



DEMOCRACY: THE FAILURE OF A SYSTEM BECOME RELIGION

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What is democracy? The answer given by civics textbooks and constitutional law treatises has the merit of being simple. Democracy has its origins in the Greek *demokratia*, formed from *demos*, "people," and *kratos*, "power." It is the power of the people, the government of the people; a political system where the people are sovereign. It is close to the republic, but it is not confused with it. The word "republic" comes from the Latin *res publica*, which means "the public good," "the public thing." The republic is the political system in which power is not exercised by one person, a hereditary monarch, but by elected representatives of the people. Democracy and republic, therefore, have very similar etymological meanings, but they cover different historical realities. In theory, in a pure democracy the voting majority has unlimited power; whereas in a pure republic a set of fundamental laws, a constitution, protects the rights of all against the will of the majority. Of course, in practice, modern nation-states are neither pure republics nor pure democracies.

Lawyers and political scientists distinguish between direct democracy, where citizens meet in assemblies and exercise power directly, and representative democracy, where citizens choose representatives to exercise power on their behalf. They point out that in a democracy, rulers are chosen through free elections, based on universal suffrage and free and secret ballots. They also point out that power is exercised by the elected representatives of the majority party, who have the legitimacy to govern, but under the control of the opposition, which has the freedom to criticize the government. Finally, they agree that the system can only function when there is a separation of powers (legislative, executive and judicial, not to mention the media, which has acquired the status of a fourth power since the 20th century) and, above all, a broad social consensus around values and legal provisions, which, in the case of France, are summarized by the motto of the Republic: *liberté, égalité, fraternité* (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity).

Democracy as a Modern, Secular Religion

Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America (1860-1865), is said to have once declared that democracy is "government of the people, by the people and for the people," meaning that sovereignty belongs to the people, who choose those who govern them. To this day, this principle is the theoretical foundation of Western democracies.

But to say that the people should be sovereign does not mean that they are. There is the admirable ideal and the prosaic reality. Paradoxically, the word "democracy" has become a cliché, a demagogic

commonplace, a superstition, a mystification. Democracy has become over time a substitute, a surrogate, a semblance of faith, a kind of secular religion, even a religion of war. To cite only one example, that of the United States of America, the military interventions and aggressions committed by the US in the world in the name of democracy and freedom (the "democratic crusades" of the "benevolent policeman of the world" or of the "indispensable nation"), are countless.

It is not only the few cases from the turn of the 21st century, repeated in the mainstream media, nor the 400 interventions over two centuries in the whole of Hispanic America, as meticulously listed by the Argentine historian, Gregorio Selser (*Cronología de las intervenciones extranjeras en América Latina*, 4 vols., 2010)—the balance sheet is in fact far worse. The United States has fought or fomented government overthrows all over the world: the Philippines, Laos, Vietnam, Korea, Cambodia, Cuba, Lebanon, Congo, Brazil, Peru, Dominican Republic, Iran, Guatemala, Ecuador, Haiti, Chile, Angola, Nicaragua, Grenada, Panama, Sudan, Somalia, Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Kosovo), Iraq, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, Indonesia. Since its inception in 1776, the U.S. has been more or less at war 80 to 90% of the time. Today, it has 175 military bases in 130 countries. By comparison, France, the United Kingdom, and Russia between them have barely 30 bases abroad. In 2019, the defense budget of the United States and its NATO allies amounted to more than \$1 trillion (52% of the global defense budget), while Russia's budget amounted to \$65.1 billion.

Under the guise of good intention and the defense of democracy, Washington defends above all the interests of American companies. We all know Theodore Roosevelt's formula: "Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far." Soft power to seduce and convince, and hard power to hit and punish! But rather than colonizing territories and peoples, US governments have made the wise choice of controlling decision-makers and gaining access to raw materials and national markets for their corporations or multinationals. The hawks in Washington are doing in Europe and around the world what they did in Central and South America—they are making sure they dominate militarily as well as economically. To do this, colonizing the elites is the most effective way. And in the end, the Empire's allies are not simply friendly states, but rather protectorates or vassals with no real say in the matter. In the end, all have to obey. De Gaulle, who was to be a faithful, even unconditional friend of America in the most difficult moments of the Cold War, understood this well. He knew that Roosevelt hated him, that he considered him a "madman" and that he wanted to bring him down in one way or another because of his desire for sovereignty and independence.

