

2017

## The Legitimate State: Pride, Compassion, and Self-Representation

Miles Davidson MacNaughton Cree  
*Bard College*

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### Recommended Citation

Cree, Miles Davidson MacNaughton, "The Legitimate State: Pride, Compassion, and Self-Representation" (2017). *Senior Projects Spring 2017*. 282.  
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The Legitimate State:  
Pride, Compassion, and Self-Representation

Senior Project submitted to  
The Bard College  
Division of Social Studies

by  
Miles Cree

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
May 2017

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## Acknowledgements

I'd like to acknowledge professors Jay Elliott and William Mullen, whose classes I took whenever possible. Each was an inspiration to me and continues to influence the way I approach academia. Both helped to ignite a passion within me for philosophy and the classics that I hope to one day carry into a career. I will be forever thankful to Jay and Bill and I regret that I won't again have the opportunity to participate in their seminars.

I would also like to acknowledge my advisor, Marco Dees, for helping me to keep on top of this project over the course of this long year and for all the valuable conversations and feedback.

Finally, I want to thank each of the other philosophy majors from the class of 2017 for trying to broaden my philosophical interests to include more than just classical philosophy. Their efforts were not entirely in vain.

## Introduction

In this thesis, I will argue that the most fundamental tendencies that govern human nature are compassion and pride, since the former exists inherently and undeniably between people and the latter arises inevitably upon the formation of communities. I will posit that these tendencies have important implications for the role of a legitimate government. Next, I will explain why government is only legitimate insofar as it functions to facilitate the political engagement of its citizens. I will then argue that political engagement is constituted by the proper manifestation of compassion and pride, and it is conditioned by these. Thus, it must be the role of a legitimate government to cultivate the right kind of compassion and pride in its citizens.

I will begin by presenting various accounts of human nature by a few of the most foundational political theorists—Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Aristotle. Each provides a different justification for the existence of government based on his different views on human nature. The three State of Nature theorists explain the formation of society on the basis of necessity, while Aristotle believes political association to be fundamental to what it means to be human. Of these views on human nature, I argue that Rousseau's is the most convincing because his is the only one that takes compassion to be a motivator for human action, while the others believe self-preservation to be man's only intrinsic drive. I will characterize compassion, explain how it conditions self-preservation, and then show how it is inherent within people. I will then discuss pride, the way it develops, and how it can positively manifest itself. The first part of this thesis will conclude with the assertion that compassion and pride are fundamental to human

nature, and that human nature is not something to be feared and constrained by government, but rather something to be cherished and allowed to thrive.

Next, I will argue that since governments are derived from the will of the people, the legitimacy of a government depends on its ability to adequately represent the will of its citizens. I maintain that one's will cannot be delegated or mediated, so the only way for a state to achieve this is to encourage the political action of each and every citizen. The most effective form of government for enacting this is a direct democracy, which is a system that allows citizens to engage directly with the decision-making process and therefore stake a personal claim to the state. Then I will present a criticism of direct democracy by discussing the trial of Socrates. I will conclude this section of the essay by arguing that a government that does not reflect the nature and will of its citizens is illegitimate.

Throughout this piece, I will assert the importance of pride and compassion in political activity. The former drives political engagement because people generally work and care for things that they feel pride in. The latter directs this political engagement toward the proper ends. It encourages people to think of one another, not just themselves, when making decisions and it also tempers some of the destructive potential of pride. This leads me to make the claim that a properly developed sense of pride for one's state and a keen sense of compassion for others form the basis for meaningful political action.

In short, the legitimacy of a state depends on its ability to reflect the will and nature of its citizens. The only way for a state to reflect the will and nature of its citizens is through widespread political engagement. Since political engagement is conditioned

by pride and compassion, I conclude that it must be the role of a legitimate government to encourage and cultivate these two fundamental aspects of human nature.

### Part One

#### Section A: The Makings of a Legitimate State

To determine what the role of a legitimate government is, and what responsibilities it has to its people, one must first examine how that government came to be and where it receives its legitimacy. To understand the roots of government is to glimpse at the intended relationship between the citizen and the state, for it is from within the citizens, the common people, that a just government arises. Beginning as early as antiquity, political theorists have sought to justify the authority of government within society and to explain how it came to be. Most tend to believe that the development of government occurred simultaneously and inevitably with the combining of people into communities. To some, such as Aristotle, to form political associations is to embrace an essential aspect of human nature, which is communally oriented. To others, like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, societies and their governments exist to provide a higher standard of living for their people, and to encourage or facilitate harmony. Both schools of thought lend themselves to the belief that that government, which will be referred to here as the state, is both aimed at some good and derives its legitimacy from its constituents. After all, no one would voluntarily consent to a condition somehow worse than their previously existing one.

I would posit that insofar as the state is the culmination of the wills of its citizens, it should have no authority beyond these. Furthermore, the only legitimate form of government is the one which directly and precisely embodies the natures and desires of its citizens. The political engagement of citizens is key to achieving such a government. Their wills cannot be delegated to others, but rather each citizen must stake his own claim to the political life of the state if there is to be any hope of adequate representation. Delegation, as it occurs within a republic or any other representative government, strips the citizen of his most essential right and negates the very purpose of his citizenship: the right to have his will heard and then reflected within his state. The only adequate representation is self-representation. The only legitimate government must therefore be a direct democracy because this is the only government in which the people are free to engage in politics without constraint of any kind, and in which their prideful and compassionate nature is harnessed and allowed to thrive.

