CHAPTER 4

What Is Democracy?

All of us have goals that we cannot attain by ourselves. Yet we might attain some of these by cooperating with others who share similar aims.

Let us suppose, then, that in order to achieve certain common ends, you and several hundred other persons agree to form an association. What the specific goals of the association are, we can put aside so as to focus strictly on the question that forms the title of this chapter: What is democracy?

At the first meeting, let us further assume, several members suggest that your association will need a constitution. Their view is favorably received. Because you are thought to possess some skills on matters like these, a member proposes that you be invited to draft a constitution, which you would then bring to a later meeting for consideration by the members. This proposal is adopted by acclamation.

In accepting this task you say something like the following:

"I believe I understand the goals we share, but I'm not sure how we should go about making our decisions. For example, do we want a constitution that entrusts to several of the ablest and best informed among us the authority to make all our important decisions? That arrangement might not only insure wiser decisions but spare the rest of us a lot of time and effort."

The members overwhelmingly reject a solution along these lines. One member, whom I am going to call the Main Speaker, argues:

"On the most important matters that this association will deal with, no one among us is so much wiser than the rest that his or her views should automatically prevail. Even if some members may know more about an issue at any given moment, we're all capable of learning what we need to know. Of course, we'll need to discuss matters and deliberate among ourselves before reaching our decisions. To deliberate and discuss and then decide on policies is one reason why we're forming this association. But we're all equally qualified to participate in discussing the issues and then deciding on the policies our association should follow. Consequently, our constitution should be based on that assumption. It should guarantee all of us the right to participate in the decisions of the association. To put it plainly, because we are all equally qualified we should govern ourselves democratically."

Further discussion reveals that the views set forth by the Main Speaker accord with the prevailing view. You then agree to draft a constitution in conformity with these assumptions.

As you begin your task you quickly discover, however, that various associations and organization calling themselves "democratic" have adopted many different constitutions. Even among "democratic" countries, you find, constitutions differ in important ways. As one example, the Constitution of the United States provides for a powerful chief executive in the presidency and at the same time for a powerful legislature in the Congress; and each of these is rather independent of the other. By contrast, most European countries have preferred a parliamentary system in which the chief executive, a prime minister, is chosen by the parliament. One could easily point to many other important differences. There is, it appears, no single "democratic" constitution (a matter I shall return to in Chapter 10).

You now begin to wonder whether these different constitutions have something in common that justifies their claim to being "dem-

ocratic." And are some perhaps *more* "democratic" than others? What does *democracy* mean? Alas, you soon learn that the term is used in a staggering number of ways. Wisely, you decide to ignore this hopeless variety of definitions, for your task is more specific: to design a set of rules and principles, a constitution, that will determine how the association's decisions are to be made. And your constitution must be in conformity with one elementary principle: that all the members are to be treated (under the constitution) as if they were equally qualified to participate in the process of making decisions about the policies the association will pursue. Whatever may be the case on other matters, then, in governing this association all members are to be considered as *politically equal.*

CRITERIA FOR A DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

Within the enormous and often impenetrable thicket of ideas about democracy, is it possible to identify some criteria that a process for governing an association would have to meet in order to satisfy the requirement that all the members are equally entitled to participate in the association's decisions about its policies? There are, I believe, at least five such standards (fig. 4).

Effective participation. Before a policy is adopted by the association, all the members must have equal and effective opportunities for making their views known to the other members as to what the policy should be.

Voting equality. When the moment arrives at which the decision about policy will finally be made, every member must have an equal and effective opportunity to vote, and all votes must be counted as equal.

Enlightened understanding. Within reasonable limits as to time, each member must have equal and effective opportunities for learning about the relevant alternative policies and their likely consequences.

Control of the agenda. The members must have the exclusive opportunity to decide how and, if they choose, what matters are to be placed on the agenda. Thus the democratic process required by the three preceding criteria is never closed. The policies of the association are always open to change by the members, if they so choose.

Inclusion of adults. All, or at any rate most, adult permanent residents should have the full rights of citizens that are implied by the first four criteria. Before the twentieth century this criterion was unacceptable to most advocates of democracy. To justify it will require us to examine why we should treat others as our political equals. After we've explored that question in Chapters 6 and 7, I'll return to the criterion of inclusion.

FIGURE 4. *What is democracy?*

Democracy provides opportunities for:

1. Effective participation
2. Equality in voting
3. Gaining enlightened understanding
4. Exercising final control over the agenda
5. Inclusion of adults

Meanwhile, you might begin to wonder whether the first four criteria are just rather arbitrary selections from many possibilities. Do we have good reasons for adopting these particular standards for a democratic process?

WHY THESE CRITERIA?

The short answer is simply this: each is necessary if the members (however limited their numbers may be) are to be politically equal in determining the policies of the association. To put it in another way, to the extent that any of the requirements is violated, the members will not be politically equal.

For example, if some members are given greater opportunities than others for expressing their views, their policies are more likely to prevail. In the extreme case, by curtailing opportunities for discussing the proposals on the agenda, a tiny minority of members might, in effect, determine the policies of the association. The criterion of effective participation is meant to insure against this result.

Or suppose that the votes of different members are counted unequally. For example, let's assume that votes are assigned a weight in proportion to the amount of property a member owns, and members possess greatly differing amounts of property. If we believe that all the members are equally well qualified to participate in the association's decisions, why should the votes of some be counted for more than the votes of others?

Although the first two criteria seem nearly self-evident, you might question whether the criterion of enlightened understanding is necessary or appropriate. If the members are equally qualified, why is this criterion necessary? And if the members are not equally qualified, then why design a constitution on the assumption that they are?

However, as the Main Speaker said, the principle of political equality assumes that the members are all equally well qualified to participate in decisions *provided* they have adequate opportunities to learn about the matters before the association by inquiry, discussion, and deliberation. The third criterion is meant to insure that these opportunities exist for every member. Its essence was set forth in 431 B.C.E. by the Athenian leader Pericles in a famous oration commemorating the city's war dead. "Our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters; . . . and instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all."[1]

Taken together the first three criteria might seem sufficient. But

suppose a few members are secretly opposed to the idea that all should be treated as political equals in governing the affairs of the association. The interests of the largest property owners, they say to you, are really more important than the interests of the others. Although it would be best, they contend, if the votes of the largest property owners were given such extra weight that they could always win, this seems to be out of the question. Consequently, what is needed is a provision that would allow them to prevail no matter what a majority of members might adopt in a free and fair vote.

Coming up with an ingenious solution, they propose a constitution that would nicely meet the first three criteria and to that extent would appear to be fully democratic. But to nullify those criteria they propose to require that at the general meetings the members can only discuss and vote on matters that have already been placed on the agenda by an executive committee; and membership on the executive committee will be open only to the largest property holders. By controlling the agenda, this tiny cabal can be fairly confident that the association will never act contrary to its interests, because it will never allow any proposal to be brought forward that would do so.

On reflection, you reject their proposal because it violates the principle of political equality that you have been charged to uphold. You are led instead to a search for constitutional arrangements that will satisfy the fourth criterion and thus insure that final control rests with the members as a whole.

In order for the members to be political equals in governing the affairs of the association, then, it would have to meet all four criteria. We have, it seems, discovered the criteria that must be met by an association if it is to be governed by a democratic process.

SOME CRUCIAL QUESTIONS

Have we now answered the question "What is democracy?"? Would that the question were so easy to answer! Although the an-

swer I have just offered is a good place to start, it suggests a good many more questions.

To begin with, even if the criteria might be usefully applied to the government of a very small, voluntary association, are they really applicable to the government of a *state?*

Words About Words

Because the term *state* is often used loosely and ambiguously, let me say briefly what I mean by it. By *state* I mean a very special type of association that is distinguishable by the extent to which it can secure compliance with its rules, among all those over whom it claims jurisdiction, by its superior means of coercion. When people talk about "the government," ordinarily they mean the government of the state under whose jurisdiction they live. Throughout history, with rare exceptions, states have exercised their jurisdiction over people occupying a certain (or in some cases, uncertain or contested) territory. Thus we can think of a state as a territorial entity. Although in some times and places the territory of a state has been no larger than a city, in recent centuries states have generally claimed jurisdiction over entire countries.

One could find much to quibble with in my brief attempt to convey the meaning of the word *state.* Writings about the state by political and legal philosophers would probably require enough paper to use up a small forest. But what I have said will, I believe, serve our purposes.[2]

Back, then, to our question. Can we apply the criteria to the government of a state? Of course we can! Indeed, the primary focus of democratic ideas has long been the state. Though other kinds of associations, particularly some religious organizations, played a

part in the later history of democratic ideas and practices, from the beginnings of democracy in ancient Greece and Rome the political institutions we usually think of as characteristic of democracy were developed primarily as means for democratizing the government of states.

Perhaps it bears repeating that as with other associations no state has ever possessed a government that fully measured up to the criteria of a democratic process. None is likely to. Yet as I hope to show, the criteria provide highly serviceable standards for measuring the achievements and possibilities of democratic government.

A second question: Is it realistic to think that an association could ever fully meet these criteria? To put the question in another way, can any actual association ever be fully democratic? In the real world is it likely that every member of an association will truly have equal opportunities to participate, to gain an informed understanding of the issues, and to influence the agenda?

Probably not. But if so, are these criteria useful? Or are they just pie-in-the-sky, utopian hopes for the impossible? The answer, simply stated, is that they are as useful as ideal standards can ever be, and they are more relevant and useful than many. They do provide standards against which to measure the performance of actual associations that claim to be democratic. They can serve as guides for shaping and reshaping concrete arrangements, constitutions, practices, and political institutions. For all those who aspire to democracy, they can also generate relevant questions and help in the search for answers.

Because the proof of the pudding is in the eating, in the remaining chapters I hope to show how the criteria can help guide us toward solutions for some of the central problems of democratic theory and practice.

A third question: Granting that the criteria may serve as useful guides, are they all we would need for designing democratic politi-

cal institutions? If, as I imagined above, you were charged with the task of designing a democratic constitution and proposing the actual institutions of a democratic government, could you move straightforwardly from the criteria to the design? Obviously not. An architect armed only with the criteria provided by the client—as to location, size, general style, number and types of rooms, cost, timing, and so on—could then draw up plans only after taking into account a great many specific factors. So, too, with political institutions.

How we may best interpret our democratic standards, apply them to a specific association, and create the political practices and institutions they require is, of course, no simple task. To do so we must plunge headlong into political realities, where our choices will require innumerable theoretical and practical judgments. Among other difficulties, when we try to apply several criteria—in this case at least four—we are likely to discover that they sometimes conflict with one another and we'll have to make judgments about trade-offs among conflicting values, as we shall discover in our examination of democratic constitutions in Chapter 10.

Finally, an even more fundamental question: the views of the Main Speaker were accepted, it seems, without challenge. But why should they be? Why should we believe that democracy is desirable, particularly in governing an association as important as the state? And if the desirability of democracy presupposes the desirability of political equality, why should we believe in something that, on the face of it, looks rather preposterous? Yet if we don't believe in political equality, how can we support democracy? If, however, we do believe in political quality among the citizens of a state, won't that require us to adopt something like the fifth criterion—inclusive citizenship?

To these challenging questions we now turn.

CHAPTER 5

Why Democracy?

Why should we support democracy? More specifically, why should we support democracy in governing the state? The state, remember, is a unique association whose government possesses an extraordinary capacity for obtaining compliance with its rules by (among other means) force, coercion, and violence. Are there no better ways of governing a state? Would a nondemocratic system of government be better?

Words About Words

Throughout this chapter I'll use the term *democracy* loosely to refer to actual governments, not ideal ones, that meet the criteria set out in the last chapter to a significant extent but by no means fully. Sometimes I'll also use *popular government* as a comprehensive term that includes not only twentieth-century democratic systems but also systems that are otherwise democratic but in which substantial parts of the adult population are excluded from the suffrage or other forms of political participation.