The American myth of liberal democracy has slowly collapsed in favor of a plutocracy or

corporatocracy. The values of the Founding Fathers have gradually disappeared in favor of the financial-industrial-military complex that Eisenhower warned against in 1961. And this situation was not new then. The nineteenth U.S. president, Rutherford Birchard Hayes, had already expressed concern about the evolution of such a system in his diary on March 11, 1888: *"The real difficulty is with the vast wealth and power in the hands of the few and the unscrupulous who represent or control capital. Hundreds of laws of Congress and the state legislatures are in the interest of these men and against the interests of workingmen. These need to be exposed and repealed. All laws on corporations, on taxation, on trusts, wills, descent, and the like, need examination and extensive change. This is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people no longer. It is a government of corporations, by corporations, and for corporations."*

In a November 21, 1933 letter to Edward House, a former Wilson advisor, Roosevelt also made this admission: *"The truth is that, as you and I know, a financial element in the great centers has owned the government since the days of Andrew Jackson."* Significantly, 15 billionaires now control the US media.

American democracy has undoubtedly turned into an oligarchy. The people still have some influence at the local level, but they no longer have much of a say at the federal level. At the top level, a tiny number of people make the decisions and reap most of the benefits. Blinded by the material comforts that the system has provided for decades, the American people have not been able or willing to see that their democracy has been progressively confiscated by their elites, that these elites have hijacked power for their own ends, and that the "deep state" has other ambitions than to help the American people, the real deep state. This lucid diagnosis is not the monopoly of dangerous radicals, anarchists, Marxists or other "anti-capitalist" revolutionaries. It is the work of a great many authors (and sometimes even presidents of the Republic) with the most diverse political sensibilities, such as Howard Zinn, John Perkins, Diana Johnstone, Michael Parenti, Eliot A. Cohen, William Blum, Noam Chomsky, Ron Paul, Pat Buchanan, Carroll Quigley, Christopher Lasch or Paul Gottfried, who denounce this situation of capture or perversion of the democratic system and of dangerous overextension of the Empire. Among them, the vast majority have as their essential concern the scrupulous respect of the principles of the Founding Fathers, collective security and the common good of the American people.

On this point, the "conventional" and somewhat "angelic" thesis of historian Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman (*American Umpire*, 2013), built around the slogans "we are exceptional," "we have made the world a better place because of our activities abroad," "we are not an Empire" because "we are a democratic republic," proves to be confoundingly biased and shallow, especially when compared to the historically

and geopolitically sound argument of Nikola Mirkovic's recent book ([*L'Amérique Empire*](#), 2021).

However, it is rare to hear someone declare or "denounce" himself as a "skeptic" or moderate democratic, and even less as a "non-democratic" or "anti-democratic." Even more so, no political regime would dare to define itself in this way. Democracy has been, for more than a century, a true political messianism that pursues the realization of the ancestral myth of the perfect City, of the ideal City and of the new Man. Not so long ago, Stalin (at least that's what Yuri Zuhov says), and all the Bolshevik socialists, such as Lenin, Trotsky, Mao or Pol Pot, wanted to be partisans of a "new democracy." Mussolini proclaimed the rejection of the "conventional and absurd lie of political equality and collective irresponsibility," in favor of an "organized, centralized and authoritarian democracy," "the purest form of democracy." Not to be outdone, the doctrinaires of National Socialist Germany condemned, like their counterparts in the Soviet Union, "formal, bourgeois democracy." The "Fuehrer State" was supposed to be, according to them, "directly democratic in the best sense of the word." One can always dream about intentions and deny realities.

Most Europeans and Westerners today believe that freedom goes hand-in-hand with democracy, just as the stars go with the moon. There are of course false notes in the polite speeches of the "elites," as when the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, issued his startling warning: "There can be no democratic choice against the European treaties" (*Figaro*, June 29, 2015). There are also scandalous manipulations of the popular will, as when in 2007, President Sarkozy had the National Assembly ratify the Lisbon Treaty on the new European Constitution, even though it had been rejected by the people in the referendum of May 29, 2005. (In the Netherlands, it was the Senate that was responsible for adopting the same treaty first rejected by the people; and in Ireland, the voters had to vote and re-vote until they finally said "yes"). As the somewhat chameleonic and communist-courting poet Bertolt Brecht wrote in the aftermath of the East German uprising (June 17, 1953): "Since the people vote against the government, the people must be dissolved."

