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# IN DEFENCE OF POLITICS

Fifth Edition

*Bernard Crick*

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# 1

## The nature of political rule

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Who has not often felt the distaste with democratic politics which Salazar expressed when he said that he 'detested politics from the bottom of his heart; all those noisy and incoherent promises, the impossible demands, the hotchpotch of unfounded ideas and impractical plans ... opportunism that cares neither for truth nor justice, the inglorious chase after unmerited fame, the unleashing of uncontrollable passions, the exploitation of the lowest instincts, the distortion of facts ... all that feverish and sterile fuss?'

J. H. Huizinga in *The Times*, 16 November 1961

Boredom with established truths is a great enemy of free men. So there is some excuse in troubled times not to be clever and inventive in redefining things, or to pretend to academic unconcern or scientific detachment, but simply to try to make some old platitudes pregnant. This essay simply seeks to help in the task of restoring confidence in the virtues of politics as a great and civilizing human activity. Politics, like Antaeus in the Greek myth, can remain perpetually young, strong, and lively so long as it can keep its feet firmly on the ground of Mother Earth. We live in a human condition, so we cannot through politics grasp for an absolute ideal, as Plato taught with bewitching single-mindedness. But the surface of the earth varies greatly, and being human we are restless and have many different ideals and are forced to plan for the future as well as to enjoy the fruits of the past, so equally politics cannot be a 'purely practical and immediate' activity, as those who cannot see beyond the end of their own noses praise themselves by claiming.

Politics is too often regarded as a poor relation, inherently dependent and subsidiary; it is rarely praised as something with a life and character

of its own. Politics is not religion, ethics, law, science, history, or economics; it neither solves everything, nor is it present everywhere; and it is not any one political doctrine, such as conservatism, liberalism, socialism, communism, or nationalism, though it can contain elements of most of these things. Politics is politics, to be valued as itself, not because it is 'like' or 'really is' something else more respectable or peculiar. Politics is politics. The person who wishes not to be troubled by politics and to be left alone finds himself the unwitting ally of those to whom politics is a troublesome obstacle to their well-meant intentions to leave nothing alone.

To some this may seem very obvious. But then there will be no harm in reminding them how few they are. All over the world there are men aspiring to power and there are actual rulers who, however many different names they go by, have in common a rejection of politics. Many Frenchmen in 1958, warm defenders of the Republic, argued that General de Gaulle was saving the French nation from the politicians; in 1961 an army rebellion broke out in Algeria in which the same General was then accused of seeking a 'purely political solution' to the Algerian problem, and the rebel Generals went on to deny that they themselves had any 'political ambitions'. Fidel Castro told a reporter in 1961: 'We are not politicians. We made our revolution to get the politicians out. We are social people. This is a social revolution.' In so many places the cry has gone up that *the party* or *the leader* is defending *the people* against the politicians. 'Politics, ill understood, have been defined,' wrote Isaac D'Israeli, 'as "the art of governing mankind by deceiving them".' Many people, of course, even in régimes which are clearly political, think that they are not interested in politics, and even act as if they are not; but they are probably few compared to the many who think that politics is muddled, contradictory, self-defeatingly recurrent, unprogressive, unpatriotic, inefficient, mere compromise, or even a sham or conspiracy by which political parties seek to preserve some particular and peculiar social systems against the challenge of the inevitable future, etc. The anti-political are very right to think that politics is an achievement far more limited in time and place than politically-minded men, or men who practise this odd thing politics, normally presume.

Many politicians, publicists, and scholars in Western cultures are apt to leap to the defence, or the propagandizing, of words like 'liberty', 'democracy', 'free-government', and then to be puzzled and distraught when, even if their voices are heard at all elsewhere, they are only

answered by proud and sincere assurances that indeed all these good things exist and are honoured in styles of government as different as my Soviet Union, my China, my Spain, my Egypt, my Cuba, my Ghana, my Northern Ireland, or my South Africa. Even if precise meanings can be attached to these words, they are too important as symbols of prestige to be readily conceded. Publicists would perhaps do better simply to defend the activity of politics itself. For it is a very much more precise thing than is commonly supposed; it is essential to genuine freedom; it is unknown in any but advanced and complex societies; and it has specific origins only found in European experience. It is something to be valued almost as a pearl beyond price in the history of the human condition, though, in fact, to overvalue it can be to destroy it utterly.

Perhaps there is something to be said for writing in praise of an activity which seems so general that few people can feel any great passion to appropriate it, or to nationalize it, as the exclusive property of any one group of men or of any particular programme of government.

It is Aristotle who first states what should be recognized as the fundamental, elementary proposition of any possible political science. He is, as it were, the anthropologist who first characterizes and distinguishes what still appears to be a unique invention or discovery of the Greek world. At one point in the second book of his *Politics*, where he examines and criticizes schemes for ideal states, he says that Plato in his *Republic* makes the mistake of trying to reduce everything in the *polis* (or the political type of state) to a unity; rather it is the case that: 'there is a point at which a *polis*, by advancing in unity, will cease to be a *polis*: there is another point, short of that, at which it may still remain a *polis*, but will none the less come near to losing its essence, and will thus be a worse *polis*. It is as if you were to turn harmony into mere unison, or to reduce a theme to a single beat. The truth is that the *polis* is an aggregate of many members.'<sup>1</sup> Politics arises then, according to great Aristotle, in organized states which recognize themselves to be an aggregate of many members, not a single tribe, religion, interest, or tradition. Politics arises from accepting the fact of the simultaneous existence of different groups, hence different interests and different traditions, within a territorial unit under a common rule. It does not matter much how that unit came to be – by custom, conquest, or geographical circumstance. What does matter is

1. *Politics of Aristotle*, edited by Sir Ernest Barker, p. 51.

that its social structure, unlike some primitive societies, is sufficiently complex and divided to make politics a plausible response to the problem of governing it, the problem of maintaining order at all. But the establishing of political order is not just any order at all; it marks the birth, or the recognition, of freedom. For politics represents at least some tolerance of differing truths, some recognition that government is possible, indeed best conducted, amid the open canvassing of rival interests. Politics are the public actions of free men. Freedom is the privacy of men from public actions.

Common usage of the word might encourage one to think that politics is a real force in every organized state. But a moment's reflection should reveal that this common usage can be highly misleading. For politics, as Aristotle points out, is only one possible solution to the problem of order. It is by no means the most usual. Tyranny is the most obvious alternative – the rule of one strong man in his own interest; and oligarchy is the next most obvious alternative – the rule of one group in their own interest. The method of rule of the tyrant and the oligarch is quite simply to clobber, coerce, or overawe all or most of these other groups in the interest of their own. The political method of rule is to listen to these other groups so as to conciliate them as far as possible, and to give them a legal position, a sense of security, some clear and reasonably safe means of articulation, by which these other groups can and will speak freely. Ideally politics draws all these groups into each other so that they each and together can make a positive contribution towards the general business of government, the maintaining of order. The different ways in which this can be done are obviously many, even in any one particular circumstance of competing social interests; and in view of the many different states and changes of circumstance there have been, are, and will be, possible variations on the theme of political rule appear to be infinite. But, however imperfectly this process of deliberate conciliation works, it is nevertheless radically different from tyranny, oligarchy, kingship, dictatorship, despotism, and – what is probably the only distinctively modern type of rule – totalitarianism.

Certainly it may sometimes seem odd, in the light of contemporary usage, to say that there is no politics in totalitarian or tyrannical régimes. To some it would be clearer to assert that while there is plainly some politics in all systems of government, yet some systems of government are themselves political systems: they function by or for politics. But usage does not destroy real distinctions. And this distinction has a great

tradition behind it.<sup>1</sup> When Chief Justice Fortescue in the mid fifteenth century said that England was both *dominium politicum et regale*, he meant that the King could declare law only by the consultation and consent of Parliament, although he was absolute in power to enforce the law and to defend the realm. But a régime purely *regale* or royal would not be *politicum* at all. In the early modern period 'polity' or 'mixed government', that is the Aristotelean blending of the aristocratic with the democratic principle, were terms commonly used in contrast both to tyranny or despotism and to 'democracy' – even when democracy was just a speculative fear, or a theoretical extension of what might happen if all men acted like the Anabaptists or the Levellers. In the eighteenth century in England 'politics' was commonly contrasted to the principle of 'establishment'. Politicians were people who challenged the established order of Crown, Court, and Church; and they challenged it in a peculiar way, not by the Palace intrigues of despotism, but by trying to create clear issues of policy *and* by making them public. Politicians were people, whether highminded like Pitt the Elder, or low-minded like Jack Wilkes, who tried to assert the power of 'the public' and 'the people' (in reality, of course, always publics and peoples) against what Dr Johnson called 'the powers by law established'. The term was pejorative. The Tory squires called the Whig magnates 'politicians' because they enlisted the help of people like Wilkes; and the 'big Whigs' themselves regarded people like Wilkes as politicians because he made use of 'the mob', or rather the skilled urban workers. So being political in fact usually meant recognizing a wider 'constituency', than did the powers-that-be of the moment, whom it was felt to be necessary to consult if government was to be effectively conducted, not in the past, but in the present which was the emerging future.

So in trying to understand the many forms of government that there are, of which political rule is only one, it is particularly easy to mistake rhetoric for theory. To say that all governing involves politics is either rhetoric or muddle. Why call, for instance, a struggle for power 'politics' when it is simply a struggle for power? Two or more factions within a single party, or the clients of two great men, struggle for a monopoly of power: there may be no political or constitutional procedures whatever to contain this struggle, or powerful enough to do so, and the contestants

1. See further 'Semantic Digression' in the first Appendix.

will regard any compromise as a pure tactic or breathing-space on the way to the complete victory of one faction and the suppression of the other. Certainly there is a sense in which, even in a tyranny or totalitarian régime, politics exists up to the moment when the ruler finds himself free to act alone. While he is not free to act alone, while he is forced to consult other people whom he regards as his enemies, either through necessity or through a temporary ignorance of their real power, he is in some kind of a political relationship. But it is essentially fragile and unwanted. The ruler will not, nor may anyone else, regard it as normal, even if it could be shown that it is perennial. Politics is then regarded simply as an obstacle – and, in a sense, it is an obstacle, but it may not be an at all secure or effective one. Some politics may exist in unfree régimes, but it is unwanted – a measure to their rulers of inadequate progress towards unity; and every effort will be made to keep such disputes secret from the ruled, to prevent the formation of a ‘public’. For Palace politics is private politics, almost a contradiction in terms. The unique character of political activity lies, quite literally, in its publicity.

There is no need, then, to deny that elements of politics can exist in tyrannical and other régimes – rather the contrary. Sophocles makes this point in the *Antigone*:

CREON: Then she is not breaking the law?

HAEMON: Your fellow-citizens would deny it, to a man.

CREON: And the *polis* proposes to teach me how to rule?

HAEMON: Ah. Who is it that’s talking like a boy now?

CREON: Can any voice but mine give orders in this *polis*?

HAEMON: It is no *polis* if it takes orders from one voice.

CREON: But custom gives possession to the ruler.

HAEMON: You’d rule a desert beautifully alone.

Suppose I had made my point less strongly by rendering *polis* as simply ‘city’; we would still see a word being contested for by two different theories of government – call it ‘civil society’ or ‘political society’. Both claim that their theory is inherent in the concept – the primacy of autocracy or citizenship respectively. And which is the more realistic? The great hope for the political way of Haemon is that it is, in the long run, a more workable way of maintaining order than the one Creon chose or stuck to. Politics thus arises from a recognition of restraints. The character of this recognition may be moral, but more often it is simply

prudential, a recognition of the power of social groups and interests, a product of being unable, without more violence and risk than one can stomach, to rule alone. (An anti-political moral heroine like Antigone may arouse the city, but it is the power of the city that counts. Creon is a bad man to refuse to let her bury her rebel brother, but he is a bad ruler because he does not allow for the power of the city on this issue.) It is, of course, often possible to rule alone. But it is always highly difficult and highly dangerous. ‘To make a desert and to call it peace’ is not impossible, nor is it uncommon. But fortunately most ordinary politicians realize the incalculability of violence, and do not always need to wreck the State in learning this lesson.

Politics, then, can be simply defined as the activity by which differing interests within a given unit of rule are conciliated by giving them a share in power in proportion to their importance to the welfare and the survival of the whole community. And, to complete the formal definition, a political system is that type of government where politics proves successful in ensuring reasonable stability and order. Aristotle attempted to argue that these compromises of politics must in some sense be creative of future benefits – that each exists for a further purpose. But it is probably wiser to keep what we want to defend as simple as possible and simply to point out that no finality is implied in any act of conciliation or compromise. Each compromise has at least served some purpose, teleological or not, if at the time it is made it enables orderly government to be carried on at all. Orderly government is, after all, a civilized value compared to anarchy or arbitrary rule; and political government, other things being equal, clearly remains more acceptable to more people if they are ever given any chance or choice in the matter. Advocates of particular political doctrines – as will be seen – should beware of denying the context in which their doctrines can operate politically: their claims can never be exclusive. The political process is not tied to any particular doctrine. Genuine political doctrines, rather, are the attempt to find particular and workable solutions to this perpetual and shifty problem of conciliation.