#### Section B: The State of Nature Theorists (and Aristotle)

Thomas Hobbes was the first to address the issue of government legitimacy by discussing it in terms of its inception. What made people found societies, and more importantly, what made people decide to form governments to lead them? In his *Leviathan*, he created a theoretical world called the 'State of Nature' in which humans existed prior to any notion of government. This is a state of absolute freedom, in which mankind is free to act in whichever way he chooses. Hobbes believes that given this freedom, people are inclined to act solely out of self-preservation and embrace their most basic instincts, which he believes to be violent and distrustful. His State of Nature



is one of “continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”<sup>1</sup> The Hobbesian depiction of man in his most natural state is that of a savage, self-interested beast; unintelligent and governed by fear. This depiction is paired with a conception of man as an animalistic slave to Nature; he acts in accordance with his instincts and every one of his actions is aimed at his survival. In this state, mankind is pitted against itself in a perpetual battle for supremacy. To Hobbes, societies originate as a way of achieving peace in what would otherwise be a world plagued by constant violence and anxiety.

Central to Hobbes’ conceptualization of man within the State of Nature is that he has no idea of a *summum bonum*, or the “highest good”. This is because any notions of good or evil amount to nothing more than an individual’s appetites or desires, or his natural tendencies to move toward or away from certain things. If one were to come up with a *summum bonum*, his would undoubtedly be at odds with someone else’s, since different people desire different things at different times. While there can be no shared *summum bonum*, there can be a shared *summum malum*, or “greatest evil”. This is the “Feare of death”<sup>2</sup>, which every person experiences in common within the State of Nature. This fear, along with reason, leads mankind out of the despicable conditions of Nature and into the less anxious conditions of society, wherein their freedoms are curtailed by an unquestioned and unchangeable authority. It would appear that Hobbes considers the relinquishment of ones liberty, and even his free will, to be justified in the interest of escaping Nature and obtaining peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Hobbes, Thomas, Richard Tuck, Raymond Geuss, and Quentin Skinner. *Hobbes: "Leviathan"* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. Print. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Hobbes. 90.

John Locke, who wrote a century later than Hobbes, was also involved in explaining the legitimacy of government, and society on a whole, through his own conception of the State of Nature. Similarly to Hobbes, Locke believed that within this state of absolute freedom there would be constant conflict between people over resources and survival. But this state is not all bad to him. This is because in this state each individual can experience true liberty in a way that he cannot within society. Locke considers this liberty fundamental to human nature and he cherishes this aspect of the State of Nature. In his *Second Treatise of Government* he writes:

In the state of nature, liberty consists of being free from any superior power on Earth. People are not under the will or lawmaking authority of others but have only the law of nature for their rule.<sup>3</sup>

It is only within the State of Nature that one can be free of any and all forces of coercion or dominance. He need not submit to anyone's will but his own, and he is free to pursue his own interests with minimal hindrance. The "law of nature" is the right to protect oneself and his extensions, which for Locke meant his property. As competition between people inevitably brings rise to conflict, it was in the best interest of people to remain solitary in the State of Nature. Where Locke departs from the Hobbesian theory most sharply is in his focus on individual property. That man has no reasonable way to protect his property within the State of Nature other than violence necessitates that a civil society be formed in order to handle these disputes in a non-violent fashion. Society

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<sup>3</sup> Locke, John. *Two Treatises on Government: a translation into modern English*. Manchester: Industrial Systems Research, 2009. 117.

therefore represents an agreement between free agents to protect the liberties of the individual, which contrasts significantly with the Hobbesian view.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was interested in dealing with similar issues, and he believed that the Hobbesian depiction of the savage man was inaccurate, or at least incomplete. In his *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau examines human nature in its most primitive form in an attempt to trace the roots of inequality among men. He strips man down to his most basic form, “such as he must have issued from the hands of Nature” and asserts that despite being less agile or physically powerful than other animals, mankind is “the most advantageously organized of all.”<sup>4</sup> Rousseau proposes that the “savage man” (that is, someone living outside of society) is not ruled merely by self-preservation, but also by an inherent sense of compassion that occurs between sentient beings, which he calls *pitié*. The virtue of pity serves to lessen man’s natural fervency for egocentrism and causes him to feel compassion for others despite his tendency to act out of self-interest. This leads Rousseau to argue that the eventual formation of societies (and subsequently, of governments) is in the interest of both pity and self-preservation, as it would be difficult to imagine communities existing without them. Contrary to Hobbes (and Locke, to a point), Rousseau does not envision an inherently violent or anxious State of Nature. His is one of relative peace, and to him societies are formed not to escape nature but to improve peoples’ lives and enable them to accomplish more than they could have individually.

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<sup>4</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, and Donald A. Cress. *Basic Political Writings*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987. Print. 47.