However, the voters whose eyes are permanently unblinded are not legion and many are disillusioned. Democracy and freedom are taken for granted (even more so when the Western media compare the situation of their countries with the rest of the world), whereas in reality both are only partially implemented and sometimes even largely forbidden. In such a political and social context, to question the value and foundations of democracy, or to express doubts about the possibilities of its practical realization, is to attract the wrath, contempt and hatred of the high priests of the cult and other opinion-makers. To be accused by the media and the champions of virtue of the capital sin of antidemocracy is

to expose oneself to the danger of a condemnation to silence, to a life of a pariah. A political regime and those who serve it rarely understand that one criticizes it or that one does not accept to sing its praises. Strangely enough, modern censors and neo-inquisitors have forgotten that generations of prestigious historians, jurists, philosophers and political scientists have carried out for almost two centuries, in an honest, rigorous and disinterested way, the most implacable analysis and dissection of Western democracy.

In the 1920s, the liberal philosopher José Ortega y Gasset had already denounced "morbid democracy." In his famous lecture "De Europa meditatio quaedam," in 1945, he warned Berlin students that the word "has become prostituted," because it has many meanings that coexist. The word "democracy," he said, has become "stupid and fraudulent;" its daily use, for whatever reason, resembles the invocation of a civil religion. The philosopher of law, Hans Kelsen, also wrote as early as 1929: "Democracy is the slogan that generally dominates the minds of the 19th and 20th centuries. But that is precisely why it loses its true meaning—like any other slogan." No less lucid, the economist Joseph Schumpeter, noted in 1942 that "residual democracy" is "an organized hypocrisy." It is reduced, said Gonzálo Fernández de la Mora (*La partitocracia*, 1977), to the opportunity that the partitocratic oligarchies offer to the governed to periodically pronounce on an option, generally limited, after having carried out a great operation of informing, or marketing to, the public opinion. In *Du pouvoir* (1945). Bertrand de Jouvenel was no less severe: "Discussions about democracy, arguments in its favor or against it, are struck with intellectual nullity, because one does not know what one is talking about." Significantly, many intellectual and academic personalities, with openly democratic convictions, prefer to speak of "deficient democracy," "precarious democracy," "democratic deficit," "impolitic regime," "fatigue" and "exhaustion" of the Welfare State, "end of the democratic ideal," "twilight" or "winter of liberal democracy." Such is the case with Guglielmo Ferrero, Giovanni Sartori, Angelo Panebianco, Stephen Krasner, Gaston Bouthoul, Julien Freund, Michel Sandel, Danilo Zolo, Guy Hermet, Michel Maffesoli and many others.

The Various Meanings of the Word "Democracy"

The reality is that the concept of democracy has multiple meanings that can satisfy everyone. The word has served and serves to designate and ennoble contrary doctrines and practices. With the exception of the last disciples of traditionalist thinkers, such as Maistre or Bonald, for whom only an order inspired by God is legitimate, and even of the last positivist monarchists of the Action française, everyone today declares himself in favor of democracy. But which democracy?

Historically, democracy, or rather a form of democracy, was established in Greece in the 5th century BC. But the current forms of government that claim to be its heirs only borrow its name. In the Athens of the 5th century B.C., out of a population of 400,000 inhabitants, only 10% of the men were recognized as citizens and represented their families (less than 200,000 souls); women, metics and slaves did not participate in political life. The Greeks also considered the election as an antidemocratic and aristocratic process that gave a notorious advantage to the most educated, the richest, the most gifted and the most cunning. The drawing of lots was, according to them, the only device capable of ensuring the democratic character of government.

On the other hand, neither Plato nor Aristotle claimed to be democratic. Plato believed that it violated freedom and dignity under the guise of equality. As for Aristotle, he preferred the "mixed" regime, a subtle mixture of democracy, monarchy and aristocracy. Ancient democracy thus remained for a very long time an object of study reserved to the scholars. The medieval proto-democracy having led to a dead end, and the revolutionaries (1642, 1763 and 1789) having not given their trust to the people any more than their counter-revolutionary opponents, it was not until the first waves of democratization in the 19th century (in the United States with Andrew Jackson in 1829 and in Europe with the revolutions of 1848), and especially after the First World War that mass democracy and universal suffrage began to develop in Western Europe and the West.

Democracy can be considered from two approaches: normative or descriptive. From a normative point of view, political democracy is above all a principle of legitimacy. Thus conceived, it is both the smallest and the only common denominator of all democratic doctrines: power is legitimate when it derives from the authority of the people and is based on their consent.