Until the twentieth century, most of the world proclaimed the superiority of nondemocratic systems both in theory and in practice. Until very recently, a preponderant majority of human beings—at times, all—have been subject to nondemocratic rulers. And the

FIGURE 5. *Why democracy?*

Democracy produces desirable consequences:

1. Avoiding tyranny
2. Essential rights
3. General freedom
4. Self determination
5. Moral autonomy
6. Human development
7. Protecting essential personal interests
8. Political equality

In addition, modern democracies produce:

9. Peace-seeking
10. Prosperity

heads of nondemocratic regimes have usually tried to justify their rule by invoking the ancient and persistent claim that most people are just not competent to participate in governing a state. Most people would be better off, this argument goes, if they would only leave the complicated business of governing to those wiser than they—a minority at most, perhaps only one person. In practice, these rationalizations were never quite enough, so where argument left off coercion took over. Most people never explicitly consented to be ruled by their self-assigned superiors; they were forced to do so. This older view—and practice—is by no means dead even today. In one form or another the contest over government by "the one, the few, or the many" is still with us.

In the face of so much history, why should we believe that democracy is a better way of governing the state than any nondemocratic alternative? Let me count the reasons.

In comparison with any feasible alternative to it, democracy has at least ten advantages (fig. 5).

1. *Democracy helps to prevent government by cruel and vicious autocrats.*

Perhaps the most fundamental and persistent problem in politics is to avoid autocratic rule. Throughout all recorded history, including our own times, leaders driven by megalomania, paranoia, self-interest, ideology, nationalism, religious belief, convictions of innate superiority, or sheer emotion and impulse have exploited the state's exceptional capacities for coercion and violence to serve their own ends. The human costs of despotic rule rival those of disease, famine, and war.

Consider a few examples from the twentieth century. Under Joseph Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union (1929–1953), many millions of persons were jailed for political reasons, often because of Stalin's paranoid fear of conspiracies against him. An estimated twenty million people died in labor camps, were executed for political reasons, or died from the famine (1932–33) that resulted when Stalin compelled peasants to join state-run farms. Though another twenty million victims of Stalin's rule may have managed to survive, they suffered cruelly.[1] Or consider Adolph Hitler, the autocratic ruler of Nazi Germany (1933–1945). Not counting tens of millions of military and civilian casualties resulting from World War II, Hitler was directly responsible for the death of six million Jews in concentration camps as well as innumerable opponents, Poles, gypsies, homosexuals, and members of other groups he wished to exterminate. Under the despotic leadership of Pol Pot in Cambodia (1975–1979), the Khmer Rouge killed a quarter of the Cambodian population: an instance, one might say, of self-inflicted genocide. So great was Pol Pot's fear of the educated classes that they were almost exterminated: wearing spectacles or having uncalloused hands was quite literally a death warrant.

To be sure, the history of popular rule is not without its own serious blemishes. Like all governments, popular governments have

sometimes acted unjustly or cruelly toward people outside their borders, people living in other states—foreigners, colonials, and so on. In this respect popular governments have behaved no worse toward outsiders than nondemocratic governments, and often they have behaved better. In some cases, as in India, the colonial power has contributed inadvertently or intentionally to the creation of democratic beliefs and institutions. Yet we should not condone the injustices often shown by democratic countries toward outsiders, for in so acting they contradict a fundamental moral principle that, as we shall see in the next chapter, helps to justify political equality among the citizens of a democracy. The only solution to this contradiction may be a universal code of human rights that is effectively enforced throughout the world. Important as this problem and its solution are, however, they are beyond scope of this small book.

More directly challenging to democratic ideas and practices is the harm inflicted by popular governments on persons who live within their jurisdiction and are compelled to obey its laws but who are deprived of rights to participate in governing. Although these people are governed, they do not govern. Fortunately, the solution to this problem is obvious, if not always easy to carry out: democratic rights should be extended to members of the excluded groups. This solution was in fact widely adopted in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when previous limits on the suffrage were abolished and universal adult suffrage became a standard aspect of democratic government.[2]

But wait! you might say. Can't democratic governments also inflict harm on a minority of citizens who do possess voting rights but are outvoted by majorities? Isn't this what we mean by "the tyranny of the majority"?

I wish the answer were simple. Alas! it is much more complicated than you might suppose. The complications arise because virtually every law or public policy, whether adopted by a democratic

majority, an oligarchic minority, or a benign dictator, is bound to inflict some harm on some persons. Simply put, the issue is not whether a government can design all its laws so that none ever injures the interests of any citizen. No government, not even a democratic government, could uphold such a claim. The issue is whether in the long run a democratic process is likely to do less harm to the fundamental rights and interests of its citizens than any nondemocratic alternative. If only because democratic governments prevent abusive autocracies from ruling, they meet this requirement better than nondemocratic governments.

Yet just because democracies are far less tyrannical than nondemocratic regimes, democratic citizens can hardly afford to be complacent. We cannot reasonably justify the commission of a lesser crime because others commit larger crimes. Even when a democratic country, following democratic procedures, inflicts an injustice the result is still . . . an injustice. Majority might does not make majority right.[3]

However, there are other reasons for believing that democracies are likely to be more just and more respectful of basic human interests than nondemocracies.

2. *Democracy guarantees its citizens a number of fundamental rights that nondemocratic systems do not, and cannot, grant.*

Democracy is not only a process of governing. Because rights are necessary elements in democratic political institutions, democracy is inherently also a system of rights. Rights are among the essential building blocks of a democratic process of government.

Consider, for a moment, the democratic standards described in the last chapter. Is it not self-evident that in order to satisfy these standards a political system would necessarily have to insure its citizens certain rights? Take effective participation: to meet that standard, would not its citizens necessarily possess a *right* to participate and a *right* to express their views on political matters, to hear

what other citizens have to say, to discuss political matters with other citizens? Or consider what the criterion of voting equality requires: citizens must have a *right* to vote and to have their votes counted fairly. So with the other democratic standards: clearly citizens must have a *right* to investigate alternatives, a *right* to participate in deciding how and what should go on the agenda, and so on.

By definition, no nondemocratic system allows its citizens (or subjects) this broad array of political rights. If any political system were to do so, it would, by definition, become a democracy!

Yet the difference is not just a trivial matter of definitions. To satisfy the requirements of democracy, the rights inherent in it must actually be available to citizens. To promise democratic rights in writing, in law, or even in a constitutional document is not enough. The rights must be effectively enforced and effectively available to citizens in practice. If they are not, then to that extent the political system is not democratic, despite what its rulers claim, and the trappings of "democracy" are merely a façade for nondemocratic rule.

Because of the appeal of democratic ideas, in the twentieth century despotic rulers have often cloaked their rule with a show of "democracy" and "elections." Imagine, however, that in such a country all the rights necessary to democracy somehow become, realistically speaking, available to citizens. Then the country has made a transition to democracy—as happened with great frequency during the last half of the twentieth century.

At this point you might want to object that freedom of speech, let us say, won't exist just because it is a part of the very definition of democracy. Who cares about definitions? Surely, you will say, the connection must be something more than definitional. And you are, of course, correct. Institutions that provide for and protect basic democratic rights and opportunities are necessary to democracy: not simply as a logically necessary condition but as an empirically necessary condition in order for democracy to exist.

Even so, you might ask, isn't this just theory, abstractions, the game of theorists, philosophers, and other intellectuals? Surely, you may add, it would be foolish to think that the support of a few philosophers is enough to create and maintain democracy. And you would, of course, be right. In Part IV we'll examine some of the conditions that increase the chances that democracy will be maintained. Among these is the existence of fairly widespread democratic beliefs among citizens and leaders, including beliefs in the rights and opportunities necessary to democracy.

Fortunately, the need for these rights and opportunities is not so obscure that it lies beyond the comprehension of ordinary citizens and their political leaders. To quite ordinary Americans in the late eighteenth century, for example, it was fairly obvious that they could not have a democratic republic without freedom of expression. One of the first actions of Thomas Jefferson after he was elected to the presidency in 1800 was to bring an end to the infamous Alien and Sedition Acts enacted under his predecessor, John Adams, which would have stifled political expression. In doing so Jefferson responded not only to his own convictions but, it appears, to views widely held among ordinary American citizens in his time. If and when many citizens fail to understand that democracy requires certain fundamental rights, or fail to support the political, administrative, and judicial institutions that protect those rights, then their democracy is in danger.

Fortunately, this danger is somewhat reduced by a third benefit of democratic systems.

3. *Democracy insures its citizens a broader range of personal freedom than any feasible alternative to it.*

In addition to all the rights, freedoms, and opportunities that are strictly necessary in order for a government to be democratic, citizens in a democracy are certain to enjoy an even more extensive array of freedoms. A belief in the desirability of democracy does not

exist in isolation from other beliefs. For most people it is a part of a cluster of beliefs. Included in this cluster is the belief that freedom of expression, for example, is desirable in itself. In the universe of values or goods, democracy has a crucial place. But it is not the only good. Like the other rights essential to a democratic process, free expression has its own value because it is instrumental to moral autonomy, moral judgment, and a good life.

What is more, democracy could not long exist unless its citizens manage to create and maintain a supportive political culture, indeed a general culture supportive of these ideals and practices. The relation between a democratic system of government and the democratic culture that supports it is complex and we'll come back to it in Chapter 12. Suffice it to say here that a democratic culture is almost certain to emphasize the value of personal freedom and thus to provide support for additional rights and liberties. What the Greek statesman Pericles said of Athenian democracy in 431 B.C.E. applies equally to modern democracy: "The freedom we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life."[4]

To be sure, the assertion that a democratic state provides a broader range of freedom than any feasible alternative would be challenged by one who believed that we would all gain greater freedom if the state were abolished entirely: the audacious claim of anarchists.[5] But if you try to imagine a world with no state at all, where every person respects the fundamental rights of every other and all matters requiring collective decisions are settled peacefully by unanimous agreement, you will surely conclude, as most people do, that it is impossible. Coercion of some persons by other persons, groups, or organizations would be all too likely: for example, by persons, groups, or organizations intending to rob others of the fruits of their labor, to enslave or dominate those weaker than themselves, to impose their own rule on others, or, indeed, to re-create a coercive state in order to secure their own domination. But if the

abolition of the state would produce unbearable violence and disorder—"anarchy" in its popular meaning—then a good state would be superior to the bad state that is likely to follow upon the heels of anarchy.

If we reject anarchism and assume the need for a state, then a state with a democratic government will provide a broader range of freedom than any other.

4. *Democracy helps people to protect their own fundamental interests.*

Everyone, or nearly everyone, wants certain things: survival, food, shelter, health, love, respect, security, family, friends, satisfying work, leisure, and others. The specific pattern of your wants will probably differ from the specific pattern of another's. Like most people, you will surely want to exercise some control over the factors that determine whether and to what extent you can satisfy your wants—some freedom of choice, an opportunity to shape your life in accordance with your own goals, preferences, tastes, values, commitments, beliefs. Democracy protects this freedom and opportunity better than any alternative political system that has ever been devised. No one has put the argument more forcefully than John Stuart Mill.

A principle "of as universal truth and applicability as any general propositions which can be laid down respecting human affairs," he wrote, ". . . is that the rights and interests of every or any person are secure from being disregarded when the person is himself able, and habitually disposed, to stand up for them. . . . Human beings are only secure from evil at the hands of others in proportion as they have the power of being, and are, self-*protecting*." You can protect your rights and interests from abuse by government, and by those who influence or control government, he went on to say, only if you can participate fully in determining the conduct of the government. Therefore, he concluded, "nothing less can be ultimately desirable

than the admission of all to a share in the sovereign power of the state," that is, a democratic government.[6]

Mill was surely right. To be sure, even if you are included in the electorate of a democratic state you cannot be certain that all your interests will be adequately protected; but if you are excluded you can be pretty sure that your interests will be seriously injured by neglect or outright damage. Better inclusion than exclusion!

Democracy is uniquely related to freedom in still another way.