Aristotle takes a quite different approach from the State of Nature theorists in justifying the formation of the state in his *Politics*. Instead of merely being conditioned by self-preservation, Aristotle conceptualizes that political associations are formed because it is human nature to engage in politics. Aristotle begins by stating that all human endeavors are aimed at “some good” and that therefore the formation of a political association must also be aimed at “some good.” From this, he rationalizes that the political institution aimed at the highest good, which also encompasses many smaller goods, should be said to have the highest authority. This institution for him is the Greek *polis* (and for us, the state), which is the natural culmination of its parts. In an attempt to attain a higher quality of living, human beings have formed various associations, beginning with the household, and then the village, and then ultimately the state, or nation. Aristotle concludes that man is “by nature a political animal”<sup>5</sup> insofar as he is naturally inclined to form political units. If one were to live outside of the state, or polis, he would be denying his nature and reducing himself to something less than an animal, which is naturally at home in the wild. It is only as part of the polis that man can achieve his highest ends.

Each of the above thinkers has a different understanding of what it means to be a human being, and this leads each to a different conclusion about what a society ought to look like. The Hobbesian perspective, which views man in a quite negative light, lends itself to absolutism in an effort to control and constrain its citizens; to get them to act not according to their nature but in a more manageable and civilized fashion. Life in Hobbes’ State of Nature is a hellish chaos, and a strong controlling hand is necessary in

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<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, and C. D. C. Reeve. *Politics*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub., 1998. Print. 1253a1-5.

order to keep the peace. Locke's understanding of human nature bears many similarities to Hobbes' but he has a quite different perspective on it. He views the inherently dangerous conditions of the State of Nature as having a great deal of value in the way they allow for individualism and freedom, but he still considers it to be unideal. Aristotle's view of nature, although he doesn't address it as explicitly as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, is also somewhat pessimistic. To him, human beings are essentially insignificant when taken individually and their lives lack meaning or importance when separated from their communities. The state is what teaches virtue and civility, and men separated from their state are no better than animals, or worse—barbarians. This leads Aristotle to suggest that any form of government is preferable to none at all, presumably even if its citizens are miserable.

Rousseau's conception of human nature is less negative: he sees mankind as relatively well off prior to the creation of the state, and thus his state aims to mirror in many ways the conditions of nature. Rousseau claims that in Nature man is subject only to his instincts, guided by the inherent principles of self-preservation and pity. The "savage man" has few needs in this state and no conception of good or evil. In response to Hobbes' assertion that a life in the State of Nature is miserable, Rousseau asks, "What kind of misery can there be for a free being whose heart is at peace and whose body is in good health?" After all, the burdens of the soul do not weigh on the savage man as they do on the civil man. The civil man is more complex but also more vulnerable, while the savage man must "think only of food, rest, and sex."<sup>6</sup> It is a primitive state, but a happy one.

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<sup>6</sup> Rousseau. 60, 47.

## Section C: Compassion

Having discussed three different justifications for the existence of government, let us try to explain the intended relationship between citizen and state. I have already mentioned that a citizen's political action is conditioned by two fundamental aspects of his nature—compassion and pride—and that these two aspects of his nature must be taken into account if a legitimate government is to function properly. Here I will discuss the former.

Rousseau's idea of self-preservation is relatively unusual. While he concurs with most other thinkers of natural law in emphasizing every animal's natural duty to perpetuate its life, Rousseau couples this right with a deeply engrained desire to not cause others pain. He calls this characteristic pity, or compassion, and explains that it helps to counter man's self-preservational instincts:

[Pity], having been given to man in order to mitigate, in certain circumstances, the ferocity of his egocentrism, or the desire for self-preservation before this egocentrism of his came into being, tempers the ardor he has for his own well-being by an innate repugnance to seeing his fellow men suffer.<sup>7</sup>

Self-preservation is among man's strongest instincts and dictates nearly every one of his actions, but only the most desperate circumstances can drive him to harm another human being. Rousseau suggests the maxim: "*Do what is good for you with as little harm as possible to others.*"<sup>8</sup> In other words, one should not necessarily disregard the well-being of his peers in the interest of self-preservation. This feeling of pity, or compassion, is one of mankind's most basic and pragmatic instincts.

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<sup>7</sup> Rousseau. 62.

<sup>8</sup> Rousseau. 64.

From as early as infancy, a baby will cry upon witnessing the displeasure of another, signifying an inherent sense of compassion between people. This tendency continues to develop over the course of a lifetime, becoming stronger and more complex, and extending beyond one's immediate peers. While an infant's sense of compassion may be limited to his caregivers and later to his family and friends, by late adolescence most people have already developed a keen sense of empathy. This empathy not only enables, but necessitates people to put themselves in the shoes of another when considering how their actions will affect those around them. A century of psychological research indicates that by the time young men and women reach adulthood, they are capable of not just interpreting other's emotional and physiological states, but also intuitively predicting them. This sense allows people to experience, viscerally or emotionally, the feelings or thoughts of another. The phenomenon being described here is often referred to as "feeling for" someone else, and it is one that every normally functioning and psychologically stable individual has experienced firsthand.<sup>9</sup> This tendency, while emotionally charged, is not grounded in subjective emotion, but rather in biological instinct. Humans must have compassion because without it the species would be on a drastically different trajectory, one without complex civilization, which would be impossible without an incredible propensity for cooperation. It is man's natural distaste for pain and his instinctual drive to protect his species that inclines him toward pity. At this point, it may be beneficial to consider pity as an extension of man's

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<sup>9</sup> Eisenberg, Nancy, and Janet Strayer. *Empathy and Its Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987. Print. 5-6.

self-preservational instincts that serves to temper or direct it, as oppose to simply countering it.