Let us immediately point out a major difference here. For the realist normativist (moderate liberals or conservative-liberals, who have not ceased to multiply throughout history the procedures aimed at diminishing the influence of universal suffrage, despite the fact that it is proclaimed by them as a constitutional principle), the end cannot justify the means. On the other hand, for the idealist or utopian normativist (liberal-Jacobin, socialist-authoritarian or Marxist-totalitarian), the use of non-democratic means for ends deemed to be democratic is always ultimately justified.

The example taken from French political history is eloquent. What matters for the French utopian normativist is not that the democratic system guarantees social order and the common good, internal harmony and external security, but that it maintains above all and at any cost the humanitarian values

of the revisited ideal of the Enlightenment. All those who do not accept the rules of the game are thus excluded *ipso facto*. The power is held by the people and the "values" are in theory a function of the will of the people; but in reality, for our "progressives," "defenders of the Republic and of Democracy," the people can never have the power to question the "republican and democratic values," these being able to be altered or redefined only by the members of the self-proclaimed republican elite. The same is true of the social-democratic theorist Jürgen Habermas. In the name of "constitutional patriotism," the German philosopher wants to be the intractable censor of historical-cultural or social-identitarian patriotism. He intends to save the possibility of a "universal consensus" of substance; and to do this he expressly excludes those who are "clearly and voluntarily" (according to his own criterion), "beyond the borders of society."

American neoconservatives and neoliberals (Alan Bloom, Wolfowitz, Hanson, Kagan, Podhoretz, Kristol, etc.), but also many of Strauss' disciples (with their French epigones Bernard-Henri Lévy, Jacques Attali, Alain Minc, etc.) are all on the same ideological page when they defend the right to interfere, or the right to humanitarian intervention all over the world, in the name of "equality, freedom and human rights") and advocate the universal application *manu militari* of the American or Western democratic model.

The irony is that since the 19th century, the arguments of European colonialists have also generally been developed on a triple register: economic (search for markets and raw materials), political (imperatives of grandeur and power) and moral (benefits of science, reason, education, progress, civilization, the Enlightenment, human rights, secular morality and/or religion). The origins and justifications of the Western right to interfere can be found much further back, not only in the Protestant jurist Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) or the economist John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), but also in the theologian and founder of the School of Salamanca, Francisco de Vitoria (1483-1546). According to the Dominican Vitoria, the following are legitimate grounds for intervention: natural law and the law of nations, the right of natural communication, the right to preach the Gospel freely, the tyranny of the indigenous rulers, the agreement or approval of the majority of the indigenous people, the alliance and the appeal for help from friendly peoples and, finally, a ground that he considers more debatable, the temporary incapacity of the indigenous people to administer themselves. One is tempted here to quote Ecclesiastes: "What was, will be; what was done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."

In this case, American democratic interventionism at the turn of the 21st century, so often described as hegemonism or imperialism by its opponents, is neither new, nor original, nor modern. Strauss was fond

of explaining that one should always judge political thinkers by the fruits of their ideas. But in view of the havoc wrought in the name of his ideas by his followers, one cannot help but return the argument. Relativism, historicism, non-interventionism and, more generally, the democratic realism of authors like Tocqueville, Ortega y Gasset, Buchanan, Mearsheimer or Paul Gottfried is infinitely less dangerous than the democratic humanitarianism of the Straussian warmongers or the neoliberal globalists.

From a second point of view, no longer normative but descriptive, political democracy is a system based on the competition of parties and elites, a competition arbitrated by the masses, as well as on the limitation of the power of rulers. Within this system, the majority must respect the rights of minorities. The reasoning here is centered on the concepts of electoral participation, selection of leaders, representation, opposition, control, limitation of power—but it is not at all centered on the idea of a self-governing people. However, in a democracy, the key notion is neither the number, nor the suffrage, nor the election, nor the representation—but the participation of all the citizens in public life. Everyone must play an active role as a member of the community, as part of a whole. The maximum of democracy merges with the maximum of participation.

In fact, depending on the convictions of its exegetes, democracy rests on different, if not contradictory, foundations. It can be founded either in reference to the individual without belonging—this is liberal democracy; or in reference to the masses, or to the working-class as the potential negation of other classes—this is popular democracy; or, in reference to the people conceived as a collective organism and as the privileged authors of all historical destiny—this is organic democracy. "Liberty, equality, fraternity," proclaims the French Republican motto. Liberty is attached to liberal democracy. Equality has been exploited by popular democracies. Fraternity is at the heart of organic democracy.