Why cannot a good ruler do this, without all the muddle and uncertainty of politics? – it will always be asked. When the academic is asked this question by an ordinary person in urgency or innocence, he coughs and blushes, feels that he is meant to utter a platitude and tries to remember correctly Lord Acton’s words about all power corrupting. Aristotle, however, took this as a perfectly serious issue of principle. If

there was a 'perfectly just man' he should, by right and reason, be made king (just as we *should* obey any party which could prove that it knows which way the iron laws of history are unfolding for our future benefit). This for some is at least a theoretical possibility – and an interesting one. There is no similar hope for an absolute justification of political rule. The answer is a practical one; Aristotle thinks, not surprisingly, that such a man is not very likely to be found. We have no particular need to take his word for that when faced with our own modern gallery of moralistic autocrats, dictators promising the moon and various 'fathers of their people'. Many of these men are not, in any ordinary sense, bad men; but few, to put it mildly, could be described as 'perfectly good'. And to Aristotle the slightest flaw will disqualify one, will put one in need of some restraint. It was only the *perfectly* good man who would not need to listen to his fellows, who would not need to have rival powers so firmly entrenched that he has to listen. Indeed, he remarks that the man who can live outside the *polis* is either a beast or a god. God is the only possible being who does not need to consult, having no fellows; God is the only possible being whose command is identical with law and justice. Aristotle's sometime pupil, Alexander, had to try to become a god in order to solve the problem of finding the authority – and hence the power – to rule, not merely conquer, diverse types of *polis*, indeed whole empires which had never known politics at all. Plato's philosopher king, in the parable of the *Republic*, after all his intense scientific training, has to undergo a mystical experience of illumination or conversion, an utter change of quality, before he is fit to rule the ideal state. The Caesars were to find deification a practical response to the problem of authority in consolidating an empire gained by conquest. And the notion of descent from God has been typical of Oriental and of pre-Hispanic American empires (an 'imperium' or empire being kingship which aspires to govern men of different histories and cultures, and thus has need of a greater authority than can stem from custom alone). The utility of such a notion for rulers is less surprising than the willingness of many followers, even in our own times, to treat their leaders as if they were God: the declarer of the law, the one above criticism, above the need to consult, the only truly self-sufficient man.

Politics, then, to Aristotle, was something natural, not of divine origin, simply the 'master science' among men. Politics was the master-science not in the sense that it includes or explains all other 'sciences' (all skills, social activities, and group interests), but in that it gives them some

priority, some order in their rival claims on the always scarce resources of any given community. The way of establishing these priorities is by allowing the right institutions to develop by which the various 'sciences' can demonstrate their actual importance in the common task of survival. Politics are, as it were, the market place and the price mechanism of all social demands – though there is no guarantee that a just price will be struck; and there is nothing spontaneous about politics – it depends on deliberate and continuous individual activity.

Now it is often thought that for this 'master science' to function, there must be already in existence some shared idea of a 'common good', some 'consensus' or *consensus juris*. But this common good is itself the process of practical reconciliation of the interests of the various 'sciences', aggregates, or groups which compose a state; it is not some external and intangible spiritual adhesive, or some allegedly objective 'general will' or 'public interest'. These are misleading and pretentious explanations of how a community holds together; worse, they can even be justifications for the sudden destruction of some elements in the community in favour of others – there is no right to obstruct the general will, it is said. But diverse groups hold together, firstly, because they have a common interest in sheer survival and, secondly, because they practise politics – not because they agree about 'fundamentals', or some such concept too vague, too personal, or too divine ever to do the job of politics for it. The moral consensus of a free state is not something mysteriously prior to or above politics: it is the activity (the civilizing activity) of politics itself.

Now, of course, our aspirations and actions will be sadly disembodied spirits if they cannot go beyond a mere appreciation of what politics is all about. We shall all want to do something with it. Those who sit tight and drift, murmuring incantations which did not wreck us yesterday, are apt to be cast away on hostile shores. Those who urge us to remember that our only clearly demonstrable task is simply to keep the ship afloat have a rather curious view of the purpose of ships. Even if there is no single predetermined port of destination, clearly all directions are still not equally preferable. 'What politics is' does not destroy or exhaust the question 'What do we want to get out of it?' But we may not go about trying to get what we want in a political manner at all.

For politics is to be seen neither as a set of fixed principles to be realized in the near future, nor yet as a set of traditional habits to be preserved, but as an activity, a sociological activity which has the

anthropological function of preserving a community grown too complicated for either tradition alone or pure arbitrary rule to preserve it without the undue use of coercion. Burke's aphorism about the need to reform in order to preserve is a characterization of the political method of rule far more profound than that of those conservatives who hold that politics is simply a communication received from tradition.

Politics is, then, an *activity* – and this platitude must be brought to life: it is not a thing, like a natural object or a work of art, which could exist if individuals did not continue to act upon it. And it is a *complex activity*; it is not simply the grasping for an ideal, for then the ideals of others may be threatened; but it is not pure self-interest either, simply because the more realistically one construes self-interest the more one is involved in relationships with others, and because, after all, some men in most part, most men in some part, have certain standards of conduct which do not always fit circumstances too exactly. The more one is involved in relationships with others, the more conflicts of interest, or of character and circumstance, will arise. These conflicts, when personal, create the activity we call 'ethics' (or else that type of action, as arbitrary as it is irresponsible, called 'selfish'); and such conflicts, when public, create political activity (or else some type of rule in the selfish interest of a single group).

Consider another human *activity*, almost as famous as politics – something which is again neither an implementation of principles nor a matter of pure expediency: sexuality. They are both activities in which the tacit understanding of presuppositions often makes more formal propositions unnecessary; the sympathies that are a product of experience are better than the doctrines that are learnt from books. Sexuality, granted, is a more widespread activity than politics, but again the suspicion remains that the man who can live without either is either acting the beast or aping the god. Both have much the same character of necessity in essence and unpredictability in form. Both are activities which must be carried on if the community is to perpetuate itself at all, both serve this wider purpose, and yet both can become enjoyable ends in themselves for any one individual. Both activities can be repeated in an almost infinite variety of forms and different circumstances; and yet in both, the activity often becomes attached to a quite arbitrary or fortuitous individual instance, which we then proceed to treat as if that he or she, or Fatherland or Motherland, were the most perfect example ever found of the whole great enterprise. And both are activities in which the range of

possible conduct is far greater than any conceivably desirable range of actual conduct. Both are activities in which the human group maintains itself amid the utmost variations in, for the actors involved, success and failure, tragedy and joy, passion and prudence, and in those dialectic syntheses more often domestic and familiar. Politics, then, like sexuality is an activity which must be carried on; one does not create it or decide to join in – one simply becomes more and more aware that one is involved in it as part of the human condition. One can only forsake, renounce, or do without it by doing oneself (which can easily be done – and on the highest principles) unnatural injury. To renounce or destroy politics is to destroy the very thing which gives order to the pluralism and variety of civilized society, the thing which enables us to enjoy variety without suffering either anarchy or the tyranny of single truths, which become the desperate salvation from anarchy – just as misogamy and celibacy are forms of salvation for the overly passionate mind.

For political rule must be preceded by public order just as love must be preceded by social acquaintance and contained by social conventions. Politics and love are the only forms of constraint possible between free people. Rule or government preserve and often even create communities. 'Electoral representation', 'liberty', 'rights' and even, or especially – as we will see, 'democracy' are specific and subsequent achievements of a civilization which has already established order and constraint in a known territory. Those who glibly say that all government is based on consent, as if that settles anything, are being as passionately vague as those who say, for instance, that all love must be based on the absolute freedom of the partners in love. If there were absolute freedom, there could be no love; if there is absolute consent, there could be no government. But people have every right to say that all government is based on consent, and there may be no harm in their saying so, so long as the small word 'all' is taken seriously. For this shows us that the assertion can have little to do with any possible distinction between freedom and oppression – the most absolute tyrant must have his faithful dogs around him.

And equally the word 'government' must be taken seriously and recognized for what it is: the organization of a group of men in a given community for survival. Thomas Hobbes, after all, spent a great deal of time arguing the massively simple point that if one does not survive, there is no knowing whether one has made the right choice. But there are good grounds for thinking that politics is often a more effective way of

ensuring survival than the absolute rule of Leviathan. Whether Leviathan is a monarch, a dictator, a party, or a 'nation in arms', he is apt to be a pretty clumsy fellow who has few reliable ways of knowing what is really going on (representative electoral institutions, for instance, seem a fairly good way by which a government can find out what people will do and what they will stand for). But this ignorance on the part of autocracy only arises because one part of survival is a continuous process of adaptation to complicated social changes, economic and technological; this need to consult cannot eliminate the other type of survival which is military, or at least militant, the capacity to act without compromise or normal consultation in a state of emergency, whether flood, famine, pestilence, or war itself. Leviathan must be there already – he cannot be created in a hurry, but he is the guarantor of politics, neither the single leader nor the negation. His authority, like that of the two Dictators of Republican Rome, ceases with the end of the emergency. *Quis custodiet custodes?* Who, indeed, shall guard the guardians? There is, perhaps it should be simply said, no possible general answer to this question. History is rich with experiment and examples, some relatively successful, some complete failures. Only the problem is clear enough. As Lincoln put it amid the agony of Civil War: 'It has long been a grave question whether any government not too strong for the liberties of its people, can be strong enough to maintain its liberties in great emergencies.'

The guardians may, indeed, try to carry on ruling the country after the end of the emergency or, more often, by prolonging the emergency – if they can get away with it. There is no possible 'right' of revolution to check this, as John Locke tried to argue: revolution is the destruction of a particular order of rights. But, thinking in sociological rather than legal terms, Locke had an obvious point; there may come a time when people are driven to rebel by the failure of a government to govern politically at all. The state of emergency is the time of sovereignty – when all power has to go to and to come from one source, if the community is to survive at all. 'Those republics,' wrote Machiavelli, 'which in time of danger cannot resort to a dictatorship will generally be ruined when grave occasions occur.' But in normal times in some fortunate states the 'sovereignty' of governments is a very formal abstract thing compared to the reality of politics. Hobbes's *Leviathan* saw government as a perpetual state of emergency. Hobbes may have been frightened in the womb by the guns of the Spanish Armada, and he may have thought sixty years later that there was nothing more terrible than Englishmen killing

Englishmen in civil war, but that is no excuse for not studying, as Machiavelli did, the problem of how to maintain a state through time (which is a problem of spreading power), as well as how to preserve it in crisis (which is a problem of concentrating power). Surely we have less excuse. Some modern states in times of infinitely greater threat have been able to preserve politics, even to recreate it, as even in part of Germany where for a generation it was wiped out with a unique and deliberate fury. 'The secret of liberty is courage,' as Pericles declaimed. It is not a very safe world anyhow. Free men stick their necks out.

Even with luck and courage, we must not hope for too much from politics, or believe that we see it everywhere. It can exist only where it has been preceded by sovereignty or where sovereignty can be quickly called into being. So if politics, to be a stable and possible method of rule, requires some settled order, as well as tolerance and diversity, then the relationships between states themselves can be seen at their best only as a kind of quasipolitics. The will to conciliate and compromise may actually be stronger at times in international relations, simply because it is more difficult to calculate whether one is powerful enough to ignore diplomacy, than it is to know whether one can govern unpolitically in a single, settled country. But the possibility of politicizing an established order is largely absent simply because there is no established order – only a speculative and doubtful common interest in peace, or some more certain, but more abstract, moral fact of human brotherhood. The agony of international relations is the need to try to practise politics without the basic conditions for political order. The 'cold war' would not have surprised Hobbes, for he defined 'War' simply as 'time men live without common power to keep them all in awe'. International society was no society at all, but simply the state of nature – war. For 'the nature of War consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary'. And there are no assurances to the contrary, outside the realm of a particular sovereign or 'common power'. This I take to be the case of 'international politics'. One wishes it were otherwise, but it is not. Certainly diplomacy and politics have much in common: the urge to conciliate and act prudently are much alike, indeed can be, as we have said, actually stronger in diplomacy. But in diplomacy the basic fact of order is lacking. Even in times of emergency, of threat to what international order there is, there may not be a clearly superior and effective power. In a territorial society, government makes politics possible; but in an international 'society',



politics (or rather diplomacy) has to try to make any even minimal government or order possible. Political maxims and experience (even though as aspirations and not an established activity) will be some help in international problems. Clearly, for instance, a country powerful enough to threaten world peace cannot be permanently excluded from any institution which even purports to be concerned with world order. But genuine politics remains an ideal in international relations. Distinctions can in fact be drawn. The United Nations Organization is not, for instance, a political assembly because it is not a sovereign assembly. There are, strictly speaking, no politicians at the United Nations; there are only 'statesmen' and 'ambassadors' who are mere delegates of bodies regarded as sovereign. Unlike politicians, they cannot settle issues of government among themselves; they depend upon instructions. For the politician is not a delegate; the politician has power to act in conjunction with other politicians; his power is limited by acceptance of periodic elections, but is not bound by daily instructions. Where government is impossible, politics is impossible. Once again, distinctions can in fact be drawn. Everything is not politics. Struggles for power are struggles for power. And the task of diplomacy is a somewhat different task from that of politics. Certainly it can be a universal activity among states – whereas politics is not a universal activity even within states. Let us defend politics, then, as an actual activity without thinking that so-called international politics is more than, at the best, a kind of aspirant, quasi-politics.

