

(All Rights Reserved - James O. Richards)

The Shaping of the "Second Europe" 1914 - Present

The Struggles of Democracies and the Revolt Against Europe

Outline of Lecture

- I. Introduction
 - II. The Roots of Democracy and Democracy as a Way of Life
 - III. Democracy in the United States and Great Britain
 - IV. Democracy and the Second Europe
-

Introduction

The success of Totalitarianism spelled trouble for Democracy. Could Democracy resist Fascism and Communism and stay true to its principles? Could it become as efficient as Totalitarianism? We know the answers to those questions now, but it was not that easy earlier in the century. The temptation was to aim for greater efficiency and strength and ignore democratic principles. Democracies had to offset the appeal of Communism and Fascism with planned economies and the welfare state. These did help win the war against totalitarianism and extend economic benefits to the majority of citizens, but democracies also made mistakes along the way.

The Roots of Democracy and Democracy as a Way of Life

Democracy grows out of the cultural values of Europe, embodying them all in equal importance. It is rooted, especially, in the Enlightenment phase of Europe, and the emphasis on the individual as the reason for the state. As I list the basic principles of Democracy notice not only those principles but their origins in Europe as a culture:

(1) Democracy's view of truth is that of the rational empiricist. Totalitarianism, we saw, is dogmatic: it knows what truth is. Truth is what the Leader or party says it is. There is no doubting or equivocation. Thinkers and doubters wind up in concentration camps. In Democracy, on the other hand, truth is not a given set of dogmas. There are no prescribed universal truths. Democracy believes that the closest any *group* can come to truth is probability. The *individual* may discover and live by truth or truths. The group cannot. Democracy, following John Stuart Mill, has been described as a process for discovering truth, but not a set of dogmas itself. Even the U. S. Constitution, rightly regarded as an instrument to be revered, is not an immutable set of truths. It provides for its own amendment or demise. Democracy insures that each person may seek and affirm his own truth in safety, so long as he does not act to harm another person doing his own search.

?

1. Is the preceding statement about rational empiricism true? The Declaration of Independence, summing up much of the Enlightenment outlook in its opening statement, says, "We hold these truths to be self-evident...." Does this contradict what I just said?
 2. Assuming the statement is true, what general "truths" must all subscribe to, if any?
-

(2) Democracy emphasizes the individual. Totalitarianism stresses the class, or race, or nation, or Leader. Democracy focuses on the individual. At the heart of democracy is the idea of the right to resist the state, rather than blindly follow it. This idea is based on the concept of a higher purpose for the state, that of the well-being of the individual. This leads to principle 3.

(3) Democracy views the state as an instrument, a means to an end. The end of the state is the individual and his well-being, not the state itself and its needs. Totalitarianism sees the state as an end in itself, directed by the Leader or Party. The individual is nothing except as he yields and sacrifices himself to the needs of the state. In Democracy man is the measure of the worth of the state. Does the state protect and promote the interests of the individual? If so, it fulfils its purpose as an instrument, a means to an end. Man himself is the end.

(4) The principle of free association in human relations. This follows from the first three principles. One shall not be forced into any political association, any church or religion, any occupation, any educational choice. That is the individual's choice to make. This leads to the next principle,

(5) Democracy believes in the concept of a higher law than any established law. Natural law and natural rights are the higher law. These precede the state; they are the reason for its existence. The state itself is voluntary. It was created freely and can be, as Jefferson said, altered or abolished better to protect natural rights. Could this lead to anarchy? Yes. At times it seems that all we want to do is talk about *our rights*, and that nobody cares about the greater good. But so far we have not sunk into anarchy. (The militia groups do not share my opinion).

(6) Democracy emphasizes means rather than ends in its actions and goals. This requires some explanation. What I mean is that Democracy does not accept (usually) the idea that the end justifies the means. Or to put it another way, that if the end is good, it does not matter how you go about achieving it. Democracy assumes (usually) that the means shape the end, and that you cannot use totalitarian means without destroying democratic ends. Remember, Democracy sees individuals as ends. This leads to the next principle.

(7) Democracy believes in discussion and consent in human relations. John Stuart Mill is the classic exponent of this idea. All sides should be heard to determine which is best. No view should be excluded by prejudice that it will not be the best view so why hear it. This one has been the hardest to attain. Totalitarianism seemed too menacing a threat to allow any old opinion out and about in society. Totalitarianism with its stress on following the Leader or the Party did not have to worry about the opinions of its people and could organize itself so much more efficiently and strongly. Wasting time on discussion and consent might weaken us so that we could not resist the Fascists or the Communists. And then there is pornography: is *it* protected by the right of free speech? Does it have a useful contribution to make in the search for truth? And finally, but not least,

(8) Democracy believes in the basic equality of all human beings. All human beings are equal. Not in intelligence, or ability (Look at differences on test scores). But basically equal in having natural rights and being worthwhile as human beings. That is a tough one too. We confuse basic equality with all sorts of other things, like performance and achievement. It is the purpose of the state to protect *basic equality*. What does that mean? Does it mean guaranteeing outcomes for everyone? We have not decided, have we?

