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### Three for Representative Democracy

For James Madison, Thomas Paine, and Alexis de Tocqueville, the experiment of the United States of America was fruitful ground for the study of political theory. Representative democracy, or the republic, was new to them, and pure democracy was discussed with detached fear and awe. However, each author proposed that America's republic could establish social and political peace, justice, and stability, even while admitting in many ways democracy engenders their polar opposites. Madison argued representative governments could overcome the instabilities due to faction; Paine saw them as the way to avoid the warring tendencies of monarchs; and Tocqueville postulated they could overcome the injustice of despotism. Each author recognized the problems with democracy; however, they strove to defend it, coupled with representation, as not only the proper government, but the best suited to overcome its own shortfalls.

According to Madison, factions, or unified groups of citizens impelled to act adverse to other citizens or the interest of the community, are a sizable threat to the stability of a nation. As he says offhandily in Federalist LI, "In a society under the forms of which the stronger faction can readily unite and oppress the weaker, anarchy may as truly be said to reign, as in a state of nature where the weaker individual is not secured against the violence of the stronger" (167). He discusses faction more methodically in Federalist X, the tenth in the series of Federalist Papers, a collaborative effort by John Jay, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton to persuade New York to ratify the Constitution. In his opening paragraph, he relates how "popular governments have everywhere perished" (404) from the disease and vice of faction. He then proceeds, through near-binary logic to reason why one should look to a "Republican remedy for the diseases most incident to Republican Government" (411).

His first logic step is to assume that faction can be cured by removing its causes or controlling its effects. To remove its causes, Madison suggests one would either have to obliterate liberty, as it "is to faction, what air is to fire" (405), or create homogenous citizens. Soon, he establishes faction cannot be eliminated at its cause, for the very cause

is “sown in the nature of man” (406), as the haves will always exploit the have-nots and the manufacturers combat the monied. He suggests, rather, that “relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its effects” (407).

For Madison, the government best equipped at doing just that is a representative democracy. He openly admits that the effects of faction are impossible to control in a true democracy--“pure Democracy...can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction...Hence it is that such Democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence” (408). He sees a Republic benefiting from two points—the delegation of the Government to an elect few, and its larger possible size. He further describes how when members of the elect few can not be counted on to act “consonant to the public good” having a large republic and a decent number of representatives can counteract this. The larger the number of people represented by each representative, the more likely the representative will be elected based on merit. The more representatives present, the harder it is for the representatives to form a majority, solely because the larger landmass and population possible under a republic is bound to include more diverse interests and fewer factions able “to concert and execute their plans of oppression” (410).

Much as Madison link faction with instability, in Thomas Paine’s The Rights of Man, Paine links hereditary systems of government to war. From his perspective, hereditary governments not only had frequent wars, but war was a “principal part of the system”. According to Paine, not only were foreign wars the result of the system, but hereditary Monarchy and Aristocracy led to civil wars as well. In his view, the best hope to establish peace was in a nation where power was delegated “for the common benefit of society” to promote a “system of peace as the true means of enriching a Nation” (234).

Paine professes that the link between Monarchical governments and war lay in taxation and revenue. “Every war terminates with an addition of taxes, and consequently with an addition of revenue...war...becomes a principal part of the system of old Governments; and to establish any mode to abolish war, however advantageous it might be to Nations, would be to take from such Government the most lucrative of its branches” (214). He goes on to say, that though we have been told that Man is his own enemy, the truth of the matter lies in propaganda. “Animosity which Nations reciprocally entertain is

nothing more than what the policy of their Government excites to keep up the spirit of the system” (214). Governments instill nationalism, not out of necessity, but out of revenue needs. Paine suggests that the problem lies in the system, not the individual: “instead of seeking to reform the individual, the wisdom of a Nation should apply itself to reform the system” (214). Because the hereditary government “is an assumption of power, for the aggrandizement of itself” (234), such a government can not be expected to move from wartime revenue raising to focus on reforming the country. As Paine says, rather archaically, “War is the Pharo-table of Governments, and Nations the dupes of the games” (234). Hereditary governments not only suffer through foreign wars, but civil wars, as well. This, Paine asserts, is to be expected when a nation suffers under the hereditary chain of rulers; “one is a tyrant, another an idiot, a third insane, and some all three” (236). Both disputed hereditary claims and rulers born incapable of office instigate such wars, which are, according to Paine, “more numerous, and have been more dreadful, and of longer continuance, than those which have been occasioned by election” (237).