Similarly, common usage may encourage us to talk about politics in the small group – in the trade union, in the office, and even in the family; and anthropologists find that many tribal societies are more 'political' and less 'autocratic' than once supposed. Some social scientists, perhaps being a little too clever, make quite a song and dance about 'the politics of small groups'. They hope by studying the microcosm to understand the macrocosm. But the difference is not just one of scale: a valuable qualitative distinction is lost. If all discussion, conflict, rivalry, struggle, and even conciliation is called politics, then it is forgotten, once more, that politics depends on some settled order. Small groups are subordinate parts of that order. They may help to create politics, but their internal behaviour is not political simply because their individual function is quite different from that of the state itself. And, unlike the state, they have no acknowledged legal right to use force if all else fails.

If the argument is, then, that politics is simply the activity by which government is made possible when differing interests in an area to be

governed grow powerful enough to need to be conciliated, the obvious objection will be: 'why do certain interests have to be conciliated?' And the answer is, of course, that they do not have to be. Other paths are always open. Politics is simply when they are conciliated – that solution to the problem of order which chooses conciliation rather than violence and coercion, and chooses it as an effective way by which varying interests can discover that level of compromise best suited to their common interest in survival. Politics allows various types of power within a community to find some reasonable level of mutual tolerance and support. Coercion (or secession or migration) need arise only when one group or interest feels that it has no common interest in survival with the rest. Put at its most obvious, most men would simply agree that coercion needs justification: conciliation justifies itself if it works. There may not be any absolute justification of politics. Let us be brazen and simply say, 'We prefer politics'. But such modesty had better be somewhat truculent. For it is, after all, too hard (indeed perverse) to respect the morality and wisdom of any who, when politics is possible, refuse to act politically.

Political rule, then, because it arises from the problem of diversity, and does not try to reduce all things to a single unity, necessarily creates or allows some freedom. Political freedom is a response to a need of government – it is not, as so many sentimentally think, an external impetus that somehow forces, or persuades, governments to act tolerantly. The freedom of a group will be established at the moment when its power or its existence cannot be denied and must be reckoned with in governing a country as it actually is. The American Revolution took place, for instance, not because people suddenly became super-sensitive to their rights, or – an even more unlikely theory – because they suddenly became nationalistic, but because the existing government broke down. The British Government had failed to recognize the peculiar interests and the peculiar character of the colonies which it suddenly tried to govern, with the Stamp Act of 1765, after a long century of what Burke had called 'wise and salutary neglect'. And it failed to recognize their interests because they were not represented. If they were 'virtually represented' in Parliament, this was in numbers so few compared to their real power and commercial importance that they were not taken seriously until too late, until they had been driven into revolutionary violence. Political representation is, then, a device of government before ever it can be sensibly viewed as a 'right' of the governed. If it is not made use of, a government may not be able to govern at all – unless it is willing

to practise coercion and to suffer fear to the degree that it is ignorant of the interests of the governed. Almost any system of representation, however ramshackle, incomplete, and at times even corrupt, is better than none; and is better than one that will represent only an alleged single interest of the governed. The English Reform Bills of 1832 and 1867 did not take place because old Whig gentlemen in Westminster suddenly became convinced, out of some movement in abstract ideas, that those Radical fellows were morally right, but because it became increasingly clear that government could not be carried on in an industrialized society unless the power and existence first of the entrepreneur and then of the skilled manual worker were recognized and represented.

'Politics', then, simply summarizes an activity whose history is a mixture of accident and deliberate achievement, and whose social basis is to be found only in quite complicated societies. It is not as such motivated by principle, except in a dislike of coercion which can, in turn, be simply thought to be a matter of prudence. (To debate too hotly the rival integrity of different motives which lead to the same action is academic – either political folly or the luxury of an already established political order.) Political principles are, whatever they are, principles held within politics. Now the holding of political principles or doctrines, at some level, with some degree of consistency, seems quite inevitable for any but the beast or the god – and why not? There is a touch of doctrinaire absurdity in those conservatives who would argue that all political doctrines become doctrinaire. A political doctrine is only doctrinaire, firstly, if it refuses to recognize the power and existence of other forces and ideas within an established political order; or, secondly – and more obviously – when it seeks to argue that some of these groups must be eliminated urgently, illegally, and unpolitically if other great benefits are to follow. Political doctrines must, in fact, be genuinely political (Marxism, for instance, as we shall see, is clearly and explicitly an anti-political doctrine).

A political doctrine I take to be simply a coherently related set of proposals for the conciliation of actual social demands in relation to a scarcity of resources. As such, a political doctrine should make short shrift with the old and barren academic controversy over 'fact' and 'value' – for it is necessarily both evaluative and predictive. For a political doctrine always offers some generalizations about the nature of actual, or possible, political societies, but it always also offers some grounds, however

disputable, for thinking some such possibilities desirable. By prediction I do not mean something that is necessarily measurable as in natural science, but merely something that guides our present actions according to our expectations of what will happen in the future (or, of course, of what we shall find in the past). And it is evaluative not merely because all thought is an act of selection from a potentially infinite range of relevant factors, but because we do in fact seek to justify some act of selection as in some way significant. Apolitical doctrine will state some purpose, but it will claim to be a realizable purpose; or it may state some sociological generalization. But argument, if not analysis, will always reveal some ethical significance in wanting this relationship to be true, or to remain true. A political doctrine is thus just an attempt to strike a particular harmony in an actual political situation, one harmony out of many possible different (temporary) resolutions of the basic problem of unity and diversity in a society with complex and entrenched rival social interests. This problem is the germ of politics and freedom.

Some freedom, at least, must exist wherever there is political rule. For politics is a process of discussion, and discussion demands, in the original Greek sense, dialectic. For discussion to be genuine and fruitful when something is maintained, the opposite or some contrary case must be considered or – better – maintained by someone who believes it. The hallmark of free government everywhere, it is an old but clear enough test, is whether public criticism is allowed in a manner conceivably effective – in other words, whether opposition is tolerated. Politics needs men who will act freely, but men cannot act freely without politics. Politics is a way of ruling divided societies without undue violence – and most societies are divided, though some think that that is the very trouble. We can do much worse than honour 'mere politics' so we must examine very carefully the claims of those who would do better.

## 3

## A defence of politics against democracy

There are those who would tell us that democracy is *the* true form of politics. Some would even say that it is politics, or that it is clearly and always a form of government, value, or activity superior to mere politics. But politics needs to be defended even against democracy, certainly in the sense that any clear and practical idea needs defending against something vague and imprecise. We will argue that while democracy as a social movement must exist in nearly all modern forms of political rule, yet, if taken alone and as a matter of principle, it is the destruction of politics.

Democracy is perhaps the most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs. She is everybody's mistress and yet somehow retains her magic even when a lover sees that her favours are being, in his light, illicitly shared by many another. Indeed, even amid our pain at being denied her exclusive fidelity, we are proud of her adaptability to all sorts of circumstances, to all sorts of company. How often has one heard: 'Well, at least the Communists claim to be democratic'? But the real trouble is, of course, that they do not pretend to be democratic. They are democratic. They are democratic in the sound historical sense of a majority actively willing to be ruled in some other way.

So while democracy has most often been used to mean simply 'majority rule' (which in a sizeable state can only mean majority consent), all kinds of special meanings have arisen (many to refute rather than to refine this common view). Perhaps its primary meaning to most people at the moment is no more than 'all things bright and beautiful', or some such rather general sentiment. Then others hold that, surprisingly enough, democracy 'really means' liberty, even liberalism, or even

individualism, even to defend the (democratic) individual against the (democratic) majority – this is certainly an amiable view. The late Ernest Bevin once told a Trade Union Conference that it was not democratic for a minority to continue to question the decisions of a majority – and he received the equally sincere and astonishing reply that democracy meant that he – an offending Brother – could say what he liked, when he liked, how he liked, against whom he liked, even against a majority of the T.G.W.U. The word can be used, as Tocqueville used it, as a synonym for equality, or, as Herbert Spencer used it, to mean a highly mobile free-enterprise society with great (Darwinian) differences in station and wealth. Or it may be seen as a political system which places constitutional limitations even upon a freely elected (democratic) government (the most sought-after use, but the most historically implausible and rhetorical); or, on the contrary, as the 'will of the people', or the 'General Will', triumphing over these 'artificial' restraints of constitutional institutions. To many democracy means little more than 'one man, one vote' – to which others would hopefully add: 'plus real choices'. And in broad terms embracing all of these usages, democracy can be seen as a particular recipe of institutions, or as a 'way of life', some style of politics or rule, as when it is said that the 'spirit of democracy' is more important than any institutional arrangements, or that a democracy is where people behave democratically in their speech, dress, amusements, etc.

There was a time when 'the meaning' of democracy was thought more certain, but was also thought by many, even in the most politically advanced country of the time, to be simply and only an affair of small units of rule. 'It is ascertained by history,' George Mason told the Virginia Convention of 1788 which met to ratify the proposed Federal Constitution, 'that there never was a government over a very extensive country without destroying the liberties of the people. History also, supported by the opinions of the best writers, shows us that monarchy may suit a large territory, and despotic governments over so extensive a country, but that popular governments can only exist in small territories.' Only in small territories could the people themselves see what was going on, and take part in what was going on. The democrats of the day, for this reason, argued vigorously that power should reside in the separate States of the Union. Some of the national government men launched an equally fierce polemic against popular government, against democratic tendencies, on precisely this same logic. There was a danger that the alternatives would be seen as either a strong oligarchical national union or a mere alliance of

popular governments. But the solution had already been seen. Few indeed really argued for a democratic government: the question was how strong should the democratic *element* be? Mason himself was reported saying at Philadelphia: 'he admitted that we had been too democratic, but was afraid that we should incautiously run into the opposite extreme.' The solution, an invention or recognition fundamental to modern politics, had already been stated by James Wilson of Pennsylvania: 'He was for raising the Federal pyramid to a considerable altitude, and *for that reason* wished to give it as broad a basis as possible.' Thus to achieve strong government at all, it must rest on 'the confidence of the people'. This was true, even in this pre-industrial society, because there was already 'a people', at least a large number, who had already exercised for many years, in their provincial and local assemblies, the habits, rights, and duties of political citizenship. They could not be ignored: the administration of any possible form of government depended upon them. But neither could conscript soldiers be ignored if the problem was, as Napoleon made it, to put a nation in arms against a system of dynastic professional armies. And nor could the skilled industrial workers be ignored if the survival and welfare of a country depended upon rapid industrialization – whether in the case of Victorian England or Stalinist Russia. In this context, too, is to be seen Michels' famous dictum explaining the unique strength of the modern political party: 'that every party organization represents an oligarchical power grounded upon a democratic base.'