Let us recall a key element that is at the heart of popular, social-Marxist democracy. At the time of its creation and development, socialists and Marxist communists castigated universal suffrage as essentially mystifying. The revolutionary minority was not to abdicate to the average opinion. "True democracy" was the one imposed and guided by the "conscious minority." The "revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat" had to act without taking into account the refractory mass, the unconscious majority, charged with the great mission of awakening men to freedom. The exercise of universal suffrage in Western democracies could be, in this optic, only a simple propaedeutic to revolutionary action and to the seizure of power that was expected from it, at the same time as an exceptional occasion of agitation and propaganda. Lenin and all Marxists announced as the last stage of their regime the stateless and classless society; but the stage of "dictatorship of the proletariat" in charge of oppressing the bourgeois

class was quickly converted into a permanent and definitive dictatorship of the minority of the Party over the whole society.

Third type of democracy: organic democracy. Here, representation takes place, partially or totally, through the municipality, the family unit, the region, the union, the professional associations or the corporations. These different forms of participation are themselves supplemented by the practice of referendums. Organic democracy is almost always held by its opponents (especially Anglo-Saxon Protestants) to be the exclusive invention of authoritarian or even totalitarian regimes (that of Franco's or Italian Fascist doctrinaires) or of Catholicism (that of Catholic-socialist or traditionalist authors, such as Ketteler, Le Play, La Tour du Pin, Toniolo, Chesterton, Belloc, etc.). But this assertion is totally false. Social organicism has its origin in German idealism (Hegel, Fichte, Ahrens and Krause). Later, it is found in eminent liberal and socialist authors, often Freemasons, such as Renan, Carlyle, Durkheim, Duguit, de Man, Laski, Weber, Prat de la Riba, Madariaga or Besteiro. For the proponents of organicism, any political doctrine whose implementation favors the disintegration of peoples, or the erosion of popular consciousness in the sense of a consciousness of belonging to the organic entity that is the people, must be considered undemocratic.

That said, the problem of terminological confusion and the correct meaning of the word "democracy" is not reduced to the simple triad of liberal democracy, popular democracy and organic democracy. Other meanings have spread with varying degrees of success. We speak of representative or liberal democracy to describe a system based on the power of parliamentary assemblies. We evoke polyarchic democracy to emphasize the plurality of pressure groups and decision-making centers. We refer to direct democracy to name a model based on the practice of referendums. Direct or plebiscitary democracy is opposed to representative, partitocratic, pluralist or polyarchic democracy. The former, supported by the national and/or populist right, is criticized on the right and left, often with arguments reminiscent of those of the traditionalist right. Referendum democracy would be an open door to demagoguery, madness, passions and irrationality. The argument is strong, but in representative democracy, the delegation, the exercise of the mandate, does not prevent the manipulation of parliamentarians by lobbies, economic arms of strong, invisible powers, nor the taking of ill-considered decisions, questionable or prejudicial to the interests of the people.

We also speak of social democracy, to define a way of life characterized by the levelling of differences in condition, or of economic democracy, to signify the will to equalize wealth. The State (Welfare State) is entrusted with the task of compensating for socio-economic inequalities through measures to

protect the most disadvantaged and to redistribute wealth. Industrial democracy is also referred to as self-management or direct self-government in the workplace; or local or grassroots democracy, to avoid using the term organic democracy. Since 1997, reference has also been made to illiberal democracy, to qualify and criticize the regimes of Eastern Europe (notably Hungary and Poland) which oppose liberal globalization, without denying freedoms, and which claim control over the collective destiny and cultural integrity of their peoples. Finally, the concepts or terms of moral, populist, citizen, absolutist, prophylactic, belligerent, ballistic, strategic democracy have appeared, as well as those of market democracy, technocratic democracy, internet democracy, teledemocracy, "cyber-democracy," "democratic governance" (a system that in reality reserves "serious" decisions for the small number of technocrats), participatory, deliberative, diversitarian, multicultural, global, globalized democracy, etc. Welcome to Orwellian newspeak!