5. *Only a democratic government can provide a maximum opportunity for persons to exercise the freedom of self-determination—that is, to live under laws of their own choosing.*

No normal human being can enjoy a satisfactory life except by living in association with other persons. But living in association with others has a price: you cannot always do just what you like. As you left your childhood behind, you learned a basic fact of life: what you would like to do sometimes conflicts with what others would like to do. You have also learned that the group or groups to which you want to belong follow certain rules or practices that as a member you, too, will have to obey. Consequently, if you cannot simply impose your wishes by force, then you must find a way to resolve your differences peacefully, perhaps by agreement.

Thus a question arises that has proved deeply perplexing in both theory and practice. How can you choose the rules that you are obliged by your group to obey? Because of the state's exceptional capacity to enforce its laws by coercion, the question is particularly relevant to your position as a citizen (or subject) of a state. How can you both be free to choose the laws that are to be enforced by the state and yet, having chosen them, not be free to disobey them?

If you and your fellow citizens always agreed, the solution would be easy: you would all simply agree unanimously on the laws. Indeed, in these circumstances you might have no need for laws, except perhaps to serve as a reminder; in obeying the rules you

would be obeying yourself. In effect the problem would vanish, and the complete harmony between you and your fellows would make the dream of anarchism come true. Alas! Experience shows that genuine, unforced, lasting unanimity is rare in human affairs; enduring and perfect consensus is an unattainable goal. So our difficult question remains.

If we can't reasonably expect to live in perfect harmony with all our fellow human beings, we might try instead to create a process for arriving at decisions about rules and laws that would satisfy certain reasonable criteria.

- The process would insure that before a law is enacted you and all other citizens will have an opportunity to make your views known.
- You will be guaranteed opportunities for discussion, deliberation, negotiation, and compromise that in the best circumstances might lead to a law that everyone will find satisfactory.
- In the more likely event that unanimity cannot be achieved, the proposed law that has the greatest number of supporters will be enacted.

These criteria, you will notice, are parts of the ideal democratic process described in the previous chapter. Although that process cannot guarantee that all the members will literally live under laws of their own choosing, it expands self-determination to its maximum feasible limits. Even when you are among the outvoted members whose preferred option is rejected by the majority of your fellow citizens, you may nonetheless decide that the process is fairer than any other that you can reasonably hope to achieve. To that extent you are exercising your freedom of self-determination by freely choosing to live under a democratic constitution rather than a nondemocratic alternative.

6. *Only a democratic government can provide a maximum opportunity for exercising moral responsibility.*

What does it mean to say that you exercise moral responsibility? It means, I believe, that you adopt your moral principles and make decisions that depend on these principles only after you have engaged in a thoughtful process of reflection, deliberation, scrutiny, and consideration of the alternatives and their consequences. For you to be morally responsible is for you to be self-governing in the domain of morally relevant choices.

This is more demanding than most of us can hope to meet most of the time. Yet to the extent that your opportunity to live under the laws of your own choosing is limited, the scope for your moral responsibility is also limited. How can you be responsible for decisions that you cannot control? If you cannot influence the conduct of government officials, how can you be responsible for their conduct? If you are subject to collective decisions, as certainly you are, and if the democratic process maximizes your opportunity to live under laws of your own choosing, then—to an extent that no nondemocratic alternative can achieve—it also enables you to act as a morally responsible person.

7. *Democracy fosters human development more fully than any feasible alternative.*

This is a bold claim and considerably more controversial than any of the others. It is, you will notice, an empirical assertion, a claim as to facts. In principle, we should be able to test the claim by devising an appropriate way of measuring "human development" and comparing human development among people who live in democratic and nondemocratic regimes. But the task is of staggering difficulty. As a consequence, though such evidence as exists supports the proposition, we probably should regard it as an assertion that is highly plausible but unproved.

Just about everyone has views about the human qualities they

think are desirable or undesirable, qualities that should be developed if they are desirable and deterred if they are undesirable. Among the desirable qualities that most of us would want to foster are honesty, fairness, courage, and love. Many of us also believe that fully developed adult persons should possess the capacity for looking after themselves, for acting to take care of their interests and not simply counting on others to do so. It is desirable, many of us think, that adults should act responsibly, should weigh alternative courses of action as best they can, should consider consequences, and should take into account the rights and obligations of others as well as themselves. And they should possess the ability to engage in free and open discussions with others about the problems they face together.

At birth, most human beings possess the potentiality for developing these qualities. Whether and how much they actually develop them depends on many circumstances, among which is the nature of the political system in which a person lives. Only democratic systems provide the conditions under which the qualities I have mentioned are likely to develop fully. All other regimes reduce, often drastically, the scope within which adults can act to protect their own interests, consider the interests of others, take responsibility for important decisions, and engage freely with others in a search for the best decision. A democratic government is not enough to insure that people develop these qualities, but it is essential.

8. *Only a democratic government can foster a relatively high degree of political equality.*

One of the most important reasons for preferring a democratic government is that it can achieve political equality among citizens to a much greater extent than any feasible alternative. But why should we place a value on political equality? Because the answer is far from self-evident, in the two following chapters I shall explain why political equality is desirable, why, indeed, it necessarily follows

if we accept several reasonable assumptions that probably most of us do believe in. I shall also show that if we accept political equality then we must add the fifth democratic criterion in figure 4.

The advantages of democracy that I have discussed so far would tend to apply to democracies past and present. But as we saw in Chapter 2, some of the political institutions of the democratic systems with which we are familiar today are a product of recent centuries; indeed, one of them, universal adult suffrage, is mainly a product of the twentieth century. These modern representative systems with full adult suffrage appear to have two additional advantages that could not necessarily be claimed for all earlier democracies and republics.

9. *Modern representative democracies do not fight wars with one another.*

This extraordinary advantage of democratic governments was largely unpredicted and unexpected. Yet by the last decade of the twentieth century the evidence had become overwhelming. Of thirty-four international wars between 1945 and 1989 none occurred among democratic countries. What is more, "there has been little expectation of or preparation for war among them either."[7] The observation even holds true before 1945. Well back into the nineteenth century, countries with representative governments and other democratic institutions, where a substantial part of the male population was enfranchised, did not fight wars with one another.

Of course modern democratic governments have fought wars with nondemocratic countries, as they did in World Wars I and II. They have also imposed colonial rule by military force on conquered peoples. They have sometimes interfered in the political life of other countries, even weakening or helping in the overthrow of a weak government. Until the 1980s, for example, the United States had an abysmal record of giving support to military dictatorships in

Latin America; in 1954 it was instrumental in the military coup that overthrew the newly elected government of Guatemala.

Nonetheless, the remarkable fact is that modern representative democracies do not engage in war with *one another.* The reasons are not entirely clear. Probably the high levels of international trade among modern democracies predisposes them to friendliness rather than war.[8] But it is also true that democratic citizens and leaders learn the arts of compromise. In addition, they are inclined to see people in other democratic countries as less threatening, more like themselves, more trustworthy. Finally, the practice and history of peaceful negotiations, treaties, alliances, and common defense against nondemocratic enemies reinforce the predisposition to seek peace rather than fight wars.

Thus a more democratic world promises also to be a more peaceful world.

10. *Countries with democratic governments tend to be more prosperous than countries with nondemocratic governments.*

Until about two centuries ago, a common assumption among political philosophers was that democracy was best suited to a frugal people: affluence, it was thought, was a hallmark of aristocracies, oligarchies, and monarchies, but not democracy. Yet the experience of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries demonstrated precisely the opposite. Democracies were affluent, and by comparison nondemocracies were, on the whole, poor.

The relation between affluence and democracy was particularly striking in the last half of the twentieth century. The explanation is partly to be found in the affinity between representative democracy and a market economy, in which markets are for the most part not highly regulated, workers are free to move from one place or job to another, privately owned firms compete for sales and resources, and consumers can choose among goods and services offered by competing suppliers. By the end of the twentieth century, although not

all countries with market economies were democratic, all countries with democratic political systems also had market economies.

In the past two centuries a market economy has generally produced more affluence than any alternative to it. Thus the ancient wisdom has been turned on its head. Because all modern democratic countries have market economies, and a country with a market economy is likely to prosper, a modern democratic country is likely also to be a rich country.

Democracies typically possess other economic advantages over most nondemocratic systems. For one thing, democratic countries foster the education of their people; and an educated workforce is helpful to innovation and economic growth. In addition, the rule of law is usually sustained more strongly in democratic countries; courts are more independent; property rights are more secure; contractual agreements are more effectively enforced; and arbitrary intervention in economic life by government and politicians is less likely. Finally, modern economies depend on communication, and in democratic countries the barriers to communication are much lower. Seeking and exchanging information is easier, and far less dangerous than it is in most nondemocratic regimes.

In sum, despite some notable exceptions on both sides, modern democratic countries have generally tended to provide a more hospitable environment in which to achieve the advantages of market economies and economic growth than have the governments of nondemocratic regimes.

Yet if the affiliation between modern democracy and market economies has advantages for both, we cannot overlook an important cost that market economies impose on a democracy. Because a market economy generates economic inequality, it can also diminish the prospects for attaining full political equality among the citizens of a democratic country. We return to this problem in Chapter 14.

It would be a grievous error to ask too much of any government, including a democratic government. Democracy cannot guarantee that its citizens will be happy, prosperous, healthy, wise, peaceful, or just. To attain these ends is beyond the capacity of any government, including a democratic government. What is more, in practice democracy has always fallen far short of its ideals. Like all previous attempts to achieve a more democratic government, modern democracies also suffer from many defects.

In spite of its flaws, however, we must never lose sight of the benefits that make democracy more desirable than any feasible alternative to it:

1. Democracy helps to prevent government by cruel and vicious autocrats.
2. Democracy guarantees its citizens a number of fundamental rights that nondemocratic systems do not, and cannot, grant.
3. Democracy insures its citizens a broader range of personal freedom than any feasible alternative to it.
4. Democracy helps people to protect their own fundamental interests.
5. Only a democratic government can provide a maximum opportunity for persons to exercise the freedom of self-determination—that is, to live under laws of their own choosing.
6. Only a democratic government can provide a maximum opportunity for exercising moral responsibility.
7. Democracy fosters human development more fully than any feasible alternative.
8. Only a democratic government can foster a relatively high degree of political equality.

9. Modern representative democracies do not fight wars with one another.
10. Countries with democratic governments tend to be more prosperous than countries with nondemocratic governments.

With all these advantages, democracy is, for most of us, a far better gamble than any attainable alternative to it.

CHAPTER 6

Why Political Equality 1?

INTRINSIC EQUALITY

Many people will conclude that the advantages of democracy discussed in the last chapter may be enough—perhaps more than enough—to justify their belief that democratic government is superior to any alternatives that are realistically attainable. And yet, you just might wonder whether it is reasonable for you to assume, as a belief in democracy seems to presuppose, that citizens ought to be treated as political *equals* when they participate in governing. Why should the rights necessary to a democratic process of governing be extended *equally* to citizens?

The answer, though crucial to a belief in democracy, is very far from obvious.

IS EQUALITY SELF-EVIDENT?

In words that were to become famous throughout the world, in 1776 the authors of the American Declaration of Independence announced: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." If equality is self-evident then no further justification is needed. None can be found in the Declaration. Yet for most of us it is very far from self-evident that all men—and women—are created equal. If the assumption is not self-evidently true, can we reasonably justify adopting it? And if we cannot, how

can we defend a process for governing that seems to assume it to be true?

Critics have often dismissed assertions about equality like that in the Declaration of Independence as nothing more than empty rhetoric. If a claim like that is supposed to state a fact about human beings, they insist, it is self-evidently false.

To the charge of falsity, critics sometimes add hypocrisy. As an example they point out that the authors of the Declaration ignored the inconvenient fact that in the new states they were now declaring independent, a preponderant majority of persons were excluded from enjoying the inalienable rights with which they were supposedly endowed by no less than their Creator. Then and long thereafter women, slaves, free Negroes, and native peoples were deprived not only of political rights but of many other "inalienable rights" essential to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Indeed, property was also an "inalienable" right, and slaves were the property of their owners. Thomas Jefferson, the principal author of the Declaration, himself owned slaves. In important respects women, too, were the property of their husbands. And a substantial number of free men—on some estimates about 40 percent—were denied the right to vote; in all the new American states the right to vote was restricted to property holders into the nineteenth century.