The difficulty is that this discovery or invention is completely general. When it occurs in the context of a society which already enjoys free institutions, such as Colonial America, the result is an extension of political liberties; when it occurs in Revolutionary France or Russia, the result is very different: it can then actually strengthen centralization and autocracy. The need for democracy as an instrument of government then creates the need to manufacture popularity, to sustain mass enthusiasm, to mechanize consent, to destroy all opposition. The people are ground down in fear by constant news (half-real or wholly invented) of conspiracies against the nation and the party, and then are raised up in hope by grandiose promises of vast future (always future) benefits. Democracy, then, not merely stabilizes free régimes, it makes stronger unfree régimes, and it has made possible totalitarianism. For the first time every stratum of society is important to the ruler and is open to exploitation, whether moral or economic. Let no one think that I am

lumping together for all purposes people as different as Hitler, de Gaulle, Baldwin, and Kennedy to say that they are all figures, for good or evil, who could only have arisen in states with a democratic franchise. But let us not be too sceptical. No propaganda can manufacture opinion which does not correspond to some real need. The experience and fear of poverty and war everywhere make men willing to sacrifice some liberty (particularly if they have never known it on any regular basis) to parties and governments which promise them relief (sometime) from these two grimmest burdens of mankind. Even let us grant that some, much, or most mass support for a totalitarian régime is a 'genuine' and free surrender of freedom (as for so many in the German elections of March 1933), if only in the sense that people are led to believe that 'true freedom' is sacrifice for the cause; yet the point still remains that Wilson of Pennsylvania was right: the higher the pyramid of power is pushed, the broader must be the base. But he was right in a sense that embraces all important forms of modern rule: democracy is not necessarily related to political popular government based upon free citizenship. And even where democracy, in this sense, does coexist with free politics, as in modern America, with an intimacy almost inextricable, yet there is tension as well as harmony; the parties in this marriage are involved in famous quarrels – democracy is jealous of liberty and liberty, at times, fears democracy. Nowhere else in the world, both to the horror and honour of Americans, is the large question of the 'tyranny of public opinion' so debated. 'If ever the free institutions of America are destroyed,' Tocqueville wrote, 'that event may be attributed to the omnipotence of the majority.'

Majoritarian democracy appears in its most unsatisfactory and unpolitical form in the famous doctrine of the 'Sovereignty of the People' (which people?). The *Declarations of the Rights of Man* of 26 August 1789 stated: 'The source of all sovereignty is essentially in the nation; no body, no individual can exercise authority that does not proceed from it in plain terms.' It should be the test of whether a man values liberty effectively, of whether he is in earnest about free politics, to see if he is willing to recognize the meaninglessness of this rhetorical phrase, this sadly empty doctrine. A constitution may claim to be based on the 'sovereignty of the people', but this has never helped anyone, rulers, judges, or politicians to decide what disputed words may mean or which policies to adopt. 'The people' may be consulted by a referendum, as in France, when the constitutional framework is changed: but their

role is limited to 'yes' or 'no' on a complicated and predigested document. And the complicated decisions of actual governments, even the management of large political parties, can never be undertaken by a body as large as, or a concept as vague as, 'the people'. 'Sovereignty of the people' can mean little more than an affirmation that government should be in the interests of everyone and that it should be representative. But the representative assembly itself will almost invariably represent particular constituencies or particular interests or parties. In other words, it will represent an actual political situation, not a theoretical 'sovereign' situation in which all power is supposed to stem from an undivided and indivisible 'people'. Such an affirmation should be made – though it might be better made in a form that seems to exclude the representation of the people by a single party: 'the right (need?) of the people to choose the government they want', or some such. But no such affirmation solves any practical difficulty of government – whether of political governments, totalitarian governments, or forms more ancient. Indeed, the doctrine, if taken too seriously, is an actual step towards totalitarianism. For, quite simply, it allows no refuge and no contradiction, no private apathy even. 'A patriot,' said Robespierre, 'supports the Republic *en masse*, he who fights about details is a traitor. Everything which is not respect for the people and you – the Convention – is a crime.' This is but another form of the cruel chimera, already observed, of supplanting political prudence and moderation by the reign of 'society as a whole', the subsuming of the political by the ideological. The violence and the terror needed to produce unanimity are no more rendered humane by the plea of democracy than they are by the pleas of racial purity or economic equality. 'The terror,' continued Robespierre, 'is nothing but justice, swift, stern, and unrelenting, it is thus an emanation of virtue; it is less a particular principle than a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to the pressing needs of the country.'

Even 'fraternity' can be as deceitful as 'virtue' as a purifying principle for mere democracy. As the apostate Nazi Rauschning argued in his *Revolution of Nihilism*, people at first did not march in the endless parades and torch-light processions because they were full of fraternity; they marched because marching gave them the feeling of fraternity. Or as the American longshoreman Eric Hoffer has said: 'Collective unity is not the result of the brotherly love of the faithful for each other. The loyalty of the true believer is to the whole – the church, the party, the nation, not to

his fellow true believer. True loyalty between individuals is possible only in a loose and relatively free society.'<sup>1</sup>

Here it is as well to digress and say that not merely the concept of 'sovereignty of the people' is un- or even anti-political, but also the whole doctrine of sovereignty. The concept can, of course, mean many things. I am considering the claim of Thomas Hobbes and the English positivist lawyers, that there must be absolute power of final decision in every organized society in some clearly recognized and effective institution. This doctrine of sovereignty can, indeed, historically and theoretically be given a meaning only as a contradiction to normal political conditions even if, at times, a necessary contradiction. Sovereignty is the realm of emergency, the potentiality of defence to maintain order at all in face of clear and present danger, the justification of emergency powers by which all régimes, including political régimes, including democratic régimes in any possible sense, must find a capacity for decisive, centralized, and unquestioned (and hence nonpolitical) action – if a state is, in desperate times, to survive at all. Politics, as Voltaire said of liberty, has no relevance to a city in a state of siege. The practical difficulties of deciding when a state of emergency exists are always great – but they are practical and procedural difficulties: they do not destroy the real distinction between the time of politics and the time of sovereignty. If sovereignty is the father of politics, then once we are grown up enough to look after ourselves, we should only fly to him when in very great distress. For there are those in free régimes who harp so much on these 'toughminded' or 'realistic' themes of power and sovereignty, on every possible occasion, often with a sadly transparent masochistic relish, that they are guilty of turning the subtle play of political life into a crude melodrama. Man cannot live by fear alone – or he will fear to live. But equally guilty are those wishful tender souls who would repress any and all mention of sovereign power, except to deny its existence; this is neither political courage nor principle, but a prudishness which bowdlerizes a plain human tale. Accident as well as design, as Machiavelli reminds us, can create conditions of emergency. Yet it is only in totalitarian régimes that a continuous state of emergency is maintained, a sense of permanent revolution, a belief that there is a continual desperate struggle against traitors within and aggressors

1. *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York 1951) – a remarkable and neglected book.

without, which is often maintained quite artificially, though seemingly as a device of government essential to such régimes.

The democratic doctrine of the sovereignty of the people threatens, then, the essential perception that all known advanced societies are inherently pluralistic and diverse, which is the seed and the root of politics. Few have understood more clearly than Alexis de Tocqueville the importance of group loyalties intermediate between 'society' and the State. He was the first to see clearly why 'the species of oppression by which democratic nations are menaced is unlike anything that ever before existed in the world ... I seek in vain for an expression that will accurately convey the whole of the idea I have formed of it; the old words *despotism* and *tyranny* are inappropriate: the thing itself is new ...'<sup>1</sup> Thus he wrote even in his *Democracy in America* in which he sought to show that there were diversifying institutions in American society which could mitigate the danger of a 'tyranny of the majority'. In his *L'ancien Régime et la Révolution* he christens this new thing 'Democratic Despotism' and characterizes it thus: 'No gradations in society, no distinctions of classes, no fixed ranks – a people composed of individuals nearly alike and entirely equal – this confused mass being recognized as the only legitimate sovereign, but carefully deprived of all the faculties which could enable it either to direct or even to superintend its own government. Above this mass, a single officer, charged to do everything in its name without consulting it. To control this officer, public opinion, deprived of its organs; to arrest him, revolutions, but no laws. In principle a subordinate agent; in fact, a master.'<sup>2</sup>

That the word 'democratic' can now be used to describe what earlier writers would have termed 'mixed-government' (which is a clearer interpretive translation of Aristotle's *politeia* than simply 'polity'), is a dangerous loss to political understanding. The older tradition of political theory in using the term 'democracy' had exemplified Aristotle's tripartite usage: democracy as, intellectually, the doctrine of those who believe that because men are equal in some things, they should be equal in all; constitutionally, the rule of the majority; sociologically, the rule of the poor. Democracy he saw as a necessary element in polity or mixed

1. Phillips Bradley's edition of the *Democracy in America* (New York 1948), Vol. II, p. 318.

2. *Society in France Before the Revolution of 1789*, translated by Henry Reeve (London 1888), p. 140.

government, but alone it was destructive of the political community, attempting the impossible feat of the direct rule of all – which in fact meant the unrestrained power of those who were trusted by most. Democracies were particularly prone to fall by 'the insolence of demagogues' into tyrannies. Modern experience seems to bear out Aristotle's precise description of democracy rather than that of those who would have it stand for 'all things bright and beautiful'.

The Western World, for all its good fortune in having a political tradition, has had the disadvantage that what should have been the great modern consolidation of politics – the spread of the idea of liberty from an aristocracy to the common people – took place in an age when relics of Feudalism associated all intermediate political and social groups between the individual and the State with privilege unredeemed by function. The aim of the friends of liberty became too often merely to sweep away such institutions so as to leave revealed the undoubted majestic and spontaneous harmony of a sovereign people and a sovereign State. There is no incident more significant for genuine political thought than when John Stuart Mill confesses in his *Autobiography* that reviewing Tocqueville led 'my political ideal from pure democracy' into considering 'the necessary protection against its degenerating into the only despotism of which, in the modern world, there is real danger – the absolute rule of the head of the executive over a congregation of isolated individuals, all equals but all slaves'. Indeed much of Mill's great essay *On Liberty* would be more convincing, if less dramatic, if recast on narrower grounds as simply a defence of politics itself. Liberty, in Mill's sense, is a political achievement – it is, both logically and historically, a product of politics, not a prerequisite. Democracy, in modern conditions, is a necessity of strong government. Government must be prior to politics, but democracy may or may not be political. There is both totalitarian democracy and political democracy.

Now if ever there was a natural unanimity of opinion in any society on all great issues, politics would, indeed, be unnecessary. But in societies which claim to be pure democracies, and full of such pure democrats that no one wishes to speak against the government – for all agree with its policies, it is more likely that politics has been forbidden *in order* to try to reach such a unanimity rather than that it has withered away because there is unanimity already. The eighteenth-century democrats commonly called a man a 'pure and incorruptible democrat' (as, for instance, John Wilkes was toasted in many a tavern) if he was thought (incredibly

enough) to have no particular interests, only the general interest at heart. Particular interests were always a corruption of the pure common interest or the general will. But it is notorious what Rousseau thought should be done to the earnest seeker who, look into his heart as he will, purify himself and strip himself of particular prejudices and loves as he must, still does not agree with the general will: he must be 'forced to be free'. There are, of course, many things a man may be as a consequence of force – he may be less dangerous, he may be made safe despite himself, less hungry despite himself, perhaps even, in some sense, be made 'better', certainly be made ready and available for a moral re-education; but whatever he is, it is nonsense to say that he is free. It is better to admit that for democratic (or any other governmental) purposes those in power may on occasion have to take away people's freedom – far better than to claim that this taking away is freedom. Otherwise, we lose the power to understand what is right even when we cannot act. And if we lose that, then the defeat is perpetual.

The identification of democracy and freedom can, of course, be attempted in the other direction. Just as liberty can get buried by democracy, democracy can get buried in liberty. Democracy, some will tell us, means a liberal constitutional régime in which the rights of the individual are preserved even against a majority. But calling such a régime democratic, even though it will almost certainly have a strong democratic element in it, is not a help to understanding anything – except how great is the prestige of the word. For it to make historical or sociological sense, to describe an actual state of affairs, it would have to be argued that liberty can exist only in a democracy.

But, as Burke reminded us, liberty in politics can mean only 'liberties'. An ounce of law is worth a ton of rhetoric if a court will recognize certain liberties and order their preservation against the State itself. And certainly all sorts of liberties, highly important to politics, can become established, preserved, and protected in societies which are by no stretch of the imagination 'democratic'. By the 1770s in England certain liberties already existed which would seem fundamental to stable political régimes: the subject was free from arbitrary arrest; he was tried by jury, not by royal judge alone, and juries frequently flew in the face of the law in their dislike of political prosecutions; he was free to criticize the government from a platform or in print; he could report Parliamentary debates, and he could travel without passports or special permission – yet the franchise was corrupt, inequitable, and inadequate. The franchise

needed to be made more democratic before the government could adequately represent the changing real interests and real power of the governed; but there is absolutely no doubt – here indeed is a platitude which needs to be taken seriously – that liberty preceded democracy and lived a life of its own. It is sadly obvious that there was more liberty in the England of the 1760s than in the People's Democracies of the 1960s – though there may have been, at times, more hunger. But the point is simply that not being hungry is not liberty: it is a different value. Other values may be deemed superior. There even may be, amid all the turbulence, injustice, and insult, more liberty of the subject in the closing stages of a Colonial régime than amid the intolerant enthusiasm for unity of a new national government. Most people will have little doubt which is to be preferred, and even sceptics will have little doubt which alone is possible. G. K. Chesterton once said of the milder fanaticisms of temperance reformers: 'Better England free than England sober'. And anyone who doubts that 'self-government is better than good government' is indeed a reactionary Canute scolding the tides of history. But unless the intellectual distinction is drawn between personal liberty and national self-determination, whatever the necessities of the moment, new states may never return to or achieve a political tradition – and the alternative is ever greater violence and propaganda to maintain the artificial unanimity once the common enemy has gone. Such states may, then, justly be called democratic, but it is, at the least, confusing to call them free. But, equally, if we call all free states democratic, we may obscure the need for them to become more democratic if they are to survive in changing circumstances.