?

Think about each of these before we move on.

1. If you accept principle 1 above, what general "truths" must all subscribe to, if any?
2. Principle 5 *is* a problem today. Is it a big problem? What are the limits to individual

rights?

3. Principle 7: courts have held that pornography is protected under the 1st Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. Do you agree?

How are these principles of Democracy taught and what kind of person is a democratic person? We saw some comments about the authoritarian personality. What can be said about a "democratic" personality? Is there such a thing? Can you have authoritarian personalities in a democracy? If so, will it function? I do not have the answers. But these things might be said about a democratic personality, by comparing them with the statements about an authoritarian personality:

(1) The democratic personality is willing and able to face responsibility and make decisions. He does not need the leader to define things for him; he does not want that.

(2) The democratic personality is willing to make choices even if he makes mistakes. He is willing to make mistakes because he believes that he learns from even mistakes. (I would say, learns *especially* from mistakes!)

(3) The democratic personality cares more about the group than the leader. A leader is necessary. You cannot get things done without having someone in charge. But it is the group that is important, not the leader. It produces the leader, not vice versa. And if a new leader is needed, he (she) comes from the group. It was said that Harry Truman as President of the U.S. was as if you had gone out on the street and grabbed the first person and put him in the Oval Office. I don't think that was really true in Truman's case, but I have wondered about some of the others. (No recent ones, by the way.)

(4) The democratic personality resists authoritarianism, whether in education, business, or politics. There is a place for authoritarianism in the military and other areas where following orders is necessary. But even there codes of law and procedures prevent pure authoritarianism. There is even a place for authoritarianism to some extent in the family. But there too are limits on parents and guardians.

(5) The democratic personality is willing to accept criticism as a means of improvement and self-development. Criticism is not necessarily an attack on the individual. It is the only means, unless one is his own best and harshest critic, for betterment. Even the democratic leader is willing to take opposition. Indeed, whether he is willing or not he is going to get it because of other traits of the democratic personality and system.

How is the democratic personality produced? I don't have much to offer here, except the conviction that he or she is not produced by authoritarian means. I do know that the greatest threats to the democratic personality and to Democracy in the 20th and 21st centuries have been (1) the growth of technology, affluence, and Mass Society, and (2) the loss of common beliefs, moral convictions, and spiritual values embodied in the European tradition and especially in the Enlightenment. Let's look at these briefly before looking at how the major democracies fared in the last century. In seeing those threats to

Democracy, perhaps we will better understand how democratic personalities are produced.

?

Your thoughts about how the democratic personality is produced?

First, the growth of technology, affluence and Mass Society. Mill (again) worried about the majority overpowering and silencing the minority. He talked about the "Majority of One". Basically his idea was that a majority could stifle free expression by a few or even one person. It could exercise a moral coercion if not a legal censorship to smother free thought. He assumed all sides were interested in the truth and not just propagandizing for their own ideology. Perhaps Mill did not understand the dogmatic authoritarian person. Some people are not interested in presenting their truth(s) and hearing others before they make up their minds. They *know* what they believe and do not want anyone else's views; they would not change their minds "if the truth hit them in the face," as we say. Then there is Mass Society which has been created by technology and affluence. In Mass Society you tend to get variety all right, but you have to look for it. The media and public opinion makers disseminate standardized tastes and values about almost everything. You are daily bombarded by messages all day long (and night) to go places, buy things, and have opinions or values about a lot of things. Some of the messages are intended, some are not. If you want to make up your own mind, you can do it. But it is hard to be different in the face of all that constant pressure to do and think what the majority are doing and thinking. Is that a loss of freedom? Is individualism in the true sense of the word--the single person making up his own mind after seeing and thinking about the alternatives--being homogenized and standardized like products and styles and popular opinions? Adlai Stevenson, Democratic candidate for President in 1952 and 1956, said: "A free society is one in which it is safe to be unpopular." Your thoughts?

Second, Democracy has suffered from a sense that Enlightenment values are no longer true. Democracy rests necessarily on a foundation of belief in certain "self-evident" truths: human equality and inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. What happens when these truths are not "self-evident" anymore? In the last century everything has been questioned. Even those who believe in "self-evident truths" find it difficult to believe and defend them. They are not susceptible to scientific proof or logical demonstration. And even if one argues scientifically and logically, these assumptions are questioned as means of discovering truth. Nazism had its own "science" about racial inequality. So Democracy shakes when its foundations shake.