Neither then nor later was inequality at all peculiar to the United States. On the contrary. In the 1830s the French writer Alexis de Tocqueville concluded that in comparison with Europe one of the distinctive characteristics of the United States was the extraordinary degree of social equality among that country's citizens.

Although many inequalities have diminished since 1776, many remain. We need only look around us to see inequalities everywhere. Inequality, not equality, appears to be the natural condition of humankind.

Thomas Jefferson was too experienced in human affairs to be

unaware of the self-evident fact that in many important respects human capacities, advantages, and opportunities are not distributed equally at birth, much less after nurture, circumstance, and luck have compounded initial differences. The fifty-five men who signed the Declaration of Independence—men of practical experience, lawyers, merchants, planters—were hardly naive in their understanding of human beings. If we grant that they were neither ignorant of reality nor simply hypocritical, what could they possibly have meant by the audacious assertion that all men are created equal?

Despite so much evidence to the contrary, the idea that human beings are fundamentally equal made a great deal of sense to Jefferson, as it had to others before him like the English philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.[1] Since Jefferson's time many more persons throughout the world have come to accept, in some form, the idea of human equality. To many, equality is simply a fact. Thus to Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835 the increasing "equality of conditions" he observed in Europe as well as America was so striking that it was "a providential fact, and it possesses all the characteristics of a Divine decree: it is universal, it is durable, it constantly eludes all human interference, and all events as well as all men contribute to its progress."[2]

INTRINSIC EQUALITY: A MORAL JUDGMENT

Equalities and inequalities can take an almost infinite variety of forms. Inequality in the ability to win a marathon race or a spelling bee is one thing. Inequality in opportunities to vote, speak, and participate in governing in other ways is quite another.

To understand why it is reasonable to commit ourselves to political equality among citizens of a democratic state, we need to recognize that sometimes when we talk about equality we do not mean to express a factual judgment. We do not intend to describe what we

believe is or will be true, as we do when we make statements about winners of marathon races or spelling bees. Instead we mean to express a moral judgment about human beings; we intend to say something about what we believe *ought* to be. One such moral judgment might be put this way: "We ought to regard the good of every human being as *intrinsically* equal to that of any other." Employing the words of the Declaration, as a *moral* judgment we insist that one person's life, liberty, and happiness is not intrinsically superior or inferior to the life, liberty, and happiness of any other. Consequently, we say, we ought to treat all persons as if they possess equal claims to life, liberty, happiness, and other fundamental goods and interests. Let me call this moral judgment the principle of *intrinsic equality*.

The principle does not take us very far, and in order to apply it to the government of a state, it helps to add a supplementary principle that it seems to imply: "In arriving at decisions, the government must give equal consideration to the good and interests of every person bound by those decisions." But why should we apply the principle of intrinsic equality to the government of a state and obligate it to give equal consideration to the interests of all? Unlike the authors of the Declaration, the claim that the truth of intrinsic equality is self-evident strikes me, and no doubt many others, as highly implausible. Yet intrinsic equality embodies so fundamental a view about the worth of human beings that it lies close to the limits of further rational justification. As with factual judgments, so, too, with moral judgments: if you pursue any assertion far enough down toward its foundations you finally reach limits beyond which reasonable argument takes you no further. In Martin Luther's memorable words of 1521: "It is neither safe nor prudent to do aught against conscience. Here I stand—I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."

Although the principle of intrinsic equality lies close to these

ultimate limits, we have not quite reached them. For several reasons, intrinsic equality is, I believe, a reasonable principle on which to base the government of a state.

WHY WE SHOULD ADOPT THE PRINCIPLE

Ethical and religious grounds. First, for a great many people throughout the world it is consistent with their most fundamental ethical beliefs and principles. That we are all equally God's children is a tenet of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Buddhism incorporates a somewhat similar view. (Among the world's major religions, Hinduism may be an exception.) Most moral reasoning, most systems of ethics, explicitly or implicitly assume some such principle.

The weakness of an alternative principle. Second, whatever might be the case with other associations, for governing a state many of us find every general alternative to intrinsic equality implausible and unconvincing. Suppose Citizen Jones were to propose the following alternative as a principle for governing the state: "In making decisions the government must always treat my good and my interests as superior to those of everyone else." Implicitly rejecting the principle of intrinsic equality, Jones asserts what might be called a principle of intrinsic superiority—or at least Jones's intrinsic superiority. The claim to intrinsic superiority could be made more inclusive, of course, and it usually is: "The good and interests of my group [Jones's family, class, caste, race, or whatever] are superior to those of all others."

It will come as no shock to acknowledge at this point that we human beings have more than a trace of egoism: in varying degrees we tend to be more concerned with our own interests than those of others. Consequently, many of us might be strongly tempted make just such a claim for ourselves and those to whom we are most

attached. But unless we ourselves can count confidently on controlling the government of the state, why should we accept the intrinsic superiority of certain others as a fundamental political principle?

To be sure, a person or a group with enough power could enforce a claim to their intrinsic superiority over your objections—literally over your dead body. Throughout human history many individuals and groups have used—or rather, abused—their power in just that way. But because naked force has its limits, those who have laid a claim to being the embodiment of an intrinsic superiority to others have invariably cloaked their otherwise transparently feeble claim with myth, mystery, religion, tradition, ideology, and pomp and circumstance.

Yet if you were not a member of the privileged group and could safely reject their claim to intrinsic superiority, would you freely and knowingly consent to such a preposterous principle? I strongly doubt it.

Prudence. The two preceding reasons for adopting a principle of intrinsic equality as a basis for governing a state suggest a third: prudence. Because the government of a state not only confers great benefits but also can inflict great harm, prudence dictates a cautious concern for the manner in which its unusual capacities will be employed. A governing process that definitely and permanently privileged your own good and interests over those of others might be appealing if you were confident that you or your group would always prevail. But for many people that outcome is so unlikely, or at least so uncertain, that it is safer to insist that your interests will be given equal consideration with those of others.

Acceptability. A principle you find prudent to adopt, many others will also. Thus a process that guarantees equal consideration for all, you may reasonably conclude, is more likely to secure the assent of all the others whose cooperation you need to achieve your ends.

Seen in this perspective, the principle of intrinsic equality makes a great deal of sense.

Yes, despite the claim to the contrary in the Declaration of Independence, it is indeed far from obvious why we should hold to the principle of intrinsic equality and give equal consideration to the interests of all in governing the state.

But if we interpret intrinsic equality as a principle of government that is justified on grounds of morality, prudence, and acceptability, it appears to me to make more sense than any alternative to it.

CHAPTER 7

Why Political Equality II?

CIVIC COMPETENCE

It may now come as an unpleasant surprise to learn that even if we accept intrinsic equality and the equal consideration of interests as sound moral judgments, we are not necessarily bound to endorse democracy as the best process for governing a state.

THE COUNTERCLAIM OF GUARDIANSHIP

To see why this is so, let us imagine that a member of a small group of fellow citizens says to you and others: "Like you, we also strongly believe in intrinsic equality. But we are not only deeply devoted to the common good; we also know better than most how to achieve it. As a result we are much better fitted than the great majority of people to rule. So if you will only grant us exclusive authority over the government, we will devote our wisdom and our labors to serving the general good; and in doing so we will give equal consideration to the good and interests of all."

The claim that government should be turned over to experts deeply committed to rule for the general good and superior to others in their knowledge of the means to achieve it—Guardians, Plato called them—has always been the major rival to democratic ideas. Advocates of Guardianship attack democracy at a seemingly vulnerable point: they simply deny that ordinary people are competent to govern themselves. They do not necessarily deny that human beings are intrinsically equal in the sense that we explored earlier. As

in Plato's ideal Republic, the Guardians might be committed to serving the good of all and, at least by implication, might hold that all those under their guardianship are intrinsically equal in their good or interests. Advocates of Guardianship in Plato's sense do not claim that the interests of the persons chosen as guardians are intrinsically superior to the interests of others. They contend that experts in governing, the Guardians, would be superior in their *knowledge* of the general good and the best means to achieve it.

The argument for political guardianship makes a persuasive use of analogies, particularly analogies involving expert knowledge and competence: a physician's superior knowledge on matters of sickness and health, for example, or a pilot's superior competence to guide us safely to our destination. Why not therefore allow those with superior competence in governing to make crucial decisions about the health of the state? To pilot the government toward its proper destination, the public good? Surely we can't assume that all persons are invariably the best judges of their own interests. Children obviously are not; others, usually parents, must serve as their guardians until they are competent to take care of themselves. That adults can also be mistaken about their interests, about the best means to attain their goals, is demonstrated by common experience: most of us come to regret some of our past decisions. We were, we admit, mistaken. What is more, almost all of us do rely on experts to make crucial decisions that bear strongly and directly on our well-being, happiness, health, future, even our survival, not just physicians, surgeons, and pilots but in our increasingly complex society a myriad others. So if we let experts make decisions on important matters like these, why shouldn't we turn *government* over to experts?

Attractive as it may seem at times, the argument for Guardianship rather than democracy fails to take sufficient account of some crucial defects in the analogy.

To delegate certain subordinate decisions to experts is not equivalent to ceding final control over major decisions. As an old adage has it, experts should be kept on tap, not on top. Experts may possess knowledge that is superior to yours in some important respects. A good physician may know better than you how to diagnose your illness, what course it is likely to run, how severe it will be, how best to treat it, and whether it is in fact treatable. You may reasonably choose to follow your physician's recommendations. But that does not mean that you should cede to your physician the power to decide whether you should undertake the course of treatment she or he recommends. Likewise, it is one thing for government officials to seek the aid of experts; but it is quite another for a political elite to possess the power to decide on the laws and policies you will be compelled to obey.

Personal decisions made by individuals are not equivalent to decisions made and enforced by the government of a state. The fundamental issue in the debate over guardianship versus democracy is not whether as individuals we must sometimes put our trust in experts. The issue is who or what group should have the final say in decisions made by the government of a state. You might reasonably wish to turn certain personal decisions over to someone more expert on those matters than you, like your doctor, accountant, lawyer, airplane pilot, or others. But it does not follow automatically that it would be reasonable for you to turn over to a political elite the authority to control the major decisions of the government of the state, decisions that would be enforced if need be by coercion, imprisonment, perhaps even death.

To govern a state well requires much more than strictly scientific knowledge. Governing is not a science in the sense that physics or chemistry or even, in some respects, medicine is a science. This is true for several reasons. For one thing, virtually all important decisions about policies, whether personal or governmental, require

ethical judgments. To make a decision about the ends that government policies should be designed to achieve (justice, equity, fairness, happiness, health, survival, security, well-being, equality, or whatnot) is to make an ethical judgment. Ethical judgments are not "scientific" judgments in the usual sense.[1]

Then, too, good ends often conflict with one another and resources are limited. Consequently, decisions about policies, whether personal or governmental, almost always require judgments about trade-offs, a balancing of different ends. For example, achieving economic equality may impair economic incentives; the costs of benefits for the elderly may be imposed on the young; expenditures on generations now living may impose costs on generations to come; preserving a wilderness area may come at the price of jobs for miners and timber-workers. Judgments about trade-offs among different ends are not "scientific." Empirical evidence is important and necessary, but it is never sufficient. In deciding how much we should sacrifice one end, good, or goal in order to attain some measure of another, we necessarily move well beyond anything that strictly scientific knowledge can provide.