With the latest "progressive" fads, classical democracy has been turned against itself to become a real enterprise of permanent deconstruction of Western values and institutions. Citizenship is no longer based on the equality of rights between citizens. The new social struggles claim to be articulated around identity, cultural and racial struggles. Multicultural democracy is in charge of enforcing political correctness, using coercion if necessary. It must pursue equality between groups by refusing the norm that is imposed on all. It must neutralize the majority for the benefit of the different cultural minorities. Consequently, the popular referendum must be prohibited as an instrument and expression of the tyranny of the majority. It is no longer a question of representing a pre-existing people (whose existence is denied), nor a relatively coherent collectivity, but of setting up a mechanism of representation allowing the various particular identities (homosexuals, LGBT, decolonial indigenous people, racialists and others) to assert themselves and to emancipate themselves. Democracy, writes political scientist Dalmacio Negro Pavón, "is thus reduced to political correctness defined and sanctioned by governments with the active or passive assent of the governed, previously infantilized by massive propaganda" (*La loi de fer de l'oligarchie: Pourquoi le gouvernement du peuple, par le peuple, pour le peuple est un leurre*, 2019).

Aristotle, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Jefferson, etc. explained that democracy is impossible without a limited territory, an ample middle-class balancing the extremes, and a high degree of homogeneity or socio-cultural cohesion. Montesquieu taught that "political virtue," which he identified with love of law and country, was indispensable to democracy. Generations of political scientists have insisted on the cultural (Tocqueville, Mill) or economic (Lipset) conditionality of democracy's development. Others (such as Juan Donoso Cortès, Lord Acton, Christopher Dawson, Julien Freund, etc.) pointed out that all forms of democracy are conditional on the development of the state and have argued that all known

civilizations have drawn their strength and stability from religion; that the fundamental ideas that shape Europe and the West (universalism, recognition of the value and natural dignity of the individual, distinction between religion and the State, importance of the election of assemblies since the Middle Ages) are practically all of Christian origin or have been re-elaborated or re-adapted by Christianity, and that the decline of Europe and of Western civilization has its origin in the rebellion, the abandonment or the negation of Christian roots.

Still others have emphasized the inevitable political and social consequences of the demographic suicide of the West (the famous work of P. Chaunu and G. Suffert, *La peste blanche* now dates from almost half a century ago). But the deconstructionists and other modern utopians don't care about that. They blithely and thoughtlessly take the exact opposite view of classical political science. In the final morbid phase of modern democracy, the totalitarian temptation is irresistible. The Orwellian newspeak is at work. Is it necessary to underline further the extent of the semantic and ideological confusion that reigns around the magic word of "democracy?"

Criticisms of the Liberal-Democratic Model

The theoretical critique, whether radical or balanced, of the liberal-democratic model has been systematized by multiple authors on the right and the left. Jusnaturalists, defenders of metaphysical natural law, have resorted to dogmatic arguments, such as the divine right of kings. Others have argued philosophically that what is true and just is independent of its recognition by the majority. German idealism (Hegel, Krause), elitist socialism (Saint-Simon, Fourier), anarchism (that of the republican Proudhon of the Solution of the Social Problem, 1848), Comtian positivism, Le Bon's social psychology, Le Play's empiricism, Maurras' monarchist nationalism, Guénon's integral traditionalism, all deny the individualistic and inorganic principle of the political representation: man is not a solitary being who constitutes the state by means of a pact, as if it were an anonymous society. He is born into a community, and his voice can only really be expressed through the intermediary bodies into which he is really inserted: family, municipality, region, professional body, etc. The jurist Carl Schmitt, for his part, has shown that there is a contradiction at the heart of the liberal-democratic regime: liberalism denies democracy (the logic of identity) and democracy denies liberalism (the logic of difference). There is an invincible opposition between the consciousness of the individual and democratic homogeneity, which presupposes the identity between rulers and ruled. In the eyes of Schmitt, liberal thought overlooks the political, because its individualism prevents it from understanding the formation of collective identities.

On the other hand, the Marxist, anarchist and syndicalist-revolutionary schools (Sorel, Labriola, Valois) have denounced in the liberal-democratic model a system of formal liberties, which become real only for the bourgeoisie. Political realist sociology (Ostrogorski, Pareto, Mosca, Michels) has demonstrated that political elites are never the product of the will of the masses, but that minorities select themselves by means of competition and self-affirmation, that political leaders are not the agents chosen by the people, but oligarchies, all the more closed in on themselves, as they belong to structured and organized parties.