?

There is an often-voiced belief today that there are no absolute values (self-evident truths) and thus no one has the right to criticize the values of another. Instead, one must *understand* and *tolerate* differences of values. (The one teaching of Jesus everyone remembers is "judge not, lest ye be judged.") Do you agree?

Democracy in the United States and Great Britain

The major democracies have struggled in the last century with a challenge which can be stated in the form of two questions:

(1) How can individual rights and human dignity be maintained as society undergoes massive economic and social changes caused by the industrial and technological revolutions of the last century (and continuing today)?

(2) Can regimentation and planning be implemented without falling into totalitarianism?

The U. S. and Great Britain faced the challenge of these two questions differently. The U. S. response was to adopt a mixture of private enterprise and regulation, sometimes called a "mixed economy". It also adopted the concept of the Welfare State and implemented it in its own way. Great Britain chose a more radical answer. It nationalized its heavy industries and services, that is it put them under state ownership and regulation. And it went much farther towards the ideal of the Welfare State than did the U. S. Both experiments changed over time and are still changing, which is for the best. Remember rational empiricism as a value for Democracy.

The political and economic history of the United States in the last century has been dominated by a single theme: how can purely economic progress be directed and modified to make the benefits of that progress available to more and more people so as to preserve basic human rights and dignity? As a theme it runs all the way from Jeffersonian Democracy down to the present. We are not going back to Jefferson, but starting with the Progressive movement of the early 20th century.

Progressives were reformers who challenged pure *laissez-faire* because of what they saw as the evils of unregulated enterprise and competition. They aimed to make politics more democratic, economic activity fairer and more competitive, and social life more moral and just. They sought not to radically reform society but to make limited changes which would achieve their goals. Thus they proposed reforms in local and state politics, making needed changes in cities such as Chicago, New York, and Cleveland, and in states such as Wisconsin, California and New York State. They pushed social legislation to regulate

child labor, to establish minimum wages for women, and to provide accident insurance for injured workers and their families. Progressives achieved many of their national aims in the administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Neither Roosevelt nor Wilson sought to destroy "Big Business"; they wanted to make it more competitive. Many of the national laws regulating monopolies and trust come from this period.

America entered a new phase with the Great Depression beginning in 1929. That shattering event led to calls for radical reforms. President Franklin Roosevelt, however, proceeded more cautiously with his reform program called the New Deal (1933-1945). Roosevelt argued during his election campaign in 1932, "Equality of opportunity as we have known it no longer exists [and] the task of government in its relation to business is to assist the development of an economic declaration of rights, an economic constitutional order." In his [First Inaugural Address of 1933](#) he promised, "I pledge myself to a new deal for the American people."

The New Deal introduced wide-spread but limited changes in a lot of areas: encouraging and legalizing labor organization; raising income, social security benefits for the aged; public housing; government initiatives in parts of the country needing development, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority; and, perhaps most important, the principle of government expenditure to stimulate the economy. The New Deal approach was pragmatic, experimental, limited. It created the Welfare State defined by two basic principles: (1) every one is entitled to a minimum standard of living; (2) everyone who wants a job should be able to get one. Along with the Welfare State came, among other things, the following:

(1) Social Security. Old age pensions and survivors benefits program, funded by contributions from the employee and employer and based on investment in U.S. Treasuries.

(2) Collective bargaining between labor and management. Labor organization became legal with the goal of protecting workers' rights and an increase in workers' incomes to produce a more stable economy and better buying power for workers.

(3) Agricultural support program for farmers. To secure a minimum price for farmers and the assurance of markets for agricultural products.

Although controversial, the New Deal changed the U.S. fundamentally. Some programs failed and were abandoned. Some survive to this day. Many others have been added. Except for the era of President Ronald Reagan from 1980-1988 and a brief period of Republican ascendancy in the 1990s, the march has been in the direction of expanding the welfare state. In the 1960s came Medicare, a big addition to welfare state programs. In 2007 came a Medicare prescription program, another big-ticket program. The government has been involved in economic regulation and management since the New Deal era. The relevant question is, how has government grown since the New Deal? Enormously. (Consider a linked spreadsheet prepared by [Daniel Schmelzer](#) which shows the growth of government expenditures as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product.)

You need to make up your own mind about that issue. Historians have taken varying views on whether the New Deal was good for the country. The prevailing view seems to be that Roosevelt's programs did prevent social revolution and worse alternatives being tried at the same time in Europe. But there is, as always, another view. See, for example, the comments of [Jim Powell](#), author of the book, [FDR's Folly: How Roosevelt and His New Deal Prolonged the Great Depression](#).