There is another reason why decisions about policies require judgments that are not strictly "scientific." Even if the ends of policy decisions can be agreed on in a general way, there is almost always considerable uncertainty and conflict over the means: how the end may best be achieved, the desirability, feasibility, acceptability, and likely consequences of alternative means. What are the best means of taking care of the poor, the jobless, the homeless? How are the interests of children best protected and advanced? How large a budget is needed for military defense, and for what purposes? It is impossible to demonstrate, I believe, that a group exists, or could be created, who possess "scientific" or "expert" knowledge that provides definite answers to questions like these. Would we rather en-

trust the repair of our car to a theoretical physicist—or to a good automobile mechanic?

To govern a state well takes more than knowledge. It also requires incorruptibility, a firm resistance to all the enormous temptations of power, a continuing and inflexible dedication to the public good rather than benefits for oneself or one's group.

Because experts may be qualified to serve as your agents does not mean that they are qualified to serve as your rulers. Advocates of guardianship make not just one claim but two. A ruling elite can be created, they contend, whose members are both definitely superior to others in their knowledge of the ends a good government should seek and the best means to achieve those ends; *and* so deeply dedicated to pursuing the public good that they can safely be entrusted with the sovereign authority to govern the state.

As we have just seen, the first claim is highly dubious. But even if it could be shown to be justified, that would not by itself support the second claim. Knowledge is one thing; power is another. The likely effects of power on those who wield it were succinctly summed up in 1887 by an English baron, Lord Acton, in a famous statement: "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely." A century earlier William Pitt, a British statesman of vast experience in political life, had made a similar observation: "Unlimited power," he said in a speech in Parliament, "is apt to corrupt the minds of those who possess it."

This was also the general view among the members of the American Constitutional Convention in 1787, who were not lacking in experience on this question. "Sir, there are two passions which have a powerful influence on the affairs of men," said the oldest delegate, Benjamin Franklin. "These are ambition and avarice; the love of power and the love of money." One of the youngest delegates, Alexander Hamilton, concurred: "Men love power." And one of the

most experienced and influential delegates, George Mason, concurred: "From the nature of man, we may be sure that those who have power in their hands . . . will always, when they can, . . . increase it."[2]

However wise and worthy the members of a ruling elite entrusted with the power to govern a state may be when they first take power, in a few years or a few generations they are likely to abuse it. If human history provides any lessons, one surely is that through corruption, nepotism, the advancement of individual and group interests, and abuse of their monopoly over the state's coercive power to suppress criticism, extract wealth from their subjects, and insure their obedience by coercion, the Guardians of a state are likely to turn into despots.

Finally, to design a utopia is one thing; to bring it about is quite another. An advocate of Guardianship confronts a host of formidable practical problems: How is the Guardianship to be inaugurated? Who will draw up the constitution, so to speak, and who will put it into action? How will the first Guardians be chosen? If Guardianship is to depend in some way on the consent of the governed and not outright coercion, how will consent be obtained? In whatever way the Guardians are first selected, will they then choose their successors, like the members of a club? If so, won't the system run a high risk of degenerating from an aristocracy of talent into an oligarchy of birth? Yet if the existing Guardians do not choose their successors, who will? How will abusive and exploitative Guardians be discharged? And so on.

THE COMPETENCE OF CITIZENS TO GOVERN

Unless advocates of Guardianship can provide convincing solutions to the problems in their prescription that I have just described, prudence and reason require, in my judgment, that we reject their case. In rejecting the case for Guardianship, in effect we conclude:

Among adults no persons are so definitely better qualified than others to govern that they should be entrusted with complete and final authority over the government of the state.

But if we should not be governed by Guardians, by whom should we be governed? By ourselves.

On most matters we tend to believe that unless a highly convincing case can be made to the contrary, every adult should be allowed to judge what is best for his or her own good or interests. We apply this presumption in favor of personal autonomy only to adults, however, and not to children. From experience we assume instead that parents must act as guardians to protect the interests of their children. If the parents fail, others, perhaps the government, may need to step in.

Sometimes we also reject the presumption for persons of adult age who are judged to lack a normal capacity to look out for themselves. Like children, they, too, may need guardians. Yet unlike children, for whom the presumption has been overruled by law and convention, with adults the presumption cannot be lightly overridden. The potential for abuse is all too obvious. Consequently, we require an independent finding, a judicial process of some kind.

If we assume that with few exceptions adults should be entrusted with the right to make personal decisions about what is in their best interest, why should we reject this view in governing the state? The key question here is no longer whether adults are generally competent to make the personal decisions they face daily. The question now is whether most adults are sufficiently competent to participate in governing the state. Are they?

To arrive at the answer, consider again some conclusions we reached in the last several chapters:

Democracy confers many advantages on its citizens. Citizens are strongly protected against despotic rulers; they possess fundamental political rights; in addition, they also enjoy a wider sphere of

freedom; as citizens they acquire means for protecting and advancing their most important personal interests; they can also participate in deciding on the laws under which they will live; they can exercise a wide range of moral autonomy; and they possess unusual opportunities for personal development.

If we conclude that democracy provides these advantages over nondemocratic systems of government, several fundamental questions arise: Why should the advantages of democracy be restricted to some persons and not others? Why shouldn't they be available to all adults?

If a government ought to give equal consideration to the good of each person, should not all adults have the right to participate in deciding what laws and policies would best achieve the ends they seek, whether their ends are restricted narrowly to their own good or include the good of all?

If no persons are so definitely better qualified to govern that they should be entrusted with complete and final authority over the government of the state, then who is better qualified to participate than all the adults who are subject to the laws?

From the conclusions implied by these questions, another follows that I would put this way: *Except on a very strong showing to the contrary in rare circumstances, protected by law, every adult subject to the laws of the state should be considered to be sufficiently well qualified to participate in the democratic process of governing that state.*

A FIFTH DEMOCRATIC STANDARD: INCLUSION

The conclusion to which the argument of this chapter now points is that if you are deprived of an equal voice in the government of a state, the chances are quite high that your interests will not be given the same attention as the interests of those who do have a voice. If you have no voice, who will speak up for you? Who will

defend your interests if you cannot? And not just your interests as an individual. If you happen to be a member of an entire group excluded from participation, how will the fundamental interests of that group be protected?

The answer is clear. The fundamental interests of adults who are denied opportunities to participate in governing will *not* be adequately protected and advanced by those who govern. The historical evidence on this point is overwhelming. As we saw in our brief survey of the evolution of democracy, nobles and burghers in England, discontented with the arbitrary way monarchs imposed burdens on them without their consent, demanded and gained the right to participate in governing. Centuries later the middle classes, believing that their fundamental interests were ignored, in turn demanded and gained that right. There and elsewhere the continuing legal or de facto exclusion of women, slaves, poor persons, and manual workers, among others, left the members of these groups poorly protected against exploitation and abuse even in countries like Great Britain and the United States where the government was otherwise largely democratic.

In 1861 John Stuart Mill contended that because the working classes were denied suffrage, no one in government spoke up for their interests. Although he did not believe, he said, that those who participated in the government deliberately intended to sacrifice the interests of the working classes to their own, nonetheless, he asked, "Does Parliament, or almost any of the members composing it, ever for an instant look at any question with the eyes of a workingman? When a subject arises in which the laborers as such have an interest, is it regarded from any point of view but that of employers of labor?"[3] The same question could have been asked about slaves in ancient and modern republics; about women throughout history until the twentieth century; about many persons nominally free

but effectively deprived of democratic rights, such as blacks in the southern United States until the 1960s and in South Africa until the 1990s, and elsewhere.

Yes, individuals and groups may sometimes be mistaken about their own good. Certainly they may sometimes misperceive what is in their own best interests. But the preponderant weight of human experience informs us that no group of adults can safely grant to others the power to govern over them. Which leads us to a conclusion of crucial importance.

You may recall that when I discussed the criteria for democracy in Chapter 4, I postponed a discussion of the fifth: inclusion of adults (see figure 4, p. 38). This chapter and the last provide us, I believe, with ample reasons for concluding that to be democratic the government of a state must satisfy that standard. Let me now put it this way: *Full inclusion. The citizen body in a democratically governed state must include all persons subject to the laws of that state except transients and person proved to be incapable of caring for them.*

UNSETTLED PROBLEMS

To reject the argument for Guardianship and adopt political equality as an ideal still leaves some difficult questions.

Don't citizens and government officials need help from experts? Indeed they do! The importance of experts and specialized knowledge for democratic governments to function well is undeniable.

Public policy is often so complex (and may be growing steadily more so) that no government could make satisfactory decisions without the help of highly informed specialists. Just as each of us in our personal decisions must sometimes depend on experts for guidance and must delegate important decisions to them, so, too, must governments, including democratic governments. How best to satisfy democratic criteria, maintain a satisfactory degree of political

equality, and yet rely on experts and expert knowledge in making public decisions presents a serious problem, one that it would be foolish for advocates of democratic government to ignore. But I shall have to ignore it here.

If citizens are to be competent, won't they need political and social institutions to help make them so? Unquestionably. Opportunities to gain an enlightened understanding of public matters are not just part of the definition of democracy. They are a requirement for democracy.

Nothing I have said is meant to imply that a majority of citizens may not make mistakes. They can and do. This is precisely why advocates of democracy have always placed a high value on education. And civic education requires not only formal schooling but public discussion, deliberation, debate, controversy, the ready availability of reliable information, and other institutions of a free society.

But suppose the institutions for developing competent citizens are weak and many citizens don't know enough to protect their fundamental values and interests? What are we to do? In searching for an answer it is helpful to review the conclusions we have reached up to this point.

We have adopted the principle of intrinsic equality: We ought to regard the good of every human being as intrinsically equal to that of any other.

We have applied that principle to the government of a state: In arriving at decisions, the government must give equal consideration to the good and interests of every person bound by those decisions.

We have rejected Guardianship as a satisfactory way of applying the principle: Among adults no persons are so definitely better qualified than others to govern that they should be entrusted with complete and final authority over the government of the state.

Instead, we have accepted full inclusion: The citizen body in a

democratically governed state must include all persons subject to the laws of the state except transients and persons proved to be incapable of caring for themselves.

Therefore, if the institutions for civic education are weak, only one satisfactory solution remains. They must be strengthened. We who believe in democratic goals are obliged to search for ways by which citizens can acquire the competence they need.

Perhaps the institutions for civic education that were created in democratic countries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are no longer adequate. If this is so, then democratic countries will need to create new institutions to supplement the old ones.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND PREVIEW

We have now explored about half the territory laid out in figure 3 (p. 29). Yet we have barely peeked into the other half: the basic institutions that are necessary for advancing the goal of democracy, and the conditions, social, economic, and other, that favor the development and maintenance of these democratic political institutions. We'll explore these in the following chapters.

We turn, then, from goals to actualities.

CHAPTER 12

What Underlying Conditions Favor Democracy?

The twentieth century was a time of frequent democratic failure. On more than seventy occasions democracy collapsed and gave way to an authoritarian regime.[1] Yet it was also a time of extraordinary democratic success. Before it ended, the twentieth century had turned into an age of democratic triumph. The global range and influence of democratic ideas, institutions, and practices had made that century far and away the most flourishing period for democracy in human history.

So we face two questions—or, rather, the same question put two ways. How can we account for the establishment of democratic institutions in so many countries in so many parts of the world? And how can we explain its failure? Although a full answer would be impossible, two interrelated sets of factors are undoubtedly of crucial importance.

FAILURE OF THE ALTERNATIVES

First, in the course of the century the main alternatives pretty much lost out in the competition with democracy. Even by the end of the century's first quarter the nondemocratic forms of government that from time immemorial had dominated beliefs and practices throughout most of the world—monarchy, hereditary aristocracy, and open oligarchy—had fatally declined in legitimacy and ideological strength. Although they were replaced by more widely

popular antidemocratic alternatives in the form of fascism, Nazism, Leninism, and other authoritarian creeds and governments, these flourished only briefly. Fascism and Nazism were mortally wounded by the defeat of the Axis powers in World War II. Later in the century, military dictatorships, notably in Latin America, fell under the weight of their failures economic, diplomatic, and even military (Argentina). As the last decade of the century approached, the remaining and most important totalitarian rival to democracy, Leninism as embodied in Soviet communism, abruptly collapsed, irreparably weakened by internal decay and external pressures.