Take the case of Great Britain. 'Democracy', to the generation before 1914, had a much more precise meaning than now. People took it to mean, amid the overtones of simple majority rule, such things as: an increased working-class representation in Parliament; an increase in the power of Trade Unions; more investigation of and more publicity about all aspects of public administration; increased educational opportunity; a decrease in the power of the House of Lords and of the landed interest. And it was beginning to show overtones of a non-doctrinaire kind of socialism, as the rising Labour Party seemed to exemplify democratic institutions and to espouse democratic habits and causes, just at the moment when the Liberals became more and more split between their radicalism and their whiggery. But the word, increasingly respectable though it was, was never used to characterize English life in general or

English politics in particular. There were friends and foes of democracy, but no one in their right mind in 1913 would have called Britain, as it was, a democracy. It simply was not. It was a free society, it had a system of representative government in which some popular reforms were proving increasingly possible, but it was not democratic. Only with the First World War did it learn that it was fighting – being conscripted, indeed – to *preserve* democracy. The rhetoric of Lloyd George, the genial cynicism of Churchill and Beaverbrook, and the idealism of Woodrow Wilson, all contrived to rob the term of any precise meaning whatever. The word was established for the sovereign purposes of war at the cost of stripping it of any real political meaning. Sacrifices could be demanded in the name of democracy which could not be expected for mere patriotism for the social order as it was. Tories who should have known better, and radicals who did know better but who were hoping for better, conspired to make Britain (verbally) democratic. And it has remained (verbally) democratic ever since.<sup>1</sup>

Or take the case of the United States. Here indeed must be an uncontested example of a political system which can be clearly, and by popular usage must be, characterized as democratic. But even here it is necessary to remind oneself that the word came to be applied very late to the system as a whole, rather than to those parts of it which were uniquely and from the beginning democratic – the franchise (with the great Negro exception) and what was, certainly by comparison with any other country, the broad equality of social conditions. Not until this century have all Americans, except political eccentrics, called American government unequivocally a democracy. The old Aristotelian distinction, well understood by the Founding Fathers, between democracy as a force on its own and democracy as one element in mixed-government, long survived the attacks of democratic rhetoric. And the situation was complicated by Party names which had little to do with the case at hand. The Democratic Party was, after all, throughout most of the nineteenth century the anti-national party. The words ‘Republic’ and ‘Republican’

1. Yet there was always some mordant scepticism. Even in the Second World War, British soldiers sang a song which ended:

And as the kicks get harder  
The poor private, you can see,  
Gets kicked to bloody hell  
To save de-moc-ra-cy.

were more often used in those times (which is why ‘Republican’ was seized to name a new party). The word had not yet lost its Roman overtones of simplicity, civic virtue, and even small proprietorship as the typical estate of a true citizen. The word ‘Republic’, for all its growing vagueness, avoided the majoritarian overtones of ‘democracy’. Perhaps only when the original democratic social condition of America became called into question did the word become adapted to stand for the whole instead of some of the vital parts. Andrew Carnegie’s *Triumphant Democracy* of 1886 may well mark this polemical turning point. When democratic forces in America were beginning to protest at some of the effects of capitalism, Carnegie wrote a triumphant hymn of praise to the material success of the Republic which systematically identified capitalism and democracy. They were not different forces. They were the same thing! Democracy meant equality of opportunity, not equality of condition: democracy enabled the most able, by a process of natural selection, ‘the survival of the fittest’ and all that, to rise to the top direction of material affairs. And, to Carnegie, it was part of the genius of American life that the best talents were drawn into business and not, as in England, into the wasteful channels of politics. Such men saw politics as ‘mere politics’: the unproductive pastime of an aristocratic oligarchy. But, in contrast, James Bryce’s great work on American politics, published two years later, took deliberate refuge in the almost meaningless title, *The American Commonwealth*. Bryce in the Preface explicitly criticized Tocqueville for making his *Democracy in America* the account of an ‘idea’ rather than of an actual system of government. But by 1949, when Harold Laski tried to surpass both Tocqueville and Bryce, it was inevitable that the title would be *The American Democracy*.

Whatever the name, however, the dispute continues between those Americans who regard their system as too democratic to provide effective government – if not in the domestic field, at least in the great jungle of foreign affairs – and those who regard it as not democratic enough – popular democracy is still frustrated by the checks and balances of the Constitution, the division of powers, particularly the Senate, on occasion the Supreme Court. American writers can still be found in abundance who are simply naïve democrats. The business of government to them is simply to find out the wishes of the people. ‘Democracy,’ as Justice Holmes said sarcastically, ‘is what the crowd wants.’ ‘Populist’ direct democracy is one of the great animating myths of American politics for both left and right. Nearly half the States of the American Union, for



instance, have provision in their constitutions for popular initiative, referendum, and recall. They forget that the first business of government is to govern – which may at times, even in America, call for the deliberate endurance of unpopularity. ‘The politician,’ said Churchill at his last Washington Press Conference, at a time when President Eisenhower was trying not to make up his mind what to do about the late Senator McCarthy, ‘who cannot stand unpopularity is not worth his salt.’ They forget that issues fit for a plebiscite, or the questions put into public opinion polls, are inherently predigested. Such issues and questions are frequently artificial in the sense that there may not be a public opinion on any question, or that the answers to such questions have to be seen in the context of all other questions, some of which may be mutually exclusive, all of which have to be weighed against each other by someone – so long as we live in a world in which life is short and resources are limited. Government alone can establish priorities of real social effort and actual policies. Democracy can only advise and consent, and then only in an indirect and spasmodic manner. Representatives must be politicians: if they all simply represent their immediate constituents and did not mediate, compromise, and occasionally think of the interests of government, they might survive, but it is unlikely that the Republic would.

More and more, however, American writers will argue just these things themselves: that ‘government by the people’ is misleading because impossible, or can only be one element in government and politics. But too often they then say that therefore ‘democracy’ must be made to mean strong and effective government, even a responsible two-party system (a very specific piece of business indeed), checks and balances, the liberty of the subject even against public opinion, etc. The lack of history for this generous usage need not worry us too much: meanings change both as levers and as mirrors of reality. But it hides the primacy of political values. It does lead to false expectations about other systems which also call themselves democratic. It may lead people to expect too much – and the disillusionment of unreal ideals is an occupational hazard of free politics. For instance, Ghana, of which we (good Pharisees) hoped so much (and new candidates for such comparisons arise almost monthly), is seen to be plainly not ‘democratic’. It is rapidly becoming what former ages would have called a ‘benevolent despotism’. Much of the opposition is in prison and so not very effective. Former colonial régimes and underdeveloped areas claim to be democratic and then we learn that they are not.

American-wise, democracies at all. We lose heart and we wonder whether there is any hope for liberty. But the real worry is not that Ghana is not a democracy, which it plainly is not, but that with the intolerance of the government to opposition even as criticism, it may not even be political. And however popular or democratic the régime, if political opposition (however unpopular) is not allowed, the State may be free but its inhabitants will remain servile. One must hope for politics at all before one can hope for democracy in the American liberal sense. Equally, the liberal use of the concept democracy can lead people to expect too little. If some democratic institutions may seem overdeveloped in America, they can seem underdeveloped in Britain. Britain does not need democratic reforms because she is supposed to be democratic already. But one does not need to be a Jacobin or an American to think that English life could endure considerably more democracy of manners and methods without endangering political order. Indeed, the British constraint and conceit of class might seem, in American eyes, to be the very factor limiting national energy and more open to remedy by a whiff of democratic spirit than by the present tortuous economic programmes of any of the political parties. And it is indeed a platitude to say that if the American executive is too much subject to democratic control, yet in Britain there is too little Parliamentary or popular control of the executive. Strong government needs strong opposition if it is to be free and effective government.

So if democracy is best understood as one element in free government, not as a characteristic of the whole system, then it will always be possible to argue that *more* or *less* democratic institutions or democratic spirit is needed in any particular circumstance. Once again, Aristotle more clearly defined the relationship between politics and democracy than the usually over-complicated, or purely ideological, writings of modern authors. The best form of government was to him political rule – ‘polity’ or mixed-government. Such a government combined the aristocratic principle and the democratic; good government is a matter of experience, skill, and knowledge – not just opinion, but is subject to the consent of the governed. If there is no democratic element, a state will be oligarchic or despotic; if democracy alone prevails, the result is anarchy – the opportunity of demagogues to become despots. Democracy, then, is to be appreciated not as a principle of government on its own, but as a political principle, or an element within politics. As an intellectual principle, the belief that because men are equal in some things they are

equal in all, it can be disastrous to the skill and judgement needed to preserve any order at all, let alone the special difficulties of a conciliatory political order.

Perhaps the worst danger from the democratic dogmas in free régimes can occur, as in the United States, not in the formal political institutions at all, but in the educational system. The idea is still deeply rooted in the American Public High School that it is 'undemocratic' (and therefore bad) to teach children of unequal ability unequally. This idea is now being challenged, spontaneously and fiercely, from many different quarters, not through any reactionary love of teaching a 'subject' rather than a 'child', as the cant has it, but largely on political grounds of worry that the schools are not furnishing people of sufficient talent and abilities to serve and maintain the national life. This argument has its own dangers. But at least it is combating a situation where many believe (always with complete sincerity) that the schools have the task of teaching not merely 'citizenship' (which has been debatable), but 'democracy' in a very specific form. This is an obvious, but now quite unnecessary, hangover from the days of mass immigration. 'A legitimate aim of education,' a Professor of Political Science writes, 'is to seek to promote the major values of a democratic society and to reduce the number of moral mavericks who do not share the democratic preferences.'<sup>1</sup> Politics will be richer in the United States when more people come to insist that it is a legitimate aim of education to educate, not indoctrinate. Within a free system there is a place both for democracy and authority. In the formal political institutions one assumes that democracy will normally outweigh but not exclude authority; but perhaps in education the converse should be the case. Political democracy does not imply intellectual democracy; intellectual democracy can make political democracy all but unworkable. Democracy, once again, cannot be the whole; it can only be a part in whatever activity it touches.

It comes to this very simply. That no government or authority can govern and survive unless it is based on consent – be it only the consent of the praetorian guard or the officer corps. But grant the social circumstances of modern industrial states, or of states wishing to industrialize, then the technical skills of manual workers become necessary for economic survival, to say nothing of progress. To govern

such societies any government must govern to the general welfare. This means that it either has to enforce some single idea of what that general welfare is, or it has to find out what people think it is – and reconcile the divergent results as well as possible. And how does one find out what people think except by giving them real choices to discuss and real freedom to criticize and choose their government?

Democracy, then, if we give the word the fairest meaning we may want to give it – if we value liberty, free choice, discussion, opposition, popular government, all of these things together – is still but one form of politics, not something to be hoped for at every stage of a country's development or in every circumstance. Politics is often settling for less than what we want, because we also want to live without violence or perpetual fear of violence from other people who want other things. But democracy, in its clearest historical and sociological sense, is simply a characteristic of modern governments both free and unfree. If industrial societies need governments of unparalleled strength, activity, and energy, they must be based upon active consent.

So while democracy can be compatible with politics, indeed politics can now scarcely hope to exist without it, yet politics does need defending on many occasions against the exclusive claims of many concepts of democracy which can lead to either the despotism of People's Democracies or the anarchy of the Congo. But perhaps it needs most of all that most unpopular of defences: historical analysis applied against the vagueness of popular rhetoric. Democracy is one element in politics; if it seeks to be everything, it destroys politics, turning 'harmony into mere unison', reducing 'a theme to a single beat'.