?

1. With the election of Barack H. Obama in November 2008, during an economic crisis, has the United States turned back to revive the New Deal? Is there a failure of confidence in free-market economics? Are we ready again for regulation and an increase of direct government intervention in the economy?
 2. Which view of the New Deal do you agree with?
-

Great Britain's direction was more radical, because the problems were more serious. Britain adopted a form of democratic socialism to solve economic and social problems. Showing the background to those problems helps explain why. The problems started with World War I which cost Britain her industrial supremacy and expended much of her capital. Britain spent much of her capital fighting the war, selling off assets around the world. At the same time she lost her advantage as the industrial leader of the world to the United States. Her machines and methods by 1920 were obsolete, and she lacked the resources to repair her industrial infrastructure. The Great Depression and World War II made these problems worse. By 1945 she was on the ropes economically.

In response to this situation, the British Labor Party grew rapidly because Labor offered a dramatic, radical solution: nationalization. Between the Depression and 1945 the numbers of Labor members in Parliament swelled to the point that in 1945, even before Churchill's government had time to finish the war against Hitler, Labor won a sweeping victory and got the chance to put its program into effect. Remember that in Great Britain voters know what they are voting for and that the party platform there *has* to be carried out.

What were the most prominent features of Labor's socialist program? Let me answer that after saying a bit about democratic socialism so that you understand the difference between the Marxist form and the democratic form. Democratic socialism agrees with Marx in the idea that there should be public ownership of at least the industries and areas that affect all society. The difference is in how this ownership is established. In Marx it is forcible appropriation with no compensation. In democratic socialism it is legislated with compensation to the owners. In contrast to capitalist free enterprise, democratic socialism offers cooperation rather than competition to manage the nationalized industries and services. Democratic, unlike Marxian, socialism is pragmatic about the industries and

services it appropriates: Is the industry a monopoly? Is it sick? Is it vital to the nation's economy. Using these criteria Labor nationalized utilities and communications, the coal industry, the iron and steel industries, transportation, and banking. Labor started the National Health Service, perhaps the most popular of its efforts. It also began the usual features of the Welfare State: social security, maternity grants and family allowances, wider educational opportunities, and graduated, progressive income taxes. These programs were begun between 1945 and 1950. When Labor was voted out in 1951 and Winston Churchill's party voted backed in, the Welfare State stayed. In the latter part of the century Britain with general agreement by both parties began to undo the nationalization of industry. Once again industry has been privatized. But the social aspects of the Welfare State persist. The National Health Service still exists. Social Security has survived. Like Americans, the British debate whether the Welfare State has outlasted its time, but neither is ready to dismantle it.

Would the democracies have survived without regimentation, planning, and the Welfare State? Probably not, given the menacing presence of Totalitarianism and its alternative as a means of meeting social needs. It is a question impossible to answer. But what other alternative was there which could have met economic and social needs and still been compatible with Democracy?

?

Dostoevsky in [The Grand Inquisitor](#), Chapter 5, Book 5, Part II of [The Brothers Karamazov](#), poses the human dilemma: man desires freedom but finds the burden of responsibility terrifying. You see, he simultaneously craves

- (1) bread: the satisfaction of material wants;
- (2) certainty: "miracle, mystery, authority" (indeed must have these); and
- (3) "unity of purpose": a sense of affinity with everyone else.

The combination of incompatible desires is impossible to sustain, Dostoevsky suggests; only the few "wise" understand this.

Is this the dilemma of the individual in a democracy: supposedly free and in pursuit of an intangible meaning which an intrusive state threatens, and yet craving the bread, security, and power that only that kind of state offers? And the dilemma understood by only a few?

What is the answer?

Democracy and the Second Europe

Before we fall all over ourselves extolling Democracy as the only thing so far to affirm the Enlightenment, let me sound one or two notes of caution. Democracies did during the two World Wars violate the rights of their citizens who opposed or were viewed as threats to the successful conduct of the wars. In the first war German-Americans suffered a lot of discrimination just because they were German or had German names. The same thing happened to Japanese-Americans during the second war because of their race. They were forcibly interned in camps for the duration of the war. The latter group received a formal apology from the U. S. government and compensation for their losses. But at the time Democracy failed.

Despite these cautions, Democracy was one of only a few parts of life during the last century that did affirm everything about the Enlightenment. For all its imperfections, Democracy is still what Winston Churchill said of it some time ago, "the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." (House of Commons, 11 Nov. 1947)

?

Do you agree with Churchill?