Paine suggests democracy as a way to avoid both types of war, yet, like Madison, he admits the faults of pure democracy. He discusses the story of Rome, admitting the instability of democracy in large nations. In a passage comparing democracy to monarchy, he says “The monarchical form is as much limited, in useful practice, from the incompetency of knowledge, as was the democratical form from the multiplicity of population. The one degenerates, by extension, into confusion; the other into ignorance and incapacity...” (241). However, similar to Madison, Paine sees the republic as the panacea for all ills, issuing the bold statement that “What Athens was in miniature, America will be in magnitude” (242). To Paine, government is nothing more than the management of the affairs of a nation, to “supply the defect of moral virtue”. It is not “the property of any particular man or family, but of the whole community” (212). Hereditary monarchies and aristocracies rendered out of the question, and with the faults of democracy in pure form in mind, Paine suggests American government’s “representation ingrafted upon Democracy” (242) as the best option.

Finally, for Alexis de Tocqueville, the biggest problem threatening the justice within a nation is the onset of despotism. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the problem is that according to Tocqueville, it is most dangerous in the time of democracy. Tocqueville believes that “each step towards equality seems to bring them nearer to despotism” (679). He makes a clear comparison between aristocratically led societies and democracies.

Among such peoples the government would often seem to forget that there comes a point where the mistakes or misfortunes of individuals compromise the general welfare, and that to prevent the ruin of a private person must sometimes be a matter of public importance. The democratic nations of our time incline to the opposite extreme. (681).

He sees the democratic theory of equality tending towards making citizens happy against their will versus the aristocratic society simply ignoring citizens' needs. Tocqueville intimates that the combination of a slowly strengthening, centralized, government with a struggle towards true equality brings about a sinister form of despotism as described in Orwell's 1984.

According to Tocqueville, in democracies government is centralized via avenues from public banking systems to public education. Industrialization of society induces a need for infrastructure, and in the 'equal' society of democracies, the monies to support such infrastructure can only come from the government. In every nation, the “government becomes the leading industrialist” (686). Justice is slowly diluted as the government begins to take over the role of choosing judges, prompting “an appearance of justice, rather than justice itself, between the government and the private person” (684). People are lulled into submission, stifled by “a network of petty, complicated rules that are both minute and uniform, through which even men of the greatest originality and the most vigorous temperament cannot force their heads above the crowd” (692). In a scary parallel to Brave New World, Tocqueville claims “Each individual lets them put the collar on, for he sees that it is not a person, or a class of persons, but society itself which holds the end of the chain” (693).

However, all is not to be despaired within the American system, Tocqueville assures us. The development and encouragement of associations within America have created a series of “aristocratic bodies” (697) that can resist being dominated by a zealously power-grubbing government. The freedom of press, so central to America, can

counteract the natural isolation of men in times of equality. As Tocqueville points out, “Printing has hastened the progress of equality, but is also one of its best correctives” (697); “The Press is, par excellence the democratic weapon of freedom” (698). Also, the judiciary system of the United States, separate from other bodies of the government, can be expected to defend the little man within society from infringement of his rights. Though Tocqueville feels “despotism is particularly to be feared in ages of democracy” (695), the systems central to America’s republic can be tailored to stave it off.

Alexis de Tocqueville, Thomas Paine, and James Madison were extolling the merits of the republic, for altogether different reasons. Tocqueville was reporting to his French brethren of the faults and curiosities of the American system, Paine was countering Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France and affirming the Constitution under which he lived, and Madison was promoting the Constitution he had recently helped to draft. They approached the concept of republic with different biases, but all concluded it was well equipped to deal with those problems novel to itself and inherent in all other forms of government. All three authors lived in times of great turbulence, and saw in the United States an escape from such turmoil. Their writings legitimized the American Experiment for those on both sides of the Atlantic. However, their chapters may have led to the U.S. complacency underwriting Manifest Destiny of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, or the isolationism prevalent through U.S. administrations until this day. Nonetheless, they have without doubt affected both the external and internal views of the United States for centuries.