Due to man's "repugnance" at witnessing the hardship of his peers, he is made to act morally when interacting with others. Even when acting out of self-interest, the savage man rarely seeks to take advantage of others because he has nothing to gain by doing so with no conception of property or value beyond survival in the State of Nature. Instead, he chooses to help others, often at his own expense. An act of pity can even serve to undermine one's self-preservation. For example, while saving someone's life is an act of compassion, it also perpetuates the competition for important resources like food. Nonetheless, pity constantly drives man to act with apparent disregard for self-interest. Rousseau writes:

Pity is what carries us without reflection to the aid of those we see suffering. Pity is what, in the state of nature, takes the place of laws, morals, and virtue, with the advantage that no one is tempted to disobey its sweet voice.<sup>10</sup>

This understanding of common interest or support serves the same purpose as a set of laws or virtues because it protects each individual and any of his or her extensions, i.e., one's property and loved ones. If one feels pity and sympathy for another, he is less inclined to harm him. Compassion discourages violence and encourages co-existence and natural equality, as laws attempt to do. Rousseau's take on "natural law" differs significantly from Locke's, which entails merely the right to protect oneself and results in conflict, not peace. The "advantage" that Rousseau mentions is that since these natural

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<sup>10</sup> Rousseau. 64.



laws exist inherently in mankind, there is no controlling authority or coercing party to oppose. It would seem, then, that a state in which man is most free to act in accordance with his nature is both happier and contains less social unrest. If the laws were merely a reflection of man's own natural tendencies, where would he be tempted to disobey?

#### Section E: Pride

Having addressed compassion, it is important to discuss the other essential aspect of human nature—pride—and where it originates. In order to survive, the savage man needed to learn to protect himself and hunt. Rousseau writes, “his superiority over the other animals ...produced within him the first stirrings of pride; ...he laid claim to it in virtue of his individuality.”<sup>11</sup> Man began to consider himself dominant among species, which led to the development of pride. Although the savage man had previously preferred to remain solitary, he started comparing himself to others and finding that they had much in common. This enabled him to either work with others or continue to live alone; all this without the development of a spoken language. When man discovered certain tasks were more plausible with the help of others, his inclination switched to community-based living, since he no longer would need to preform every task himself. Societies grew in size, starting with small families and ending eventually in entire nations.

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<sup>11</sup> Rousseau. 70.

The pride that developed from man's self-awareness is not just an individual pride, or pride in oneself, but also a pride that extends beyond the self to include one's peers. Mankind's dominance over other species serves to unite it, and it seems at times that anything can be accomplished with cooperation. While nearly every species cooperates, some even more than humans, what these other species lack is intellect and morality, which are unique to humans. It is with these unique elements of humanity that one learns to feel pride for the right things and experience it at the proper moments. While pride is often negatively construed as egocentrism, there are several positive forms of pride that an individual can experience. Pride in one's community, for example, is a quite positive feeling to have, as is pride in one's work. Unlike individual pride, these other forms of pride are not grounded in an inflated self image, but rather in the knowledge that one has worked to create something good, like how athletes feel pride in the success of their team. With a sufficient intellect and a proper ethical background, one can appreciate the value of experiencing pride in certain instances.

Aristotle believed that a proper moral education was crucial to the flourishing of a society. Since the state is defined by its citizens, a good state must be made up of good citizens, and a good state would also produce good citizens. Part of being a virtuous citizen is learning how to properly experience certain feelings, like pleasure and pain, or joy and sadness. One of the concepts that is fundamental to Aristotle's ethics is that of the "Golden Mean", which implies maintaining a balance between two extremes of one's character, one being excess and the other being deficiency.<sup>12</sup> It is in the balance of

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<sup>12</sup> Aristotle, and Richard McKeon. *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. New York: Random House, 2009. Print. 1106a26-b28.

these extremes that true virtue belongs. For example, courage is the Mean between recklessness and cowardice. Someone who is courageous is able to assess certain dangers and recognize that some are worth facing and others are not, and the amount of fear he experiences is appropriate to the situation. A coward would be overcome by fear, and a reckless person would have no fear at all. Aristotle suggests that the same scheme applies to each of the virtues. Virtue, then, is an intermediate condition that must be experienced in moderation.

Pride is considered a virtue by Aristotle, and it exists in the mean between vanity and timidity. He describes it thus: "Now the man is thought to be proud who thinks himself worthy of great things, being worthy of them; for he who does so beyond his deserts is a fool".<sup>13</sup> One who considers himself to be worthy of greatness, or capable of great things, but is in fact neither, is vain. The vain person is delusional and has an inflated self image; his opinion of himself is not reflected in his actions and he wrongly attributes certain virtues to himself. On the other hand, one who considers himself to be unworthy of greatness, or fails to recognize his greatness is timid, or "unduly humble". The timid person is also unable to perceive himself accurately, though in a way opposite to the vain person. One who is proud, though, is both worthy of great things and knows himself to be so. He is able to see himself for what he is, and to meaningfully judge his own worth. One who is proud should also be recognized by his peers for being great, since his opinion of himself must correspond with others' opinions of him, because greatness is not a subjective condition to Aristotle.

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<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, McKeon. 1125a15-20.