All the criticisms of democracy can be grouped into two categories. Some of them concern the democratic principle itself and are generally anti-democratic. The others deplore the fact that democratic practice rarely conforms to the ideal and propose various solutions to remedy this. But often the authors adopt successively one or the other position, so that it is not easy to situate them clearly. Most of these criticisms are well known: democracy is par excellence the reign of division, instability, endemic civil war, rhetoric, the dictatorship of quantity ("the superior cannot emanate from the inferior"), disguised oligarchy, incompetence, mediocrity, corruption, influence peddling and the omnipotence of money. Democracy has no other philosophical foundation than skepticism and relativism. Until recently, many of the authors of these critiques were not so much fighting parliamentary and representative democracy in principle as the capitalist or market democracy in which it is embedded. The problems of social justice, of class struggles and of socio-economic exploitation were not then considered as accessory or subsidiary. The "social sciences" did not yet claim to have "discovered" the "real" enemy of redeemed humanity that is Western civilization dominated by the white, heterosexual, colonialist, slave-owning male, responsible for all discriminations.

Comparing "constitutional ideology" to "political reality," many legal scholars and political scientists have criticized the abstractions, metaphors and fictions of liberal democracy.

The first example of a fiction is the principle of the division of powers (executive, legislative and judicial). In reality, the parliament regularly invades the domain of the executive when it legislates in concrete, not general, matters; the government promulgates decree-laws of general content and thus assumes the functions of the legislature; and the judges of the constitutional court exercise the supreme legislative or even constitutional function when they interpret an ambiguous, fundamental precept.

The second example of fiction: the main justification for parliament is that it streamlines discussion,

ensures political transparency and expresses the national will. But the reality is quite different. Most deputies or representatives are not those whom the people consider the best, but those who belong to the class of "politicians." Their non-imperative mandate is not enough to ensure their independence, as they are usually subject to the discipline or instructions of their party. The voter puts a ballot in the box and the parties then arrange to form a coalition government or not at their convenience. The more important the deliberations, the more secretly they are conducted by senior party officials. The same applies to the selection and nomination of candidates for election and the appointment of offices. Nor is parliament the instrument of political integration, of the submission of divergent wills to a single national will, but the means by which a political faction occupies the entire state and imposes itself on its opponents.

Third example of fiction: the liberal-democratic State intends to ensure the equality of power to all deputies and the equality of vote of all citizens. But then, why does the simple majority in the constituent assemblies undemocratically provide that qualified majorities will be needed to reform the Constitution? Why do most electoral laws establish very high electoral thresholds (5 to 10%) and majority bonuses (of 25 or 50%), so that some ballots are worth more than others? Wouldn't the basis of the anti-democratic spirit finally be to consider that the primary goal of an election is not to allow the people to express themselves freely but to force them to elect a "stable majority" of an oligarchic nature?

To this, the realist democrat retorts that a regime based on the plurality of parties, the limitation of powers and the respect of minorities, may be execrable, but that the others are even worse. We know Churchill's ironic or cynical phrase, "democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." In *Democratic Theory*, the famous liberal political scientist Giovanni Sartori agrees that "anyone who wants to prove that the democratic system has a rational basis is at a dead end.... It is no accident that in the realm of rationalist philosophy one rarely encounters theories of democracy."

The only exception to the rule is that of the rationalist Rousseau; but he is forced to resort to the fiction of the general will in order to better evade the fallible and changing will of all. In truth, it is difficult to affirm that there is more rationality among the supporters of democracy than among its opponents. The liberal Hans Kelsen, for example, readily admits that he finds it difficult to believe that the people and only the people possess the truth and the sense of the good; for this would imply a belief in a divine right of the people as inadmissible as the belief that a man is king by the grace of God. Kelsen goes

even further. He admits, as do many other lucid democrats, that the cause of democracy is hopeless, if one starts from the idea that man can attain absolute truths and values. The liberal philosopher Pierre Manent also concedes that "under the guise of democracy, it is in reality an oligarchy that thrives." He does not hesitate to add: "the minority of those who possess material and cultural capital manipulate political institutions to their benefit."

The "democracy or dictatorship" dilemma, in which idealistic democrats seek to confine their opponents, is more seductive than it is well-founded. No political procedure is an absolute guarantee against autocracy and despotism. Even the least brilliant student of the history of political ideas knows this. Tyranny and dictatorship represent a corruption that is always possible and that also threatens, in different forms, the totality of political systems.