So was democracy now secure throughout the globe? As the American president Woodrow Wilson optimistically (and, as it turned out, wrongly) proclaimed in 1919 after the end of World War I, had the world at last "been made safe for democracy"?

Unfortunately, no. A final victory for democracy had not been achieved, nor was it close. The most populous country on earth and a major world power, China, had not yet been democratized. During the four thousand years of an illustrious civilization, the Chinese people had never once experienced democracy; and the prospects that China would soon become democratic were highly dubious. Nondemocratic regimes persisted in many other parts of the world as well, in Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and some of the remnants of the dissolved USSR. In most of these countries the conditions for democracy were not highly favorable; consequently, it was unclear whether and how they would make the transition to democracy. Finally, in more than a few countries that had made the transition and introduced the basic political institutions of polyarchal democracy, the underlying conditions were not favorable enough to guarantee that democracy would survive indefinitely.

Underlying conditions? I have suggested yet again that certain underlying or background conditions in a country are favorable to the stability of democracy and where these conditions are weakly

FIGURE 8. *What conditions favor democratic institutions?*

Essential conditions for democracy:
1. Control of military and police by elected officials
2. Democratic beliefs and political culture
3. No strong foreign control hostile to democracy

Favorable conditions for democracy:
4. A modern market economy and society
5. Weak subcultural pluralism

present or entirely absent democracy is unlikely to exist, or if it does, its existence is likely to be precarious.

So it is now time to ask: What are these conditions?

To answer, we can draw on a large body of relevant experience provided by the twentieth century: countries that have undergone a transition to democracy, consolidated their democratic institutions, and retained them over many decades; countries where the transition has been followed by collapse; and countries that have never made the transition. These instances of democratic transition, consolidation, and breakdown indicate that five conditions (and there are probably more) significantly affect the chances for democracy in a country (fig. 8).

FOREIGN INTERVENTION

Democratic institutions are less likely to develop in a country subject to intervention by another country hostile to democratic government in that country.

This condition is sometimes sufficient to explain why democratic institutions failed to develop or persist in a country where other conditions were considerably more favorable. For example, were it not for the intervention of the Soviet Union after World War II, Czechoslovakia would probably be counted today among the older

democracies. Soviet intervention also prevented Poland and Hungary from developing democratic institutions.

More surprisingly, until the last decades of the twentieth century the United States had compiled a dismal record of intervention in Latin America, where it had sometimes undermined a popularly elected government by intervening against it to protect American businesses or (in the official view) American national security. Although these Latin American countries where democracy was nipped in the bud were not necessarily fully democratic, had they been free from American intervention—or, better yet, strongly supported in their initial steps toward democratization—democratic institutions might well have evolved in time. A particularly egregious example was the clandestine intervention of U.S. intelligence agencies in Guatemala in 1964 to overthrow the elected government of a populist and left-leaning president, Jacopo Arbenz.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the countries of Central Europe and the Baltic moved speedily to install democratic institutions. In addition, the United States, and the international community generally, began to oppose dictatorships in Latin America and elsewhere and to support the development of democratic institutions throughout much of the world. Never in human history had international forces—political, economic, and cultural—been so supportive of democratic ideas and institutions. During the last decades of the twentieth century, then, an epochal shift occurred in the world's political climate that greatly improved the prospects for democratic development.

CONTROL OVER MILITARY AND POLICE

Unless the military and police forces are under the full control of democratically elected officials, democratic political institutions are unlikely to develop or endure.

In contrast to the external threat of foreign intervention, perhaps

the most dangerous internal threat to democracy comes from leaders who have access to the major means of physical coercion: the military and the police. If democratically elected officials are to achieve and maintain effective control over military and police forces, members of the police and military, especially among the officers, must defer to them. And their deference to the control of elected leaders must become too deeply ingrained to cast off. Why civilian control has developed in some countries and not in others is too complex to describe here. But for our purposes the important point is that without it, the prospects for democracy are dim.

Consider the unhappy history of Central America. Of the forty-seven governments in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua between 1948 and 1982, more than two-thirds gained power by means other than free and fair elections—most frequently by a military coup.[2]

In contrast, Costa Rica has been a beacon of democracy in the region since 1950. Why were Costa Ricans able to develop and maintain democratic institutions when all their neighbors could not? A part of the answer is to be found in the existence of the other favorable conditions. But even these would not have sustained a democratic government in the face of a military coup, as so often occurred in the rest of Latin America. In 1950, however, Costa Rica dramatically eliminated that threat: in a unique and audacious decision, the democratic president abolished the military!

No other country has followed Costa Rica's example, nor are many likely to. Yet nothing could illustrate more vividly how crucial it is for elected officials to establish and maintain control over the military and police if democratic institutions are to be established and preserved.

CULTURAL CONFLICTS WEAK OR ABSENT

Democratic political institutions are more likely to develop and endure in a country that is culturally fairly homogeneous and

less likely in a country with sharply differentiated and conflicting subcultures.

Distinctive cultures are often formed around differences in language, religion, race, ethnic identity, region, and sometimes ideology. Members share a common identity and emotional ties; they sharply distinguish "us" from "them." They turn toward other members of their group for personal relationships: friends, companions, marriage partners, neighbors, guests. They often engage in ceremonies and rituals that, among other things, define their group boundaries. In all these ways and others, a culture may become virtually a "way of life" for its members, a country within a country, a nation within a nation. In this case society is, so to speak, vertically stratified.

Cultural conflicts can erupt into the political arena, and typically they do: over religion, language, and dress codes in schools, for example; or equality of access to education; or discriminatory practices by one group against another; or whether the government should support religion or religious institutions, and if so, which ones and in what ways; or practices by one group that another finds deeply offensive and wishes to prohibit, such as abortion, cow slaughter, or "indecent" dress; or how and whether territorial and political boundaries should be adapted to fit group desires and demands. And so on. And on.

Issues like these pose a special problem for democracy. Adherents of a particular culture often view their political demands as matters of principle, deep religious or quasi-religious conviction, cultural preservation, or group survival. As a consequence, they consider their demands too crucial to allow for compromise. They are nonnegotiable. Yet under a peaceful democratic process, settling political conflicts generally requires negotiation, conciliation, compromise.

It should come as no surprise to discover, then, that the older and

politically stable democratic countries have for the most part managed to avoid severe cultural conflicts. Even if significant cultural differences exist among citizens, they have generally allowed more negotiable differences (on economic issues, for example) to dominate political life most of the time.

Are there no exceptions to this seemingly happy state of affairs? A few. Cultural diversity has been particularly significant in the United States, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Canada. But if diversity threatens to generate intractable cultural conflicts, how have democratic institutions been maintained in these countries?

Their experiences, though very different, show that in a country where all the other conditions are favorable to democracy, the potentially adverse political consequences of cultural diversity can sometimes be made more manageable.

Assimilation. This was the American solution. From the 1840s to 1920, the dominant culture, which during two centuries of colonial rule and independence had been solidly established by white settlers who mainly came from Great Britain, confronted waves of non-British immigrants from Ireland, Scandinavia, Germany, Poland, Italy, and elsewhere—immigrants who could often be distinguished by differences in language (except for the Irish), religion, food, dress, customs, manners, neighborhood, and other characteristics. By 1910 almost one in five white persons residing in the United States had been born elsewhere; in addition, the parents of more than one in four of the native-born whites had been born abroad. Yet within a generation of two after immigrants reached the United States, their descendants were already assimilated into the dominant culture, so fully indeed that although many Americans today retain (or develop) a certain attachment to their ancestral country or culture, their dominant political loyalty and identity is American.

In spite of the impressive success of assimilation in reducing the

cultural conflicts that massive immigration might otherwise have produced in the United States, the American experience reveals some crucial shortcomings in that solution.

To begin with, the challenge of assimilation was greatly eased because a great many of the adult immigrants who came to the United States to achieve the better life it promised were fairly eager to assimilate, to "become real Americans." Their descendants were even more so. Thus assimilation was mainly voluntary or enforced by social mechanisms (such as shame) that minimized the need for coercion by the state.[3]

If a massive population of immigrants was, on the whole, successfully assimilated, when American society confronted deeper racial or cultural differences the limits of that approach were soon revealed. In the encounters between the white population and the native peoples who had long occupied the New World, assimilation gave way to coercion, forced resettlement, and isolation from the main society. Nor could American society assimilate the large body of African-American slaves and their descendants, who, ironically, had like the Indians been living in America well before most other immigrants arrived. Coercively enforced caste barriers based on race effectively barred assimilation. A somewhat similar failure also occurred in the late nineteenth century when immigrants arrived from Asia to work as laborers on railroads and farms.

There was one further great divide that assimilation could not bridge. During the early nineteenth century a distinctive subculture, economy, and society based on slavery developed in the southern states. Americans living in the southern states and their compatriots in the northern and western states were divided by two fundamentally incompatible ways of life. The ultimate outcome was an "irrepressible conflict" that could not be resolved, despite great effort, by peaceful negotiation and compromise.[4] The resulting civil war lasted for four years and took a huge toll in human lives. Nor

did the conflict end even after the defeat of the South and the abolition of slavery. A distinctive southern subculture and social structure then emerged in which the subjection of African-American citizens was enforced by the threat and actuality of violence and terror.

So much for the past failures of assimilation. By the end of the twentieth century it was unclear whether the historic American practice of assimilation could cope successfully with the steadily increasing Hispanic minority and other self-conscious minorities as well. Will the United States develop into a multicultural society where assimilation no longer insures that cultural conflicts are managed peacefully under democratic procedures? Or will it become one in which cultural differences produces a higher level of mutual understanding, toleration, and accommodation?[5]

Deciding by consensus. Distinctive and potentially conflicting subcultures have existed in Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands. What can we learn from the experiences of these three democratic countries?

Each created political arrangements that required unanimity or broad consensus for decisions made by the cabinet and the parliament. The principle of majority rule yielded (in varying degrees) to a principle of unanimity. Thus any government decision that would significantly affect the interests of one or more of the subcultures would be made only with the explicit agreement of the representatives of that group in the cabinet and parliament. This solution was facilitated by PR, which insured that representatives from each of the groups would be fairly represented in parliament. They were also represented in the cabinet. And under the consensual practices adopted in these countries, the cabinet members from each subculture could exercise a veto over any policy with which they disagreed. (Arrangements like these, which political scientists refer to as "consociational democracy," vary greatly in details among the three countries. For more, see Appendix B.)

Clearly, consensual systems like these cannot be created or will not work successfully except under very special conditions. These include a talent for conciliation; high tolerance for compromise; trustworthy leaders who can negotiate solutions to conflicts that gain the assent of their followers; a consensus on basic goals and values that is broad enough to make agreements attainable; a national identity that discourages demands for outright separation; and a commitment to democratic procedures that excludes violent or revolutionary means.

These conditions are uncommon. Where they are absent, consensual arrangements are unlikely. And even if they are somehow put in place, as the tragic example of Lebanon indicates, they may collapse under the pressure of acute cultural conflict. Once described by political scientists as a highly successful "consociational democracy," Lebanon plunged into a prolonged civil war in 1958, when internal stress proved too great for its consensual system to manage.

Electoral systems. Cultural differences often get out of hand because they are fueled by politicians competing for support. Authoritarian regimes sometimes manage to use their massive coercive power to overwhelm and suppress cultural conflicts, which then erupt as coercion declines with steps toward democratization. Tempted by the easy pickings provided by cultural identities, politicians may deliberately fashion appeals to members of their cultural group and thereby fan latent animosities into hatreds that culminate in "cultural cleansing."

To avoid this outcome, political scientists have suggested that electoral systems could be designed to change the incentives of politicians so as to make conciliation more profitable than conflict. Under the arrangements they propose, no candidates could be elected with the support of only a single cultural group; they would need to gain votes from several major groups. The problem, of

course, is to persuade political leaders early in the process of democratization to adopt arrangements of this kind. Once a more divisive electoral system is in place, the spiral into cultural conflict may be all but irreversible.