In addition to feeling pride in the proper ways, one must also feel pride at the proper moments, and for the proper things. The proud person does not feel pride in regards to “small matters”, but rather his focus is on greater things. The greatest endeavor from the Aristotelian perspective is the political life, or the engagement of a citizen with his state. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* he describes politics as “the most authoritative” and “the master art”.<sup>14</sup> The highest end that one can pursue is a life of politics, which is a life dedicated to the betterment of one’s community. Since it is human nature to form political communities, then one’s humanity is inherently tied to the state, and it is his responsibility to improve it.

Aristotle’s 5th century Athens was governed by direct democracy, a system in which every citizen has equal say in all the decision-making of the polis. Citizens were invited each week to attend the public assembly where they would vote, by show of hands, on policies proposed by their fellow Athenians. These meetings generally took place in the *agora*, or the central marketplace of the city, which was the heart of the city’s public life. While those most eloquent and persuasive were often admired as leaders within the assembly, there was no official transference of authority to others in the form of delegates or electors. This direct democracy differs considerably from American representative government in that a sense of personal responsibility for the success (or failure) of the polis was deeply embedded within its citizens.

As adolescents, all Greeks were required to undergo military training and serve in their city-state’s army. In Athens, these young men were called *ephebos*, and they

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<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, McKeon. 1094b.

were instructed in fighting, physical fitness, and academics (referred to as *ephebic* training) before fulfilling two years of mandatory military service at the age of eighteen. Similar to a school class or team, the ephebes would enjoy a wide range of activities aimed at fraternization and camaraderie, such as playing sports or putting on organized performances for the viewing pleasure of the polis. Once they had graduated from their ephebic status and become men in the eyes of the state, each was officially granted citizenship. Every citizen was expected (but not legally obligated) to take part in the political life of the city by serving terms in public office and attending judicial or deliberative assemblies, where individuals were free to express their own beliefs and opinions. Citizens lived together, fought together, enjoyed leisure together, and governed together. As a result, they shared a unique and proud bond.

So strong was this bond that to be exiled from the polis was considered a fate far worse than death. One could be banished from the city for life, or one could be exiled for a period of ten years, which was called ostracism. Once a year the assembly would meet in the agora to discuss potential ostracisms; each citizen would write the names of those they wanted to be exiled and place them into an urn to be counted. If, according to Plutarch, one name received at least six-thousand votes, that citizen would have his case debated two months later. A maximum of one citizen could be exiled each year. Ostracism was used employed most often as a preemptive measure against a perceived tyrant or some other treat to the Athenian democracy. While the great and controversial political leader Pericles was not ostracized himself, he was at multiple times a candidate. One of his prominent rivals, Thucydides (not the historian), was ostracized and removed from Athens when his beliefs were deemed to be subversive.

In the 6th century B.C., Peisistratos was permanently banished for attempting to claim power in Athens. While in exile, he amassed an army of mercenaries and returned to the city to take it by force. One could also be forced into exile without a formal trial, such as in the case of the tyrant Alcibiades, who first fled to Sparta and then to Persia, after being involved in a brutal takeover of Athens, during which the city-state became an oligarchy instead of a democracy.

In the words of the orator Antiphon, to be exiled was to become “a beggar in a strange land, an old man without a city.”<sup>15</sup> One’s life was so intertwined with his peers and with the city that to be forced out of it would have been unthinkable to most. Aristotle argued that since the polis and the individual citizen each ultimately desired happiness, their aims were inseparable. As a result, the concept of opposition between the laws of the state and the rights or freedoms of its citizens did not exist in ancient Athens. They were considered to be one and the same. This would lead Aristotle to posit, famously, that man is “by nature a political animal”, in that man’s sense of personhood was deeply reliant on political association. He went as far as to assert that man fails to fulfill his ultimate purpose when disconnected from the polis; he is not “human” in the truest sense of the word. Aristotle, in his extreme communitarianism, argued that life has no value outside the boundaries of the state. His predecessor, Socrates, refused to leave Athens even through periods of intense violence and political scrutiny, despite many accounts indicating that he would have been welcomed by nearly any city. Instead he was reserved to die, rather than flee from his city.

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<sup>15</sup> Allen, Danielle S. *The World of Prometheus: The Politics of Punishing in Democratic Athens*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000. Print. 204.

The pride that the Athenians felt for their community is unmatched, and it represents the ideal relationship between citizen and state. This sense of pride is absolutely essential to the proper functioning of any political community, and it grows from the involvement of each individual. If someone feels a deep connection with something, he is likely to do his best to sustain and improve it, especially if it is something he himself created. In an ideal and legitimate state, every citizen has a hand in its functioning and its progression. In this way, the political trajectory of the state aligns with the spirit of its citizens, and constantly evolves along with their views. People are always evolving, and it should always be the goal of a legitimate state to evolve with them.

#### Section E: Pride, Compassion, Gardens

If pride is the force that motivates political action, then compassion is what directs it. Empathy exists inherently between people, but this empathy rarely applies beyond one's immediate relationships. A small child may care for his parents or his siblings, but he is not yet able to extend this same sense of empathy to those not closest to him. By adolescence he most likely cares about many more people than he did as a child, such that he is beginning to be able to imagine himself in another's shoes, but still his perspective and compassion are limited to his own private world. It is only in adulthood that one's sphere of empathy can plausibly extend so far as to include the interests of people across the country, or half way around the world, and even then

it is still an imperfect compassion. Compassion, like pride, is a virtue that must be cultivated if it is to properly condition political action.