1. Harold Lasswell, *The World Revolution of Our Times* (Stanford 1951), p. 31.

None of them has a permanent tendency towards that real hatred of politics which characterizes ideological thought and totalitarian doctrines. They seek to persuade or exclude opposition, but not to destroy it. They are normally content to work in a political system with other parties or doctrines pulling and pushing them, perhaps only a little but still some, this way and that. A political system may be sufficiently well grounded in history, habit, and belief to withstand much unconsciously unpolitical or even anti-political behaviour. (A statesman may even think that he is acting according to some ideological principles; but if he is subject to political pressures, his actual behaviour may be more reasonable than his rhetoric.) Political doctrines are products of time and circumstances; there are occasions when elements of them all seem needed. But this does not make it sensible to try to synthesize them into some perfect political packet; for they do represent different interests and their common acceptance of political methods does not in the least imply agreement on anything more fundamental than that. This, perhaps, is our whole argument.

## 7

### In praise of politics

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And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.

*St Paul*

In the prison of his days

Teach the free man how to praise.

*From W. H. Auden, In Memory of W. B. Yeats*

Politics deserves much praise. Politics is a preoccupation of free men, and its existence is a test of freedom. The praise of free men is worth having, for it is the only praise which is free from either servility or condescension. Politics deserves praising as – in Aristotle’s words – ‘the master-science’, not excusing as a necessary evil; for it is the only ‘science’ or social activity which aims at the good of all other ‘sciences’ or activities, destroying none, cultivating all, so far as they themselves allow. Politics, then, is civilizing. It rescues mankind from the morbid dilemmas in which the state is always seen as a ship threatened by a hostile environment of cruel seas, and enables us, instead, to see the state as a city settled on the firm and fertile ground of mother earth. It can offer us no guarantees against storms encroaching from the sea, but it can offer us something worth defending in times of emergency and amid threats of disaster.

Politics is conservative – it preserves the minimum benefits of established order; politics is liberal – it is compounded of particular liberties and it requires tolerance; politics is socialist – it provides conditions for deliberate social change by which groups can come to feel

that they have an equitable stake in the prosperity and survival of the community. The stress will vary with time, place, circumstance, and even with the moods of men; but all of these elements must be present in some part. Out of their dialogue, progress is possible. Politics does not just hold the fort; it creates a thriving and polyglot community outside the castle walls.

Politics, then, is a way of ruling in divided societies without undue violence. This is both to assert, historically, that there are some societies at least which contain a variety of different interests and differing moral viewpoints; and to assert, ethically, that conciliation is at least to be preferred to coercion among normal people. But let us claim more than these minimum grounds: that most technologically advanced societies are divided societies, are pluralistic and not monolithic; and that peaceful rule is intrinsically better than violent rule, that political ethics are not some inferior type of ethical activity, but are a level of ethical life fully self-contained and fully justifiable. Politics is not just a necessary evil; it is a realistic good.

Political activity is a type of moral activity; it is free activity, and it is inventive, flexible, enjoyable, and human; it can create some sense of community and yet it is not, for instance, a slave to nationalism; it does not claim to settle every problem or to make every sad heart glad, but it can help some way in nearly everything and, where it is strong, it can prevent the vast cruelties and deceits of ideological rule. If its actual methods are often rough and imperfect, the result is always preferable to autocratic or to totalitarian rule – granted one thing alone, that sufficient order is created or preserved by politics for the state to survive at all. Praise, in politics as in love, beyond the early days of idealization, can only hearten if it paints a picture plausible enough to be lived with. It must be asked, when is politics possible at all? It is possible when there are advanced or complicated societies, societies with some diversity of technical skills and which are not dependent for their prosperity or survival on a single skill, a single crop, or a single resource. Not all societies (or people) are in this position. Some primitive societies may be so near the margin of survival, so dependent on constant toil and on the precarious success of harvests or trade in a single commodity, that they never amass any capital, hence no leisure, no margin for tolerance, and hence no possibility of political culture. Diversity of interests, which creates a speculative recognition of alternatives, may simply not exist, or if so, be a luxury endangering sheer physical survival. Advanced states in

times of war or emergency revert to this condition; if everything depends on the military, then everything is subordinated to military considerations. But, of course, a people who have known politics will be more reluctant to accept this condition on trust; they will take some chances with survival in order to preserve liberty.

Diversity of resources and interests is itself an education. Men living in such societies must appreciate, to some degree, alternative courses of action – even if just as speculative possibilities. There is then not just a technique of doing some one thing, but an abstract knowledge of how other things are done. Some division of labour exists and this, of itself, creates attempts at seeing their relationships: abstract knowledge. The Greek *polis* was perhaps the first circumstance in which a division of labour went together with a division of interests (or speculative alternatives) to a sufficient degree to make politics a plausible response to the problem of ruling such a society. Politics is, as it were, an interaction between the mutual dependence of the whole and some sense of independence of the parts. Obviously the small size of these cities helped to make politics possible. The idea and the habit of politics stood little chance of administrative survival in an Empire as large as Rome, when so many parts of the Empire were entirely dependent on their immediate crops and on the military power of the centre. In an Empire politics must expand from the Mother City, or perish under the burden of the struggle for sheer survival and the habits of autocratic rule which it is forced to create in the true citizens. Part of the price of the Commonwealth's remaining a British Empire would almost certainly have been autocracy in Britain itself – as France came at least so near in the attempt to keep Algeria. And the Romans did not even have the fortunate necessity of having to negotiate politically with other independent powers – the quasi-politics of international relations.

Thus diversity of resources and interests is itself the education which is necessary for politics. There is no *a priori* level of education – even literacy or any such test – which can be laid down as necessary for politics. The level of education will be relative to the level of technological development. The unique modern problem arises when advanced, Western industrial technology is suddenly introduced into a hitherto colonial or underdeveloped area. Then there will almost inevitably be a time lag, at least, between a country's ability to handle these particular skills itself and its ability to develop or recognize a speculative sense, even, of the alternative uses to which these skills and this capital can be

put. The simultaneous introduction of Western ideas, including that of free politics itself, may help; this is also a resource and a skill. But politics has to strive against an initial sense that the introduction of scientific and industrial technology is one unified and overwhelming good. Industrialism becomes at first a comprehensive slogan. The fact of new machines is confused with the doctrine of 'technology': that technology solves everything and that all problems are technological. Perhaps only time can show that not merely are real choices of policy called for at every stage of industrialization, but that new and real differences of interests are created.

Here is, of course, the great hope of many that freedom will grow even in the Soviet Union, even in China. The complexity of industrial society, it is argued, will force genuine negotiation first between the party and the managers, and then with the scientists and perhaps even the skilled workers. At least the managers and the scientists, it is argued, because of their function cannot be prevented from meeting together, from developing corporate interests divergent from those of the party and the party ideology. This is a reasonable hope, but it is only a hope. Certain conditions of the modern age work against it. There is the power of bureaucracy. One of the great conditions for, and achievements of, the process of state consolidation and centralization in the whole modern period has been the growth of centralized, skilled bureaucracies. The idea of a rational bureaucracy, of skill, merit, and consistency, is essential to all modern states. Like democracy, as we have seen, bureaucracy is a force that strengthens any state – political, autocratic, and totalitarian alike. The bureaucracy, like the priesthood of medieval Christendom, can become more than an intermediary between the scientists, the managers, the workers, and the seat of power; it can become a conservative power on its own acting in the name of whoever controls the state at the time when these great changes begin. This ambivalent factor of bureaucracy, necessary to all states, strengthening free and unfree alike, has then to be seen in the context of a second obstacle to the hope that industrialization by itself creates freedom.

There is also, as part of industrialization, as we have been at sad pains to insist, a genuine revulsion from, hatred of, and theoretical attack upon, politics. Politics itself is attacked for dividing communities, for being inefficient, for being inconclusive and – with a completely false but powerful idea of science – for being anti-scientific. Political thinking is replaced by ideological thinking. The force of abstract ideas is not to be

ignored – though it is the academic fashion of today to do so. So if we ask when is political rule possible, we must also add – far from formally – that it is possible only when at least some powerful forces in a society want it and value it. And it follows that politics is not possible when most people do not want it. The element of will is not independent of circumstances, but it may often and has often weighed the scales one way or the other. Certainly, there is little doubt at the moment which of the two great fruits of Western civilization – politics and technology – is in greater demand in the non-Western world. If Western history demonstrates that they did emerge together, this is no guarantee that in their migration they will always be received together.

Skilled manpower is itself a crucial factor for the possibility of politics in underdeveloped areas. The demand on educational resources, on the very small skilled talent available at all, for scientists, doctors, and engineers, may make the vocation of politics seem either an unjustifiable luxury, or else seem a refuge for not merely the second-rate, who anyway are the bulk of steady representative figures in free societies, but for the utterly third-rate. In this dilemma it is worth noticing that the lawyer often holds a key position. In Nigeria, for instance, and in most of the present and former British colonial dependencies, the profession of law is highly esteemed and sought after. It was almost the only avenue of social advance for the educated, and the most likely springboard for politics. The supply of lawyers is already greater than the demand, at the moment, for strictly legal work. This can mean that political values are kept alive – when politics becomes the arena of the talented underemployed. But, of course, it can also mean that if political opposition has been silenced out of principles or alleged necessity, the supply of skill for a despotic bureaucracy is ensured. Hope and fear spring, once again, from precisely the same factors.<sup>1</sup> The decision depends, once again – in large part at least, on a conscious affection for politics or disaffection from it.

1. Perhaps it is not merely pride which has made several 'national leaders' recently cancel the scholarships of students studying abroad, who are reported, amid the heady freedom of London or New York, to have expressed even slight doubt that their leader has all the virtues of, shall we say, Mohammed and Lenin combined. Such men depend on the skills and the support of such youths. One knows the cost and the risk, but such youths may be in a stronger position than they think – if they are in earnest with their scepticism.

Closely related to this decision is what some writers mean by praising 'political ethics' or 'constitutional ethics' as a condition of free societies: simply that people must agree to, or accept, the solution of social problems by political and legal means. Problems can always be attacked by autocratic means. There was a time, as we have seen, when liberals had a profound distrust of party and faction. James Madison argued in the great Tenth Paper of *The Federalist* (one of the masterpieces of political literature) that factions were, indeed, selfish and divisive. But he argued that they were inevitable (he said 'natural') and could be eliminated (which they could be) only at the cost of eliminating liberty; they could and should be restrained, but not destroyed. Indeed, as the state has grown larger and more complex, we go beyond this and say that such organized factions – better still, parties as things which are capable of forming responsible governments – are essential to free politics in the modern state. They should pursue their 'selfish' ends, for they are devices, whatever their doctrines or lack of doctrine, by which an electorate may hold a government responsible for its actions; and they are gauges by which a government may learn what it can safely and properly do. But they must be forced to pursue their aims in a way which does not endanger public order and their aims should be limited, if they are to be worthy of support by free men, to things which can be done without destroying politics. However convinced men are of the rightness of their party, they must compromise its claims to the needs of some electoral and legal framework, at least so far that the only way of removing it from power does not have to become revolution. Political compromises are the price that has to be paid for liberty. Let us not delude ourselves that we are not paying a price; but let us summon reasons to think that it is normally worth paying.

Political power is power in the subjunctive mood. Policy must be like a hypothesis in science. Its advocates will commit themselves to its truth, but only in a manner in which they can conceive of and accept its possible refutation. Politics, like science, must be praised for being open-minded, both inventive and sceptical. One is not acting politically if one pursues as part of a policy devices intended to ensure for certain that it can never be overthrown. This condition embraces both the well-meaning but futile attempts of constitution makers to put something permanently above politics (though it may be part of politics to make the

gesture), and the autocratic attempt to forbid or destroy opposition. The true activity of scientists, not the myth of 'scientism', should give some comfort – if only by analogy – to politicians. When anything is deemed to be fixedly true by virtue of the authority who pronounces it, this thing can be neither politics nor science. Everything has to be put to the test of experience – though some men are better at framing hypotheses or policies than others. If all boats are burnt, if assertions are made categorically, as in a totalitarian party, then the pace of the advance can only be intensified and made desperate. Politics is to be praised, like science, for always retaining a line of retreat.

For independent positions in society to survive there must be some institutional framework. And this framework can be thought of as guaranteeing these independencies. There is a long tradition of Western political thought which sees the essence of freedom as the cultivation of constitutional guarantees. The laws or customs which define the framework of government and representation must be put on some different footing to ordinary customs or acts of legislation. There must be, it is said, some fundamental law, something entrenched against the momentary caprice of government or electorate – something at least made more difficult to change than ordinary laws. Some writers, then, properly aware of the difficulties and dangers of calling free régimes 'democratic', call them 'constitutional-democracies' and speak of 'constitutionalism' as the key to free politics. This view deserves praise – but a qualified praise.