Real Western Democracy

Historically, the world has never known any other form of government than that of the few, of the ruling minority (the oligarchy, the establishment, nowadays the European-American-globalist "elite bloc," i.e., all the financial, industrial and media elites, without forgetting Gramsci's "organic intellectuals" and, of course, the so-called "experts" of the consulting firms). Moreover, every government needs the support of public opinion. Behind all known forms of government (monarchy, aristocracy, democracy—according to the classical classification; democracy and dictatorship—according to modern classification), there is always a minority that dominates the immense majority. The multiple possible variants depend on the mode of renovation of the minority and the limits and controls to which this minority submits in the exercise of power. The positions of power are never contested by the masses; they are contested by the different factions of the political class. The governed are spectators, sometimes facilitators, but rarely arbiters. When a political oligarchy is discredited, it is replaced by another in search of prestige, of legitimacy of exercise, ready if necessary to use demagoguery. All political power seeks to simulate, to operate in secrecy, to control information, to manufacture consent through the mass media.

The works of Gustave Le Bon (*The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, 1895), Edward Bernays (*Propaganda*, 1928), Lord Ponsnonby (*Falsehood in War-Time*, 1928), Sergei Stepanovich Chakhotin, (*The Rape of the Masses. The Psychology of Totalitarian Political Propaganda*, 1939), or Jacques Ellul (*Propaganda*, 1962) or Anne Morelli (*Principes élémentaires de propagande de guerre*, 2001) to name but a few, have explained in great detail how propaganda (or "communication" as we hypocritically call it

today), whether "good" or "bad," "white" (for the Good) or "black" (for the Evil), works in Western democracies. They have demonstrated that it is, paradoxically, an invention of liberal democracies and not, as is often heard, the creation and practice of totalitarian or authoritarian states alone. When today's politically correct journalism (opinion journalism camouflaged behind the cloak of so-called news journalism) criticizes, not without corporatist ulterior motives, the "fearsome character" of the new cyber propaganda, it is the hospital that mocks the charity. In reality, the often-vaunted pluralism of the Western mainstream media is nothing but a deception, fully described by the allegory of the horse and rabbit stew.

On the evening of the re-election of French President Emmanuel Macron (April 24, 2022), an independent journalist mischievously asked in the columns of a non-conformist blog: "What is the name of the country where almost 100% of the subsidized press supports the government? What is the name of the country where all taxpayers finance, forced and coerced, media "committed" to the same side, that of the elites, the power and a huge hegemonic party that criminalizes its opponents? What is the name of the country where half of the citizens no longer trust any major media?" (G. Cluzel. BV, April 24, 2022). Of course, the almost unwavering attachment of the people of the United States of America to the First Amendment of its Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech, press and expression, makes all the difference and seems to protect them from a similar situation. But while the American citizen-voter can ignore the precepts of political correctness and say in theory just about anything he or she wants, he or she cannot do so without risking serious disadvantages in his or her professional and social life.

Politics, said the poet Paul Valery, "is the art of preventing people from meddling in what concerns them." But public opinion is much more aware of this today. The consequence is that the oligarchy or "elite bloc"—increasingly fearful—tightens the screws that subjugate the *demos*. We know the hostility, contempt and fear that populist movements and popular rebellions such as the "Yellow Vests" arouse. People fear the power to which they are subjected—but power also fears the community over which it rules.

To conclude, real Western democracy is, after all, only an oligarchy elected by the people. It excludes the use of physical violence but not moral violence (unfair, fraudulent or restricted competition). Two conditions would make it possible to reform it in depth for the benefit of the people. First, the represented should be able to recover the freedom to directly control their representatives or elected officials, a freedom that has been abusively taken away from them. This would require the introduction

of an electoral system with an imperative mandate; representatives would thus be obliged to respect the mandate of their respective electors. Then, for the people to be able, if not to direct and govern de facto, at least to participate durably in political life, it would be necessary for the principle of direct democracy to be widely accepted. A realistic ideal, which, one can well imagine, is not close to being achieved. The crux of the matter is, however, to prevent those in power from being mere transmission belts for the interests, desires and feelings of the political, social, economic and cultural oligarchy.

As the political scientist Dalmacio Negro points out, "The only effective attitude in politics is the rational criticism of reality in order to keep the spirit of collective freedom alive." Realistic and lucid, he wisely adds that there is an essential condition for political democracy to be possible and for its corruption to become much more difficult if not impossible. It is necessary that the attitude towards the government be always distrustful, even when it is a question of friends or people for whom one has voted. Bertrand de Jouvenel said in this regard: "the government of friends is the barbaric way of governing."

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[Featured image](#): "World's Constable." Cartoon by Louis Dalrymple. Published in Judge, January 14, 1905.