A properly developed sense of compassion is rooted in the understanding that people are interconnected and the desire to not cause harm to others. The truly compassionate political actor does not seek to take advantage of others for personal gain, but rather he sees their interests as the same. His sense of pride is tightly interwoven with his sense of compassion, as the latter forces the former outward, despite its tendency to face inward. It is what causes him to feel pride in the success of the state, because each of his peers is seen as an extension of himself and his own identity. The compassionately prideful man is one doesn't judge his worth by comparison to his fellow citizens, but by the effects his actions have on his fellow citizens. Compassion, when applied to the political sphere, is what guides people toward right action and allows for a sense of national pride that is grounded in the success of the state, and never in xenophobia.

The conceptual moment when mankind leaves the state of nature in favor of society is crucial in understanding the legitimacy of government. Hobbes, Rousseau, and other social contract theorists share in common the belief that people enter into society with the goal in mind to protect themselves and live better. After all, no one would consent to something that somehow reduced their standard of living. Where these theorists differ is in their view of human nature and the degree to which the state is obligated to constrain it. Hobbes' state of nature is brutal, anxious, and unsafe. He describes it as *bellum omnium contra omnes*, or "the war of all against all", in his



*Leviathan*. His view of the savage man is the most primitive of the state of nature theorists, and he saw men as naturally and violently opposed to one another in their fierce competition for resources and survival. Because of this negative view of human nature, he asserted that the best government (an absolute monarch in his case) must be one that counters man's innate tendencies and forces him into submission. Hobbes is not concerned as much with bringing people together, as he believes that it is not in their nature to coexist: "men have no pleasure, (but on the contrary a great deal of griefe) in keeping company."<sup>16</sup> Thus his envisioned state is one in which people are held or forced together. It is not one built upon human nature, but one built in opposition to it. The state of nature is a despicable state; one that must be escaped by any means necessary.

What separates Rousseau's social and political theory from Hobbes' is that the former views humans in a more positive light. To Rousseau, the state of nature is not something to be feared, but rather something to be revered. The savage man is much more psychologically complex than Hobbes would have us believe. The savage man is concerned with extending his life, but not necessarily at the expense of others. He is completely content, or even happy, in his limited existence because he has everything he needs to survive and no knowledge of anything more. Even more significant is the fact that the savage man has complete freedom, which is something that has not existed since the advent of society. Whereas Hobbes is fearful of this freedom, because he thinks men would use this freedom to harm one another, Rousseau embraces it because he believes they will choose to coexist in relative peace. This view leads

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<sup>16</sup> Hobbes. 88.

Rousseau to advocate a form of government not aimed at constraining its citizens, but instead at providing them with as many “natural” rights as possible and encouraging cooperation. Any laws preventing citizens from doing harm to one another could be justified on the basis that they protect and encourage human nature.

Additionally, they hold different views regarding the natural and legal rights of people, some appearing unalienable and other appearing quite alienable. It is clear that man must give up certain freedoms in order to enjoy a higher standard of living, but the key is finding which freedoms he is capable of giving up while still feeling free. This feeling of freedom is absolutely crucial to an optimally functioning society. In order to experience a well-founded pride in one's state, he must feel a sense of connection to it that can only be built by means of political engagement. Just as an artist experiences pride in creating a work of art, or a worker in a job well done, so too does a citizen's pride in his state follow from his personal stake in it. It is his feeling of freedom, though, that enables him to interact genuinely and without constraint with his state. If the state were to impose itself on its citizens in a way that made them feel imposed on, they would begin feeling resentment toward it, not pride. One's feeling of nationalism and political pride must be rooted in the belief that he affected it and that he chose freely to feel this way.

In his book *Utopia*, Thomas More aims to create a perfect “utopian” society based on his own ideology. Among some of the strange and unique religious, economic, and political customs he describes, More emphasizes the intense connection his Utopians have with one another and with the state. His is a society without personal

property, so each family takes turns living in different houses, all of which are built almost identically with a large garden space out front. More is fascinated with the way in which the Utopians interact with these temporary, communal spaces. He pays particular attention to the gardens of these houses, which the Utopians maintain with the utmost care:

They cultivate their gardens with great care, so that they have both vines, fruits, herbs, and flowers in them; and all is so well ordered, and so finely kept, that I never saw gardens anywhere that were both so fruitful and so beautiful as theirs. And this humour of ordering their gardens so well, is not only kept up by the pleasure they find in it, but also by an emulation between the inhabitants of the several streets, who vie with each other; and there is indeed nothing belonging to the whole town that is both more useful and more pleasant.<sup>17</sup>

More's preoccupation with these gardens is both strange and striking upon first encounter with the text, but it is apparent that they represent something far more significant to him than the outdoor recreation they entail and the beautification they provide. The Utopian garden is a symbol of the state as a whole, and the care that citizens put into maintaining their gardens is reflective of their relationship with their state. Though it is not spelled out neatly for the reader, More characterizes his Utopians' sense of citizenship through not just their civic engagement, but also their seemingly insignificant interests and pastimes.

