second half of the twentieth century they were everywhere dominant, and the European Union has given them a new lease of life.

One might well think that this was the path to the future. You might almost call it an "end of history" . And political philosophers have commonly taken this view. Impressed by realist theories of democracy which emphasised the irrationality of democratic practices, they have emphasised that democracy as a system must involve everyone in public debate and deliberation. The general will as the achievement of a rational public interest in which all citizens have been involved beckoned before them. But it will be evident that there are important barriers blocking this happy fulfilment, and that leads me to suggest, tentatively, that we are moving into a third stage of political transition.

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(6) A New Oligarchy?

To understand what is happening, we must observe certain constitutional problems. I shall illustrate the position in terms of Britain, but the broad picture is similar everywhere. In 1800, the British constitution was essentially monarchical, and over several previous centuries, much attention had been given to the problem of preventing the monarch from engaging in any form of absolutist rule. The British constitution was understood in terms of balance: the power of the king was balanced by that of parliament, the power of parliament by free elections, the executive by the independence of judges, and all authority was subject to legal supervision. In other words, the dangers of tyranny and despotism were well understood so long as the formal government of Britain was monarchical. But what happens when, over a long period of time, the will of the sovereign monarchy gives way to the sovereign will of the people? Those who love freedom will oppose any king who oversteps his power, but how can we, the people, oppose the will of the people? As the Communists used to say, "the people cannot oppress the people". Nothing so gross as that slogsn surfaced in Britain, but there is no doubt that democratic fundamentalism has weakened the restraints on power which long centuries of experience had built in to Western constitutions. When rulers are clearly distinct from the people (and many of them are aristocratic) the danger to freedom is well understood in political circles; when the dominant theory is that the people are the rulers, we have a new situation, and one in which freedom is a good deal less secure.

We thus enter a period of constitutional decline, by which I mean that most people tend to judge the validity of a public policy in terms of what they take to be its desirability rather than its formal constitutionality. The question they ask is: is this a good thing? They are much less concerned to ask: "does the agency have authority to do this thing?" And this utilitarian impatience with formal restraints is common throughout Europe. A current example: the European Court of Justice has just validated a directive banning the manufacture in Europe of high-tar cigarettes. The real reason is that high tar cigarettes have bad effects on health, but the ground of the decision argued before the Court was that health issues can sometimes be used as barriers to trade, and therefore the Community has jurisdiction. Yet the national states of the E.U. have not so far given the Commission authority to regulate health. Constitutionality thus gives way before (supposed) desirability. Over the last century, European governments have used their authority to validate the discretion of the Executive over a wide range of subjects, while from the demos have come increasing demands that government should use its money and its authority to supply benefits that would in earlier times have been the responsibility of individuals and families. One major engine of this extension of governmental power has been the subsidy. Governments have found many reasons to pay for benefits to the people - in the form of education, cultural support, health care and so on - and

very soon after the subsidy comes the control. As the familiar feminist slogan has it, "the personal is the political", a slogan that invites the government into the living room, the bedroom, the kitchen and the nursery. Governments have not been slow to accept the invitation.

Hence it is that Ferdinand Mount, in a notable discussion of the British constitution quotes the Oxford political scientist Nevil Johnson: "there has over a fairly long period been a retreat from constitutional ways of thinking in Britain. " The suggestion is that even our language of constitutional discussion has atrophied. Mount also quotes with disapproval a former Conservative Minister of Education, John Patten. Patten invoked the traditional idea of balance. But what was the balance between? On Patten's view, it was between effectiveness - the capacity of government to govern, and consent - maintaining popular support for the political system. Mount finds this "a bizarre conception of balance" and no doubt in traditional terms it is. "Balance" used to refer to constitutional powers that blocked each other's tendency to tyrannise. But what Patten's remark reveals is that he is recognizing the fact that no government that seeks to manage the lives of its subjects can possibly hope to have the approval of the whole people. It just needs to make sure, by a variety of means, that most people will at least accept whatever is being done. What in fact this observation brings out clearly is that Britain has become what Michael Oakeshott calls an enterprise rather than a civil association. A "civil association" means, in Oakeshott's argument, an association of individuals living within a framework of law and pursuing their own individual and cooperative enterprises. In an enterprise association, by contrast, the whole state has become an enterprise in which all the members are coercively managed so that they support whatever ends the entrepreneurs have chosen.

I have, then, identified two stages in the spread of democracy in Europe. In the first stage, democratic elections were merely modifications of political practice in states which had long been evolving a monarchical structure, and this means that democracy was largely foreign to their customs and conventions. This stage is an analytic idea, but it roughly corresponds to Europe in the nineteenth century. In the second stage, democracy began to exhibit those equalising tendencies in which a dominant majority, being poor, uses political power to change economic outcomes. States take into their hands ever increasing powers to appropriate the resources of society and to distribute those resources in accordance with principles such as equality and social justice. The effect has been a profound modification in the moral, social and constitutional condition of Western states.

I now want to conclude from this analysis that the modern state is turning into a new form of association (a third stage in terms of my schema), in which an emerging elite based upon an educated skill in deploying legal and rhetorical instruments of persuasion acquires the power to manage the people rather than merely rule them.

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This is a kind of utilitarian project whose aim corresponds in one way or another with trying to secure the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The objective is peace and harmony both within the state, and between states. One important aim of this new order of things is to obliterate the gap, or seem to have obliterated the gap, between the government and the governed. That, I think, is one reason why people these days are learning to talk about "governance" rather than government, for governance is a word suggesting that rules and regulations materialize, as it were, out of thin air. There is always a tension between rulers and ruled, but the high art of management is to persuade the managed that they are all involved in the same enterprise. Here then is a new oligarchy in which democratic salvationism supplies the justification while endless negotiation and moral concepts such as rights supply the means of constructing this new order.

Such is my hypothesis, and it is, of course, highly arguable. That democracy is evolving into oligarchy is a logically peculiar doctrine. It combines the argument that democracy has given way to oligarchy, with the prediction that this tendency will continue. Both propositions are no doubt xcontestable, but I think it is important to bring them out into the light of discussion.