Let us simply realize that this is desirable but impossible to ensure. Some political societies survive without such a strengthening of their foundations. Constitutionalism is itself a doctrine of politics. Like any doctrine of politics it says that something is the case and that something *should* be. It says that political government is limited government: that governments cannot do everything we or they may want. This is true. But it also says that we should guarantee that they should not try – and this is impossible. There are no guarantees in politics. Guarantees may have to be offered as part of politics. But while guarantees stop short of giving independence to a former sub-group or dependency, they remain themselves things subject to change, negotiation, and, even in the most rigid-seeming written Constitution, interpretation. Constitutionalism is vitally important to politics. It is one of the great themes of Western thought and a fruitful concept in that it leads us always to see abstract

ideas as needing institutional expression, and to see existing institutions as existing for some purpose. But the praise of politics as constitutionalism needs to be realistic; it needs to be seen that it is the belief itself in fundamental or constitutional law which gives this law force. No law can survive the withering of the belief. No law can survive the growth of new needs and demands; if the fundamental law is not in fact flexible, it can hinder more than help free politics. Constitutions are themselves political devices. They may be viewed as self-sufficient truths in the short run; but in the long run it is political activity itself which gives – and changes – the meaning of any constitution. When we praise a constitution we are doing no more than praise a particular abridgement of a particular politics at a particular time. If the abridgement was a skilful one and circumstances are kind, it may last into a long middle period and help to give stability to a state. But, in the long run, though the words are the same and formal amendments to it may be few, the meaning of it will be different. Even the old Anglo-American Whigs, the arch-constitution-makers, used to say that no constitution was better than the character of the men who work it.

Certainly, at any given time a settled legal order is necessary for freedom and politics. Law is necessary in any society at all complex and people should be able to find out what it is fairly precisely and to use it fairly cheaply. (Litigation, not politics, is the necessary evil of free states.) The autocrat was, indeed, an arbitrary ruler – making laws without any process of consultation or litigation. And the totalitarian leader thinks of law as policy: people are judged not for specific breaches of the law, but for not living up to the general ideals of the régime. Certainly politics should be praised in procedures. Since the business of politics is the conciliation of differing interests, justice must not merely be done, but be seen to be done. This is what many mean by the phrase ‘the rule of law’. The framework for conciliation will be a complexity of procedures, frustrating to both parties, but ensuring that decisions are not made until all significant objections and grievances have been heard. Procedure is not an end in itself. It enables something to be done, but only after the strength behind the objections has been assessed. Procedures help to stop both governments and litigants from making claims which they cannot enforce. Procedures, legal or Parliamentary, if given some temporary independent power themselves, tiresome, obstructive, and pettifogging though they may be, at least force great acts of innovation to explain themselves publicly, at least leave doors open for their amendment if the government has misjudged the power of the forces opposed to it. More

praise, then, for politics as procedure than for politics as constitutional law, since, while there is no doubt that procedures are necessary for politics, there is also no doubt that every particular procedure is limited to time and place. Justice Frankfurter once asked the interesting question whether one would rather have American substantive law and Russian procedures or Russian substantive law and American procedures. Every essay should be pardoned one enigma.

Some common views about constitutions are more helpful if restated in political terms. Some claims for necessary legal elements in political order need seeing, by just a shift of perspective, as themselves parts of political order, or as possible but not exclusive types of political order. Consider the view that free government depends upon legally instituted checks and balances and the division of powers. People at times have felt extremely certain about this.

Alexander Hamilton wrote in the Ninth Paper of *The Federalist*:

The science of politics, however, like most other sciences, has received great improvement. The efficacy of various principles is now well understood, which were either not known at all, or imperfectly known to the ancients. The regular distribution of power into distinct departments; the introduction of legislative balances and checks; the institution of courts composed of judges holding their offices during good behaviour; the representation of the people in the legislature by deputies of their own election: these are wholly new discoveries, or have made their principal progress towards perfection in modern times.

But these are not ‘principles’ at all. They are already the summary of an existing political practice in which power was divided, indeed to an extraordinary degree; and in which legislative checks and balances already existed in most of the separate Colonial or Provincial Assemblies as the procedural products of a long struggle between the Royal Governors and the Assemblies, indeed between factions in the Assemblies themselves. The American Federal Constitution was an invention intended to summarize and synthesize an existing division of powers into a Federal Union which had itself only the minimum power necessary to ensure common survival. (Federalism has been a practical response to divided power more than a way of dividing it as a matter of principle.) And in America these divisions had been astonishingly political in nature.

They were predominantly the separate interests of thirteen existing fully political units. Only through these political units could 'national' and sectional economic and social differences express themselves.

This is not to say, however, else our praise would be but faint and local, that Hamilton's 'principles' (even if not strict principles) had relevance only to American Colonial conditions. As we have argued, there already exist in certain advanced societies divisions of power, group interests with independent strength from the state itself – independent at least in the sense that the central state is not willing to risk destroying them, but is conscious that it must conciliate them. It is these divisions which make the Constitution necessary; they are not created by it. The constitutional principle of the division of powers only affirms the reasons for which politics arises at all, and attempts to make them secure amid the need for strong government to maintain both internal and external safety. The constitutional principle of checks and balances only affirms the need for organized participants in politics to remember that their will is not the only will. Even when this will does seem to be in fact the only will, typically in the first generation of some colonial Liberation, it affirms the need for this unified majority to set obstacles against itself developing illusions of infallibility and permanence. In the constitutions of many of the American states there was, indeed, the praiseworthy spectacle of a unified majority willing to bind itself against itself. The binding can never be permanent, but it can set up sufficient obstacles for second thoughts to follow any initial impetus for great innovations.

So the relativity to time and place of all constitution-making does not mean that we are driven back merely to the maintenance of order as the only clear criterion of good government. Mere order is not enough to satisfy men as they are. Politics will fail if it cannot maintain order, as at the end of the French Fourth Republic; but it is a counsel of despair to think that all that can be hoped for is public order and 'merciful and just rulers'. We live in a democratic age whether we like it or not. And if none of the devices for limiting power and for subjecting governments to control, even when they extend their control of the economy vastly, are permanent or sure, yet we have learned more about such devices, even about constitution-making, than the tired or despairing conservative will usually allow. Politics, again we insist, is a lively, inventive thing as well as being conservative. We can use it for good and deliberate ends.

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Political rule should be praised for doing what it can do, but also praised for not attempting what it cannot do. Politics can provide the conditions under which many non-political activities may flourish, but it cannot guarantee that they will then flourish. 'One cannot make men good,' said Walter Bagehot, 'by Act of Parliament.' No state has the capacity to ensure that men are happy; but all states have the capacity to ensure that men are unhappy. The attempt to politicize everything is the destruction of politics. When everything is seen as relevant to politics, then politics has in fact become totalitarian. The totalitarian may try to turn all art to propaganda, but he cannot then guarantee that there will be art as distinct from propaganda – indeed by his concern to destroy or enslave the abstract speculation of the philosopher or the creativity of the artist, activities apparently quite irrelevant to mere political power, he demonstrates that these irrelevancies are necessary to free life and free society. The totalitarian, like the autocrat, may try to make use of religion until he is powerful enough to destroy it, but he is driven to degrade men in order to try to prove that there is no soul which need not fear the body's harm.

To ensure that there be politics at all, there must be some things at least which are irrelevant to politics. One of the great irrelevancies to the total-politician is simply human love:

How can I, that girl standing there,  
My attention fix  
On Roman or on Russian  
Or on Spanish politics?

– the poet rightly asks. The girl, of course, may happen to be involved in politics – Yeats had his Maud Gonne and Zhivago his Larissa – but the value of the involvement between the poet and the girl is not political. Yeats called this poem 'Politics' and headed it with a remark of Thomas Mann's: 'In our time the destiny of man presents itself in political terms.' Would Mann, one wonders, have disagreed with this splendidly contemptuous criticism, or would Yeats have made it, were either sure that the other was using politics in the narrow sense which we have striven to show is its best sense, and not as standing for all forms of power and authority? If man has a destiny, politics is obviously incompetent to



legislate about it; but it can keep him alive and free to seek it. If artistic activity is an end in itself, then it is the denial of politics to start laying down laws about art. No wonder poets and writers have constantly explored the theme of the clash between political values and art and love. The independence of art and love, it is some comfort to think, are not merely the sure signs of a free society, but have a deep influence in making men think freedom worth while amid the temptations there are to surrender ourselves to the sense of certainty offered by an ideology. Politics does not need to defend itself against the anarchy and irresponsibility of the artist and the lover; it does not need even to claim that it is necessary for everyone to be involved in and to support politics. (It can withstand a lot of apathy; indeed when the normally apathetic person suddenly becomes greatly interested in political questions, it is often a sign of danger.) But if the politician, too, has a little proper pride in his vocation, he can at least ask such critics whether they are not sometimes confusing state power in general with political rule in particular, or, more subtly, are not accusing political régimes of being purely democratic – democracy, again, as the belief that because men are equal in some things, they are equal in all. It is this belief against which the very existence of the philosopher, the artist, and the lover is a unique testimony.

Even in true politics, however, there is no guarantee that there will not, in some unhappy circumstances, be a clash between the public interest and private conscience. Indeed the paradigm-case of political philosophy, the point at which this new thing began, was Plato's picture of the trial of Socrates as just such an event. Plato, of course, leaves us in no doubt that love of wisdom – *philosophia* – should be put before love of country; and he was condemning a particular democratic régime. But – the mark of the great artist – he could not help but give us enough of the other side of the case to show that Socrates really could be thought a danger to the state, by corrupting the most able youth of the city with a technique of self-doubt at a time when the city was struggling in war for very survival, and needed every ounce of military ability and civic patriotism available. Certainly Plato's Socrates himself saw no way out of the dilemma but death. He could not promise, as an inspired philosopher, to hold his tongue for the duration of the hostilities. Nothing can guarantee us against genuine tragedy – that moral virtues can lead to disaster in certain circumstances – except belief in an ideology which abolishes tragedy by making every sacrifice a pragmatic calculation towards gaining future benefits for the collective cause.

One of the great disappointments of modern liberalism, made possible by democracy, was the need and the ability to introduce military conscription, first in time of war, and then even in times of the mere threat of war. Conscription taught liberals a sad lesson in the primacy of survival over personal liberties. But how great and praiseworthy was the fact that even in the Second World War, even in genuinely total war, Great Britain, and to a lesser extent the United States, solemnly made provision for conscientious objection to military service. Let one be as critical as one likes of the bizarre concept of 'conscience' which arose in the tribunals. Let one be as Machiavellian as one can and call it a mere gesture, something which would never have been tolerated if the numbers involved, or the example, had proved in the least bit a hindrance to the war effort. But the gesture was a gesture towards the kind of life which a political régime thought it was trying to preserve. If someone's sense of self-identity was so deeply bound up with feeling it impossible to kill a fellow human being, then that sense of self-identity had to be respected. Perhaps pacifism as a social force did not matter very much. And a pacifist was just as useful – as some of them sadly realized – replacing an agricultural labourer for service in the infantry as he would have been serving himself – probably more so. But it is the mark of political régimes that they do not, as ideological régimes do, condemn even ineffective opposition out of sheer arrogant principle. It is the mark of freedom that, even if ideas may have to be prevented from achieving institutional and powerful form, the ideas themselves are not forbidden and hunted down. We cannot always get what we want, but if we lose the ability to think of wanting other things beside what we are given, then the game is lost for ever.

Political activity is important not because there are no absolute ideals or things worth doing for themselves, but because, in ordinary human judgement, there are many of these things. Political morality does not contradict any belief in ideal conduct; it merely sets a stage on which people can, if they wish, argue such truths without degrading these truths into instruments of governmental coercion. If the truth 'will set you free' and if the service of some ideal is held to be 'perfect freedom', let this be so, so long as the advocates are prevented from involving others in the fraudulent freedom of coerced obedience. The view that the belief in absolute ideals (or what Professor K. R. Popper has called 'essentialism') is dangerous to political freedom is itself intolerant, not a humanistic view of society but a gelded view, something so over-civilized and logically

dogmatic as to deprive many of any feeling that anything, let alone free institutions, is worth while. Freedom and liberty are not ends in themselves, neither as methods nor as substitute moralities; they are part of politics and politics is simply not concerned, as politics, with absolute ends. It need neither affirm nor deny. And when sceptics or true believers are in fact acting politically, it should teach us to take with a grain of salt the 'purely practical' or 'the purely ideal' construction which they put on their own involvement. Political morality is simply that level of moral life (if there are other levels) which pursues a logic of consequences in the world as it is. To act morally in politics is to consider the results of one's actions.