Although several aspects of More's Utopian society are too foreign to seriously entertain, his discussion of gardens represents well the ideal connection between citizen and state. The garden is the medium through which Utopians can express their

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<sup>17</sup> More, Thomas, George M. Logan, and Robert M. Adams. *Thomas More: Utopia*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print. 31-32.

love for their community. These gardens are not theirs to keep, but still they feel intense satisfaction in working to make it better. Each group of Utopians that rotates through any given house contributes to the flourishing of that house's garden, making it more fruitful and beautiful for the family that moves in next. In a short period of time the entire city is filled with lush gardens, which everyone agrees is both pleasant and practical. What is most remarkable about this practice is that these Utopians are driven not by selfishness or ego, but by a desire to contribute to something greater than what any one individual can achieve. They are not forced by the state to maintain their gardens but rather chose to do so freely. Outside of his viewing pleasure, the individual does not clearly gain anything for himself by gardening. But his actions, and the simultaneous actions of his peers, are what make Utopia such a nice place to live. It is a society comprised of people who believe in making it as good as it can be and feel pride in doing so.

In an ideal state, each person should strive to make his state better and this is done through political action. Imagine that the political sphere is one large Utopian garden with every citizen engaged in making it flourish. This engagement is not just essential in making the state as good as it can possibly be, but it also cultivates a sense of pride for the state that can only grow from having a personal stake in it. This personal stake is the basis for a healthy national pride, which derives not from fear or dislike of others but from communal accomplishment. Once this pride is built, it will continue to encourage political action.

## Part Two

### Section A: The State as a Fluid Amalgamation of Wills

Since the state has no legitimacy beyond that which it is given by its citizens, who consent (whether explicitly or implicitly) to live within it instead of within the state of nature, it must find harmony between both their intrinsic nature and their desires. It must be not an absolute authority but rather a true consensus of its people. A direct democracy is best because it is capable of most truly reflecting the will of its citizens through their direct contribution and because it empowers each man to, more or less, be the master of his own fate. In fact, I would posit that *any* other form of government is illegitimate in that each fails to adequately embody the spirit of its people and to foster compassion and pride within them.

As has been stated previously, one's will cannot be delegated, and the only adequate representation is self-representation. A government that fails to engage its citizens cannot be considered legitimate, since it was formed on the basis of their political cooperation, and no person would willingly relinquish their authority or consent to be governed by their peer. The Hobbesian monarchy alienates the individual from the state, and ultimately from his peers. It also counters mankind's natural tendencies, fostering resentment and eventually building dissent, which leads to social unrest and violence. Rousseau's government brings people together. And since it is built upon our natural values and inclinations, there is much less resentment. Widespread public involvement is important in fostering a sense of freedom, interconnection, and national pride. These things are inherently lacking in authoritarian governments.

Government is nothing more than an amalgamation of its peoples' wills, and it is through them that it originates. A government should at no point have a will, identity, or purpose of its own. These are continuously created for it by its citizens through political engagement. The sole purpose of government should be to facilitate the political activity of its citizens and it should have no inherent responsibility beyond this. The only legitimate form of government must therefore be the one that most directly embodies the wills and natures of its citizens. In any legitimate state, there is little or no distinction between the citizens and the state, and the state is perceived merely as an extension of its people, evolving constantly with them and at no point constraining or controlling them.

### Section B - Tyranny of the Majority

A rational criticism of direct democracy, and indeed any form of democracy, would be that it allows for 'tyranny of the majority', a term coined by John Adams in the late 18th century. This is a condition in which the majority population places its own interests above those of the various minority populations within a state. The interest of the majority can often be at the expense of the minority, causing the latter to feel imposed on. The oppression experienced by the minority is comparable to that experienced under a tyrant or autocrat. Indeed it is the nature of democracies to form a consensus, or general will, that sees some suffer while most flourish.

This phenomena is represented by the famous trial of Socrates in 399 B.C., which brought an end to one of the most intellectually enlightened eras in history. The

event continues to baffle philosophers and historians today. Why, in a society praised for its freedom and intellectuality, would a jury of five hundred Athenians sentence to death a man who has been described as the 'wisest man in Greece' just years before he would have met his natural end?<sup>18</sup> The fact that Socrates taught in Athens for his entire adult life with minimal hinderance serves to further complicate this question. What could he have said or done to warrant the steep charges laid against him? While it is impossible to truly determine the rationale behind such a verdict, an analysis of the relevant sources indicates that Socrates was perceived as a threat to the Athenian democracy and the traditional institutions of the city.

Despite his fame and the unparalleled influence he has had on the development of philosophy, little is actually known of the character of Socrates. Since he never wrote down his ideas or kept written records, all information regarding the man himself can be found in various subjective accounts by his contemporaries. Born in 470 B.C., as a young man Socrates witnessed the rise to power of Pericles and the dawn of a new era of prosperity and freedom that followed. Pericles (who may well have been the first liberal politician in Western history) believed that everyone deserved liberty, not just wealthy property owners. His allocation of Athenian resources to the arts, courts, and public welfare initiatives resulted in a significant power shift from the once all-powerful aristocrats to the masses.