Separation. When cultural cleavages are too deep to be overcome by any of the previous solutions, the only remaining solution may be for cultural groups to separate themselves into different political units within which they possess enough autonomy to maintain their identity and achieve their main cultural goals. In some situations the solution might be a federal system in which the units—states, provinces, cantons—are sufficiently autonomous to accommodate the different groups. A critical element in the remarkable harmonious multicultural society created by the Swiss is their federal system. Most of the cantons are fairly homogeneous culturally; for example, one canton may be Francophone and Catholic and another German-speaking and Protestant. And the powers of the cantons are adequate for cultural needs.

Like the other democratic political solutions to the problem of multiculturalism, the Swiss solution also requires unusual conditions—in this case, at least two. First, citizens in different subcultures must be already separated along territorial lines, so that the solution imposes no severe hardships. And second, though divided for some purposes into autonomous units, the citizens must have a national identity and common goals and values sufficiently strong to sustain the federal union. Although both conditions hold for Switzerland, neither is at all common.

Where the first condition exists but not the second, cultural differences are likely to produce demands for full independence. If one democratic country becomes two by peacefully separating, the solution seems impeccable when judged purely by democratic standards. For example, after almost a century of near independence in a union with Sweden, in 1905 Norway peacefully gained full independence.

But if the first condition exists only imperfectly because the groups are intermingled, then independence may impose severe hardships on the minority (or minorities) to be included in the new country. These may in turn justify their own claims either for independence or for remaining, somehow, within the mother country. This problem has complicated the issue of independence from Canada for the province of Quebec. Although many French-speaking citizens of Quebec wish to gain full independence, the province also includes a sizable number of non-Francophones—English-speakers, aboriginal groups, and immigrants—who wish to remain Canadian citizens. Although a complicated territorial solution is theoretically possible that would allow most of those who preferred to remain in Canada to do so, whether it will prove to be political possible is unclear.[6]

The disheartening fact is, then, that all the solutions to the potential problems of multiculturalism in a democratic country that I have described, and there may be others, depend for their success on special conditions that are likely to be rare. Because most of the older democratic countries have been only moderately heterogeneous, they have largely been spared from severe cultural conflicts. Yet changes began to set in toward the end of the twentieth century that will almost certainly end this fortunate state of affairs during the twenty-first century.

DEMOCRATIC BELIEFS AND CULTURE

Sooner or later virtually all countries encounter fairly deep crises—political, ideological, economic, military, international. Consequently, if a democratic political system is to endure it must able to survive the challenges and turmoil that crises like these present. Achieving stable democracy isn't just fair-weather sailing; it also means sailing sometimes in foul and dangerous weather.

During a severe and prolonged crisis the chances increase that

democracy will be overturned by authoritarian leaders who promise to end the crisis with vigorous dictatorial methods. Their methods, naturally, require that basic democratic institutions and procedures be set aside.

During the twentieth century the collapse of democracy was a frequent event, as the seventy instances of democratic breakdown mentioned at the beginning of this chapter attest. Yet some democracies did weather their gales and hurricanes, not just once but many times. Several, as we saw, even overcame the dangers arising from sharp cultural differences. And some emerged with the democratic ship of state even more seaworthy than before. The survivors of these stormy periods are precisely the countries we can now call the older democracies.

Why did democratic institutions weather crises in some countries but not in others? To the favorable conditions I have already described, we need to add one more. The prospects for stable democracy in a country are improved if its citizens and leaders strongly support democratic ideas, values, and practices. The most reliable support comes when these beliefs and predispositions are embedded in the country's culture and are transmitted, in large part, from one generation to the next. In other words, the country possesses a democratic political culture.

A democratic political culture would help to form citizens who believe that: democracy and political equality are desirable goals; control over military and police should be fully in the hands of elected leaders; the basic democratic institutions described in Chapter 8 should be maintained; and political differences and disagreements among citizens should be tolerated and protected.

I don't mean to suggest that every person in a democratic country must be formed into perfect democratic citizens. Fortunately not, or surely no democracy would ever exist! But unless a substantial majority of citizens prefer democracy and its political institutions to any

nondemocratic alternative and support political leaders who uphold democratic practices, democracy is unlikely to survive through its inevitable crises. Indeed, even a large minority of militant and violent antidemocrats would probably be sufficient to destroy a country's capacity for maintaining its democratic institutions.

How do people in a country come to believe in democratic ideas and practices? How do democratic ideas and practices become an intrinsic part of the country's culture? Any attempt to answer these questions would require us to delve deeply into historical developments, some general, some specific to a particular country, a task well beyond the limits of this book. Let me say only this: Lucky is the country whose history has led to these happy results!

But of course history is not always so generous. Instead, it endows many countries with a political culture that, at best, supports democratic institutions and ideas only weakly and, at worst, strongly favors authoritarian rule.

ECONOMIC GROWTH WITH A MARKET ECONOMY

Historically, the development of democratic beliefs and a democratic culture has been closely associated with what might loosely be called a market economy. More specifically, a highly favorable condition for democratic institutions is a market economy in which economic enterprises are mainly owned privately, and not by the state, that is, a capitalist rather than a socialist or statist economy. Yet the close association between democracy and market-capitalism conceals a paradox: a market-capitalist economy inevitably generates inequalities in the political resources to which different citizens have access. Thus a market-capitalist economy seriously impairs political equality: citizens who are economically unequal are unlikely to be politically equal. In a country with a market-capitalist economy, it appears; full political equality is impossible to achieve. Consequently, there is a permanent tension between democracy

and a market-capitalist economy. Is there a feasible alternative to market-capitalism that would be less injurious to political equality? I return to this question, and more generally to the relation between democracy and market-capitalism, in the next two chapters.

Meanwhile, however, we cannot escape the conclusion that a market-capitalist economy, the society it produces, and the economic growth it typically engenders are all highly favorable conditions for developing and maintaining democratic political institutions.

A SUMMARY

Probably other conditions would also be helpful—the rule of law, prolonged peace, and no doubt others. But the five conditions I have just described are, I believe, among the most crucial.

We can sum up the argument of this chapter in three general propositions: First, a country that enjoys all five of these conditions is almost certain to develop and maintain democratic institutions. Second, a country that lacks all five conditions is extremely unlikely to develop democratic institutions, or, if it somehow does, to maintain them. What about a country where the conditions are mixed—where some are favorable but some are unfavorable? I'll postpone the answer, and the third general proposition, until we have considered the strange case of India.

INDIA: AN IMPROBABLE DEMOCRACY

You might already have begun to wonder about India. Doesn't it lack all the favorable conditions? If so, doesn't it stand in contradiction to my entire argument? Well, not quite.

That India could long sustain democratic institutions seems, on the face of it, highly improbable. With a population approaching one billion at the end of the twentieth century, Indians are divided among themselves along more lines than other country

CHAPTER 13

Why Market-Capitalism Favors Democracy

Democracy and market-capitalism are like two persons bound in a tempestuous marriage that is riven by conflict and yet endures because neither partner wishes to separate from the other. To shift the simile to the botanical world, the two exist in a kind of antagonistic symbiosis.

Although the relation is extraordinarily complicated, from the profuse and constantly growing array of experiences with political and economic systems we can, I believe, draw five important conclusions. I offer two in this chapter, the other three in the next.

1. *Polyarchal democracy has endured only in countries with a predominantly market-capitalist economy; and it has never endured in a country with a predominantly nonmarket economy.*

Although I have limited this conclusion to polyarchal democracy, it also applies pretty well to the popular governments that developed in the city-states of Greece, Rome, and medieval Italy and to the evolution of representative institutions and the growth of citizen participation in northern Europe. But I'm going to bypass that history, some of which we encountered in Chapter 2, in order to focus exclusively on the institutions of modern representative democracy—that is, polyarchal democracy.

Here the record is amazingly unambiguous. Polyarchal democracy has existed *only* in countries with predominantly market-

capitalist economies and *never* (or at most briefly) in countries with predominantly nonmarket economies. Why is this so?

2. *This strict relation exists because certain basic features of market-capitalism make it favorable for democratic institutions. Conversely, some basic features of a predominantly nonmarket economy make it harmful to democratic prospects.*

In a market-capitalist economy, the economic entities are either individuals or enterprises (firms, farms, and whatnot) that are privately owned by individuals and groups, and not, for the most part, by the state. The main goal of these entities is economic gain in the form of wages, profits, interest, and rent. Those who manage the enterprises have no need to strive for broad, lofty, and ambiguous goals such as the general welfare or the public good. They can be guided solely by self-interested incentives. And because markets supply owners, managers, workers, and others with much of the crucial information they need, they can make their decisions without central direction. (This doesn't mean they can do without laws and regulations, which I'll come back to in the next chapter.)

Contrary to what our intuition might tell us, markets serve to coordinate and control the decisions of the economic entities. Historical experience shows pretty conclusively that a system in which countless economic decisions are made by innumerable independent but competing actors, each acting from rather narrow self-regarding interests and guided by the information supplied by markets, produces goods and services much more efficiently than any known alternative. What is more, it does so with a regularity and orderliness that is truly astonishing.

As a result, in the long run market-capitalism has typically led to economic growth; and economic growth is favorable to democracy. To begin with, by cutting acute poverty and improving living standards, economic growth helps to reduce social and political

conflicts. Furthermore, when economic conflicts do arise, growth provides more resources that are available for a mutually satisfactory settlement in which each side gains something. (In the absence of growth, economic conflicts, to use the language of game theory, become "zero-sum": what I gain you lose, what you gain I lose. So cooperation is useless.) Growth also provides individuals, groups, and governments with surplus resources to support education and thus to foster a literate and educated citizenry.

Market-capitalism is also favorable to democracy because of its social and political consequences. It creates a large middling stratum of property owners who typically seek education, autonomy, personal freedom, property rights, the rule of law, and participation in government. The middle classes, as Aristotle was the first to point out, are the natural allies of democratic ideas and institutions. Last, and perhaps most important, by decentralizing many economic decisions to relatively independent individuals and firms, a market-capitalist economy avoids the need for a powerful, even authoritarian central government.

A nonmarket economy can exist where resources are scarce and economic decisions few and obvious. But in a more complex society, to avoid economic chaos and to provide at least a moderate standard of living, a substitute for the coordination and control provided by markets is necessary. The only feasible substitute is the government of the state. So whatever the formal legal ownership of enterprises might be in a nonmarket economy, their decisions are, in effect, made and controlled by the government. Without the coordination of the market, it necessarily becomes the government's task to allocate all scarce resources: capital, labor, machinery, land, buildings, consumer goods, dwellings, and the rest. To do so, the government needs a detailed and comprehensive central plan and thus government officials charged with making the plan, carrying it out, and seeing to its enforcement. These are prodigious tasks,

requiring staggering quantities of reliable information. To gain compliance with their directives, government officials must discover and apply appropriate incentives. These may run from rewards, both legal (such as salaries and bonuses) and illegal (for example, bribery), to coercion and punishment (such as execution for "economic crimes"). Except under rare and transitory conditions, which I'll come to in a moment, no government has proved up to the task.

It is not the inefficiencies of a centrally planned economy, however, that are most injurious to democratic prospects. It is the economy's social and political consequences. A centrally planned economy puts the resources of the entire economy at the disposal of government leaders. To foresee the likely consequences of that fantastic political windfall, we might recall the aphorism that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." A centrally planned economy issues an outright invitation to government leaders, written in bold letters: *You are free to use all these economic resources to consolidate and maintain your power!*

Political leaders would have to have superhuman powers of self-denial to resist this temptation. Alas, the melancholy record of history is clear: rulers with access to the enormous resources provided by a centrally planned economy have all confirmed the wisdom of the aphorism. To be sure, leaders may use their despotism for good ends or bad. History records some of both—though overall, I think, despots have achieved considerably more ill than good. In any case, centrally planned economies have always been closely associated with authoritarian regimes.