Lincoln once set out to define the position of the new Republican Party on the slavery question. He said (in a speech of 15 October 1858):

The real issue in this controversy – the one pressing upon every mind – is the sentiment on the part of one class that looks upon the institution of slavery *as a wrong*, and of another class that *does not* look upon it as a wrong. . . . The Republican Party . . . look upon it as being a moral, social, and political wrong, and while they contemplate it as such, they nevertheless have due regard for its actual existence among us, and the difficulties of getting rid of it in any satisfactory way, and to all the constitutional obligations thrown about it. . . . I repeat it here, that if there be a man amongst us who does not think that the institution of slavery is wrong in any one of the aspects of which I have spoken, he is misplaced, and ought not to be with us. And if there be a man amongst us who is so impatient of it as a wrong as to disregard its actual presence among us and the difficulty of getting rid of it suddenly in a satisfactory way, and to disregard the constitutional obligations thrown about it, that man is misplaced if he is on our platform. We disclaim sympathy with him in practical action.

This is true political morality – indeed political greatness. If anyone is not willing to walk this kind of path he might be happier to realize that he has in fact abandoned politics. He may abandon them for the lead of the benevolent autocrat who will promise the end of slavery tomorrow, or he may simply do nothing because he is not willing to muddy his conscience with such 'terrible compromises' or equivocation. As regards the greatness of a man who can sharpen the issue so clearly, I admit that there is always an alternative interpretation of such words – hypocrisy.

Someone may just be offering excuses for not doing something which he does not believe in anyway. This is a matter of judgement – and perhaps the motive does not matter if the right public actions follow, except to the man's own soul and to his biographer. 'Hypocrisy,' said Swift, 'is the tribute that vice pays to virtue.' What matters in politics is what men actually do – 'sincerity' is no excuse for acting unpolitically, and insincerity may be channelled by politics into good results. Even hypocrisy, to a very, very small degree, keeps alive something of the idea of virtue. Certainly on an issue such as slavery, some people must keep a pure moral vision alive, but such visions, perhaps held only by 'saints', fanatics, reformers, intellectuals, will be partially fulfilled only when there is an attempt to realize them in terms of public policy. There is little doubt in Lincoln's case that he did truly believe that slavery was a 'moral, social, and political wrong'. But it is rare good fortune for the leader of a state himself to combine absolute ethics and the ethics of responsibility. And these are things only to be reconciled through time.

The politician must always ask for time. The hypocrite and the enemy of reform uses time as an excuse for inaction – literally the 'time-server' or the slave to time, he whose vision is entirely limited to the immediate. But 'eternity', said the poet Blake, 'is in love with the products of time'. 'Eternal values' cannot be treated as immediate values; but time in itself is nothing but a tedious incident on the way to death unless in it and through it we strive to achieve – what the Greeks looked for in the public life – 'immortal actions', ever memorable reforms, monuments to the belief that civilization can advance. In 1955 the United States Supreme Court declared that racial segregation in all American schools supported by public funds was unconstitutional. It enjoined the responsible authorities to integrate, not immediately – which would have been impossible, without the use of force incredible to imagine in a free society – but with 'deliberate speed'. This was an act not merely of great moral (and presumably legal) significance, but of political wisdom. *The law* is now known. That is as far as a Court or a moralist can go. But it will be an act of political cowardice if the Federal executive cannot now constantly nudge the unconstructed time-servers to implement the law. Time by itself solves nothing; but time is needed to attempt anything politically.

Now let us continue to praise Lincoln as a great politician on even harder grounds, which may scare away still more fairweather friends of politics – or men who would do good if it did not mean walking, like Bunyan's Pilgrim, through both Vanity Fair and the Valley of the Shadow of Death. In the

middle of the hardest time of the American Civil War, Horace Greeley, a militant abolitionist, challenged Lincoln to commit himself to immediate emancipation as a matter of principle. Lincoln replied:

My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing *all* the slaves, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the coloured race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union, and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union . . . I have here stated my purpose according to my view of *official* duty, and I intend no modification of my oft expressed *personal* wish that all men, everywhere, could be free.

Lincoln put preservation of the Union, the political order itself, above everything else, not because he did not care for Negro suffering and exclusion – he did; but because only if there was a Union again, a common political order again between North and South, could any of these problems be tackled. Suppose I will risk the case of politics on even more unhappy grounds than Lincoln actually had to face – that a man in his position could have felt confident of winning the war and preserving the Union only by promising *not* to use his emergency powers as Commander-in-Chief to emancipate the slaves. Would this have been justified? I think the hard answer is obviously – yes. The first responsibility of a leader is to preserve the state for the benefit of those to follow. Suppose such a leader had privately believed that after his making such a promise the legislature would, immediately after the war, overrule him. This is no deceit; he could not have been held responsible for their actions – or if so, it would have been an agony for the private conscience faced with the primacy of public responsibility. Suppose even the darkest situation of all, that he had privately believed that once his promise was made and once his war-time powers were gone, the legislature would not emancipate the slaves. The personal agony of such a position as this cannot be evaded, and it would be hard to blame a man who would abandon politics in such a situation in the sense of resigning from office. But even then such a man as Lincoln would probably not have abandoned power, for the true political statesman knows that while there is *political* power at all, while there is a representative assembly,

nothing is really certain, no single aspect of policy is not negotiable somehow, realizable in however small a part in the flexibility and management of a free assembly.

The example of Lincoln is not too bad a one on which to rest this case for politics – however much pietistic myths have obscured the grosser human tale of political action. He offended beyond reason many responsible men of his day by rarely being willing to talk seriously in private, by his infuriating retreats into badinage and the telling of old jokes. His dignity was a very variable quality. He seems to have been an indifferent administrator, disorderly, inconsistent, and even slothful; his relations with Congress were often inept and usually bad. But, for all that, he is as great an example of a mere politician as can be found. If this claim actually sounds more odd to American than to English ears, it is because American English, or rather American liberalism, has debased the word ‘politician’. True, he preserved the State as a statesman; but he sought to do it, even at the height of the emergency, politically. (It is not helpful to inflate, as is done in American vernacular, every small but honest politician into a ‘statesman’.) Lincoln, before his death, made it quite clear that he would oppose Congress if they sought to treat the South as a conquered territory without constitutional rights. The task, he said, was that of ‘doing the acts necessary to restoring the proper practical relations between these States and the Union’; he scorned ‘deciding, or even considering’ whether these States had ever been out of the Union; he ironically suggested, almost parodying his own best style, that ‘each for ever after, innocently indulge his own opinion whether, in doing the acts, he brought the States from without, into the Union, or only gave them proper assistance, they never having been out of it’. Politics, as we have seen, is indeed a matter of ‘practical relations’, not of deduction from higher principles.

Lincoln had little dignity, but he had enough authority and he did not have pride. Pride is an easy vice for any whose business must be in the public eye. But a true politician cannot afford it. The politician lives in a world of publicity, calumny, distortion, and insult. He is often looked down upon by polite society as being a mere ‘fixer’ and an ‘opportunist’ (though it is puzzling why this last word always has a bad meaning); and he is mocked by intellectuals for rarely having ideas of his own:

a politician is an arse upon  
which everyone has sat except a man

– which is the whole of an easy poem by e. e. cummings. And, indeed, the politician, beneath his necessary flexibility, will rarely be a man of less than normal pliability and ambitions. He will provoke such cheap mockery from spectators. But he will not take these things to heart. The successful politician will learn how to swallow insults. The successful politician keeps in mind the English nursery proverb:

Sticks and stones may break my bones  
But names will never hurt me.

He does not store up memories of insults and nor does he, when in power, take opposition personally, making a matter of principle or of *lèse majesté* of every ungenerous suspicion hurled upon him. A politician, like any of us, may not be above such pettiness; but he has no need for it, so he must not show it. The temptation is great, however. It is now an offence in Ghana's criminal code, punishable by up to three years in prison, to defame or insult President Nkrumah. This law is a sad monument to a man who showed such zest and ability for politics when in opposition himself. It is sad to think that this tender soul may not even have enjoyed such politics. Lincoln once remarked, with pragmatic humility: 'A man has not the time to spend half his life in quarrels. If any man ceases to attack me, I never remember the past against him.' He told one of his generals: 'I wish you to do nothing merely for revenge, but that what you may do shall be solely done with reference to the security of the future.' The politician has no more use for pride than Falstaff had for honour. And if when suddenly dismissed from favour, he then invokes pride and asks for employment and honour, he is just kicking against the terms of his trade which he, like any of us, had ample opportunity to study. Politics as a vocation is a most precarious thing, so we should not grudge the politician any of the incidental rewards he can pick up. But we must always beware that he does not grow bored or frustrated with 'mere politics' – that all this need for compromise stops him from doing what is obviously best for the nation. The price of politics is eternal involvement in politics ourselves.

The political leader, as we have seen, may have to take risks with liberty to preserve the nation. He may have to invoke 'sovereignty' and, at this point, the leader who cannot lead is not worth having. But he will lead so that politics can survive. Lincoln wrote to General Hooker: 'I have heard, in such a way as to believe it, of your recently saying that both the

army and the government needed a dictator. Of course it was not *for* this, but in spite of it, that I have given you command. Only those generals who gain successes can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship.' Free politics is a risky business, though not so risky as dictatorship. And 'free politics', as I have sought to show, is really a pleonasm – either word will do. If a politician has pride, it must be, as Aristotle distinguished, a 'proper pride' – in his skill at his conciliatory vocation, not hubris, the attempt to be more than a man, which commonly makes a man less than a man.

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Conciliation is better than violence – but it is not always possible; diversity is better than unity – but it does not always exist. But both are always desirable. Perhaps it all comes down to the fact that there are two great enemies of politics: indifference to human suffering and the passionate quest for certainty in matters which are essentially political. Indifference to human suffering discredits free régimes which are unable, or which fear, to extend the habits and possibility of freedom from the few to the many. The quest for certainty scorns the political virtues – of prudence, of conciliation, of compromise, of variety, of adaptability, of liveliness – in favour of some pseudo-science of government, some absolute-sounding ethic, or some ideology, some world-picture in terms of either race or economics. Perhaps it is curious, or simply unnatural, that men who can live with dignity and honour in the face of such endemic uncertainties as death, always so close in the normal possibilities of accident and disease; as love, its precariousness and its fading, its dependence on the will and whims of others, yet can go mad for certainty in government – a certainty which is the death of politics and freedom. A free government is one which makes decisions politically, not ideologically.

There is no end to the praises that can be sung of politics. In politics, not in economics, is found the creative dialectic of opposites: for politics is a bold prudence, a diverse unity, an armed conciliation, a natural artifice, a creative compromise, and a serious game on which free civilization depends; it is a reforming conservator, a sceptical believer, and a pluralistic moralist; it has a lively sobriety, a complex simplicity, an untidy elegance, a rough civility, and an everlasting immediacy; it is conflict become discussion; and it sets us a humane task on a human scale. And there is no end to the dangers that it faces: there are so many reasons that sound so

plausible for rejecting the responsibility and uncertainty of freedom. All that we have tried to do is to show why political activity is best seen as only one form of power relationship and political rule as only one form of government; and then to advance some arguments to show why the political solution to the problem of government is normally to be preferred to others. The only end to such an incomplete essay of defence and praise is to repeat drily what it is we have been describing.

Aristotle repeated his definition in almost the same words as we quoted at the beginning:

The object which Socrates assumes as his premiss is ... 'that the greatest possible unity of the whole *polis* is the supreme good'. Yet it is obvious that a *polis* which goes on and on, and becomes more and more of a unit, will eventually cease to be a *polis* at all. A *polis* by its nature is some sort of aggregation. If it becomes more of a unit, it will first become a household instead of a *polis*, and then an individual instead of a household. . . . It follows that, even if we could, we ought not to achieve this object: it would be the destruction of the *polis*.

## A footnote to rally the academic professors of politics (1964)

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Ther bith ij kyndes off kyngdomes, of the wich that on is a lordship callid in laten *dominium regale*, and that other is callid *dominium politicum et regale*. And thai diversen in that the first kyng may rule his peple bi suche lawes as he makyth hym self. . . . The secounde kyng may not rule his peple bi other lawes than such as thai assenten unto.

(Sir John Fortescue, *The Governance of England*, ed. Charles Plummer, London 1926, p. 109)

### (a) The political system

*That while politics is probably present to some degree in all systems of government, that some systems are usefully differentiated as 'political systems'. The political system is both an 'operative ideal' and the most scientific standard of comparison available.*

Engraved on the ring of power there are two primal curses upon all who profess to study the types and ways of Government. One is the curse of separation: that walls of fire flare up between the study of 'institutions' and the study of 'ideas'. The other is the curse of identification: that when we ask in the common tongue for the market-place of 'politics', students are quite happy to direct us to any old castle called 'government'.

While both government and politics are all but universal phenomena, yet the most useful distinctions for any theories which would explain governmental activity are between degrees of political activity; and there