SOME QUALIFICATIONS

Although the two conclusions are valid, they need several qualifications.

For one thing, economic growth is not unique to democratic

countries, nor is economic stagnation unique to nondemocratic nations. Indeed, there appears to be no correlation between economic growth and a country's type of government or regime.[1]

Moreover, although democracy has existed only in countries with a market-capitalist economy, market-capitalism has existed in nondemocratic countries. In several of these—Taiwan and South Korea in particular—the factors I mentioned earlier that tend to accompany economic growth and a market economy in turn helped to bring about democratization. In these two countries authoritarian leaders, whose policies helped to stimulate the development of a successful market economy, export industries, economic growth, and a large, educated middle class, also unwittingly planted the seeds of their own destruction. Thus although market-capitalism and economic growth are favorable to democracy, in the long run they may be far less favorable, indeed downright unfavorable for nondemocratic regimes. Consequently, the dénouement of a momentous historical drama to be played out during the twenty-first century will reveal whether China's nondemocratic regime can withstand the democratizing forces generated by market-capitalism.

A market-capitalist economy need not exist, however, only in its familiar twentieth-century urban-industrial or postindustrial form. It may also be—or at least has been—agricultural. As we saw in Chapter 2, during the nineteenth century the basic democratic institutions, with the exception of female suffrage, developed in several countries—the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia—that were predominantly agricultural. In 1790, the first year of the American republic under its new (and still continuing) constitution, out of a total population of just under four million persons, only 5 percent lived in places with more than twenty-five hundred inhabitants; the remaining 95 percent lived in rural areas, mainly on farms. By 1820, when the political institutions of (white male) polyarchal democracy were already solidly established, in a

population of fewer than ten million people, more than nine out of ten still lived in rural areas. On the eve of the Civil War in 1860, when the country had more than thirty million inhabitants, eight of ten Americans lived in rural areas. The America that Alexis de Tocqueville described in *Democracy in America* was agrarian, not industrial. The economic enterprises of that agrarian society were, of course, principally farms, owned and managed by individual farmers and their families. Much of what they produced was used for their own consumption.

The important point, however, is that the economy was highly decentralized (more, indeed, than it was to become with industrialization); it gave political leaders little access to its resources; and it created a large middle class of free farmers. Thus it was highly favorable for democratic development. Indeed, in Thomas Jefferson's vision of the Republic, the necessary foundation for democracy was an agrarian society consisting of independent farmers.

Are these preindustrial origins of several of the oldest democracies irrelevant to countries in the postindustrial era? No. That body of experience reinforces a crucial point: whatever its dominant activity, a decentralized economy that helps to create a nation of independent citizens is highly favorable for the development and maintenance of democratic institutions.

A moment ago I mentioned "rare and transitory conditions" under which governments have efficiently managed central planning. What is more, the governments were democratic. These were the wartime governments of Britain and the United States during World War I and even more emphatically during World War II. But in these cases, the planning and allocation of resources had a clearly defined goal, which was to insure that military needs were met along with a basic supply of goods and services for civilians. The war aims were widely supported. Though some black markets developed, they were not so extensive as to diminish the effectiveness

of the centralized system for allocating resources and controlling prices. Finally, the system was dismantled after peace arrived. As a result, political leaders were deprived of the opportunities they would have enjoyed for exploiting their dominant economic role for political purposes.

If we put these wartime systems to one side, centrally directed economies have existed only in countries where the leaders were fundamentally antidemocratic. Thus we cannot easily untangle the undemocratic consequences of the economic order from the undemocratic consequences of leaders' beliefs. Lenin and Stalin were so hostile to democracy that with or without a centrally directed economy, they would have prevented democratic institutions from developing. The centrally directed economy simply made their task easier by providing them with greater resources for inflicting their will on others.

Strictly speaking, then, the historical experiment that combines democratic institutions with a centrally directed peacetime economy has never been tried. I for one hope that it never will. The likely consequences are, I believe, fully foreseeable. And they bode ill for democracy.

Yet even if market-capitalism is far more favorable to democratic institutions than any nonmarket economy that has so far existed, it also has some profoundly unfavorable consequences. We examine these in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 14

Why Market-Capitalism Harms Democracy

If we approach market capitalism from a democratic point of view we discover, when we look closely, that it has two faces. Like the emblem of the Greek god Janus, they face in opposite directions. One, a friendly face, points toward democracy. The other, a hostile face, points the other way.

3. *Democracy and market-capitalism are locked in a persistent conflict in which each modifies and limits the other.*

By 1840, a market economy with self-regulating markets in labor, land, and money had been fully installed in Britain. Market-capitalism had triumphed over its enemies on all fronts: not only in economic theory and practice but in politics, law, ideas, philosophy, and ideology as well. Its opponents, so it appeared, were completely routed. Yet in a country where people have a voice, as they had in England even in those predemocratic times, such a complete victory could not endure.[1] As it always does, market-capitalism brought gains for some; but as it always does, it also brought harm to others.

Though suffrage was highly restricted, the other political institutions of representative government were largely in place. And in due time—in 1867 and again in 1884—suffrage was expanded; after 1884 most males could vote. Thus the political system provided opportunities for the effective expression of opposition to unregulated market-capitalism. Turning for help to political and governmental leaders, those who felt themselves injured by unregulated markets

sought protection. Opponents of laissez-faire economics found effective expression of their grievances through political leaders, movements, parties, programs, ideas, philosophies, ideologies, books, journals, and, most important, votes and elections. The newly formed Labour Party focused on the plight of the working classes.

Although some opponents proposed only to regulate market-capitalism, others wished to abolish it outright. And some compromised: let's regulate it now, they said, and eliminate it later. Those who proposed to abolish capitalism never achieved their goals. Those who demanded government intervention and regulation often did.

As in Britain, so, too, in Western Europe and the other English-speaking countries. In any country where governments could be influenced by popular movements of discontent, laissez-faire could not be sustained. Market-capitalism without government intervention and regulation was impossible in a democratic country for at least two reasons.

First, the basic institutions of market-capitalism themselves require extensive government intervention and regulation. Competitive markets, ownership of economic entities, enforcing contracts, preventing monopolies, protecting property rights—these and many other aspects of market capitalism depend wholly on laws, policies, orders, and other actions carried out by governments. A market economy is not, and cannot be, completely self-regulating.

Second, without government intervention and regulation a market economy inevitably inflicts serious harm on some persons; and those who are harmed or expect to be harmed will demand government intervention. Economic actors motivated by self-interest have little incentive for taking the good of others into account; on the contrary, they have powerful incentives for ignoring the good of others if by doing so they themselves stand to gain. Conscience is

easily quieted by that seductive justification for inflicting harm on others: "If I don't do it, others will. If I don't allow my factory to discharge its wastes into the river and its smoke into the air, others will. If I don't sell my products even if they may be unsafe, others will. If I don't . . . others will." In a more or less competitive economy, it is virtually certain that, in fact, others will.

When harm results from decisions determined by unregulated competition and markets, questions are bound to arise. Can the harm be eliminated or reduced? If so, can this be achieved without excessive cost to the benefits? When the harm accrues to some persons and the benefits to others, as is usually the case, how are we to judge what is desirable? What is the best solution? Or if not the best, at least an acceptable solution? How should these decisions be made, and by whom? How and by what means are the decisions to be enforced?

It is obvious that these are not just economic questions. They are also moral and political questions. In a democratic country citizens searching for answers will inevitably gravitate toward politics and government. The most easily accessible candidate for intervening in a market economy in order to alter an otherwise harmful outcome, and the most effective, is . . . the government of the state.

Whether discontented citizens succeed in getting the government to intervene depends, of course, on many things, including the relative political strengths of the antagonists. However, the historical record is clear: in all democratic countries,* the harm produced by, or expected from, unregulated markets has induced governments to intervene in order to alter an outcome that would otherwise cause damage to some citizens.

In a country famous for its commitment to market-capitalism,

*And in many nondemocratic countries as well. But our concern here is with the relation between democracy and market-capitalism.

the United States, national, state, and local governments intervene in the economy in ways too numerous to list. Here are just a few examples:

- unemployment insurance;
- old age annuities;
- fiscal policy to avoid inflation and economic recession;
- safety: food, drugs, airlines, railroads, highways, streets;
- public health, control of infectious diseases, compulsory vaccination of school children;
- health insurance;
- education;
- the sale of stocks, bonds, and other securities;
- zoning: business, residential, and so on;
- setting building standards;
- insuring market-competition, preventing monopolies, and other restraints on trade;
- imposing and reducing tariffs and quotas on imports;
- licensing physicians, dentists, lawyers, accountants, and other professional persons;
- establishing and maintaining state and national parks, recreation areas, and wilderness areas;
- regulating business firms to prevent or repair environmental damage; and belatedly,
- regulating the sale of tobacco products in order to reduce the frequency of addiction, cancer, and other malign effects.

And so on. And on, and on.

To sum up: In no democratic country does a market-capitalist economy exist (nor in all likelihood can it exist for long) without extensive government regulation and intervention to alter its harmful effects.

Yet if the existence in a country of democratic political institutions significantly affects the operation of market-capitalism, the existence of market-capitalism in a country greatly affects the operation of democratic political institutions. The causal arrow, so to speak, goes both ways: from politics to economics and from economics to politics.

4. *Because market capitalism inevitably creates inequalities, it limits the democratic potential of polyarchal democracy by generating inequalities in the distribution of political resources.*

Words About Words

Political resources include everything to which a person or a group has access that they can use to influence, directly or indirectly, the conduct of other persons. Varying with time and place, an enormous number of aspects of human society can be converted into political resources: physical force, weapons, money, wealth, goods and services, productive resources, income, status, honor, respect, affection, charisma, prestige, information, knowledge, education, communication, communications media, organizations, position, legal standing, control over doctrine and beliefs, votes, and many others. At one theoretical limit, a political resource might be distributed equally, as with votes in democratic countries. At the other theoretical limit, it might be concentrated in the hands of one person or group. And the possible distributions between equality and total concentration are infinite.

Most of the resources I just listed are everywhere distributed in highly unequal fashion. Although market-capitalism is not the only cause, it is important in causing an unequal distribution of many key resources: wealth, income, status, prestige, information, organization, education, knowledge . . . .

Because of inequalities in political resources, some citizens gain significantly more influence than others over the government's policies, decisions, and actions. These violations, alas, are not trivial. Consequently, citizens are not political equals—far from it—and thus the moral foundation of democracy, political equality among citizens, is seriously violated.

5. *Market-capitalism greatly favors the development of democracy up to the level of polyarchal democracy. But because of its adverse consequences for political equality, it is unfavorable to the development of democracy beyond the level of polyarchy.*

For the reasons advanced earlier, market-capitalism is a powerful solvent of authoritarian regimes. When it transforms a society from landlords and peasants to employers, employees, and workers; from uneducated rural masses barely capable of surviving, and often not even that, to a country of literate, moderately secure, urbanized inhabitants; from the monopolization of almost all resources by a small elite, oligarchy, or ruling class to a much wider dispersion of resources; from a system in which the many can do little to prevent the domination of government by a few to a system in which the many can effectively combine their resources (not least their votes) and thereby influence the government to act in their favor—when it helps to bring about these changes, as it often has and will continue to do in many countries with developing economies, it serves as a vehicle for a revolutionary transformation of society and politics.

When authoritarian governments in less modernized countries undertake to develop a dynamic market economy, then, they are likely to sew the seeds of their own ultimate destruction.

But once society and politics are transformed by market-capitalism and democratic institutions are in place, the outlook fundamentally changes. Now the inequalities in resources that market-capitalism churns out produce serious political inequalities among citizens.

Whether and how the marriage of polyarchal democracy to market-capitalism can be made more favorable to the further democratization of polyarchy is a profoundly difficult question for which there are no easy answers, and certainly no brief ones. The relation between a country's democratic political system and its nondemocratic economic system has presented a formidable and persistent challenge to democratic goals and practices throughout the twentieth century. That challenge will surely continue in the twenty-first century.