Yet despite having come of age in the bastion of democracy and liberalism that was fifth-century Athens, Socrates developed a curious set of ideals that would separate

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<sup>18</sup> Grube, G. M. A. *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1981. 21a.

him from most of his fellow Athenians and ultimately serve as the basis for some of the charges against him. Socrates was neither a democrat nor did he believe in a sense of inherent equality among men. In fact, he posited that the masses were not fit for self-governance, but rather they should be guided by those most wise and suited for leadership. Furthermore, he asserted that the common man was not capable of cultivating the virtue and intellect necessary for a state to flourish, and he even protested the right of such citizens to participate in politics and speak in public assemblies. Socrates' unpopular opinions quickly became known, as the majority of his discussions would take place in the streets of Athens. In Plato's *Gorgias*, Socrates criticizes Pericles for causing Athenians to become "idle, cowardly, talkative and avaricious."<sup>19</sup> According to the third century biographer Diogenes Laertius, who wrote a series of brief histories on many prominent figures, Socrates developed a reputation as an eccentric instigator who often voiced his beliefs with condescension and contempt, making his listeners angry and even provoking some to violence. Laertius writes of Socrates, "frequently, owing to his vehemence in argument, men set upon him with their fists or tore his hair out; and for the most part he was despised and laughed at, yet bore all this ill-usage patiently."<sup>20</sup> However controversial his teachings may have been, Socrates was probably not perceived as much of a threat to Athens until later in his life. Or perhaps he was simply testing the tolerance of his peers, until they reached breaking point at the time of the trial. Nevertheless, he was allowed to continue his philosophizing throughout his entire adult life without significant interference.

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<sup>19</sup> Jowett, Benjamin. *Gorgias*. Champaign, Ill.: Project Gutenberg, 199. 515e.

<sup>20</sup> Hicks, Robert Drew. "The Life of Socrates." In *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. London: W. Heinemann. 1925.



Socrates' reputation suffered significantly around the turn of the fourth century when the democracy was temporarily overthrown twice by two of Socrates' closest friends and pupils; Alcibiades in 411 B.C. and Critias about six years later. The teachings of Socrates began to be seen as subversive, as the two violent revolutions led by the pro-aristocratic Alcibiades and Critias reflected his distaste for the current Athenian government and his oligarchic leanings. Socrates was even said to have admired Sparta (the primary rival of Athens) for its oligarchy, which is expressed in Aristophanes' *Birds*, when he is described as the idol of the pro-Spartan dissenters in Athens.<sup>21</sup> During these two brief periods of oligarchy, Athens witnessed incredible violence and many of the prominent members of the democracy were either killed or exiled from Athens, including Anytus, who would later be one of the leading prosecutors of Socrates. Critias belonged to a notorious group of oligarchs called the Thirty Tyrants, who would wreak further destruction and injustice upon the people of Athens, and who propounded many of the same ideals as Socrates. While it is unclear as to what Socrates' relationship was with the Thirty Tyrants, he said and did nothing to stop their injustice, and this would be mentioned during his trial. At this time, the Athenians began to perceive Socrates in a new light: his teachings were no longer harmless and he was no longer just a local eccentric with questionable values. From this point on, he was viewed as a dangerous influence that bred tyrants and threatened the common people.

Following the reestablishment of the democracy in 403 B.C., an official pardon prevented Socrates and a great many others from being prosecuted for any of their

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<sup>21</sup> Arrowsmith, William. *Four Plays by Aristophanes: The Clouds, The Birds, Lysistrata, The Frogs*. New York: Meridian Classic, 1984. 112.

actions during or before the reign of the Thirty Tyrants. In other words, Socrates would have to be charged with criminal activity between the years 403 and 399 B.C., however, he would continue his teachings unflinchingly during these years despite pressure to cease. He once again found himself at the center of another anti-democratic revolt in 401, this one also led by the disgruntled aristocratic youth, who were well-known to have flocked to Socrates. The people of Athens had had enough of Socrates and his influence over their youth. His close relationship with the traitor Alcibiades and the barbarous Critias was suspicious to say the least and his knack for attracting young, powerful Athenian aristocrats would have been enough to warrant his execution in association with the injustice of the Thirty Tyrants. Despite the general amnesty that was issued following the reinstatement of the democracy, Socrates continued to voice his anti-egalitarian, pro-oligarchic beliefs with a fervor that was credited for turning otherwise peaceful young men into violent Spartan-emulating tyrants.

A famous interpretation of the trial is presented by Aechines about fifty years later, indicating that the true cause of Socrates' execution was his association with the Thirty Tyrants. To a jury of Athenians he spoke, "you executed Socrates, the sophist, because he was clearly responsible for the education of Critias, one of the thirty anti-democratic leaders."<sup>22</sup> This allusion to Socrates by the orator Aechines is incredibly significant and indicative of the underlying issue of the trial. Aechines wouldn't have made this reference if the reason for the philosopher's execution was not generally accepted to have been his connection to the Tyrants, and the fact that Aechines won his

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<sup>22</sup> "I. F. Stone Interviewed about the Trial of Socrates." 8 Apr. 1979. <<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/socrates/ifstoneinterview.html>>.

case further demonstrates the potency of this reference. The injustice and brutality of the Thirty Tyrants was still fresh in the memory of Athenians and so too was the blemish on Socrates' reputation that resulted from his indisputable influence on Critias, the most powerful of the oligarchs. While it is impossible to prove that Socrates was directly responsible for the injustices committed against the democracy, an analysis of the available information warrants, at least, guilt by association. The incredible irony of the trial is that Athens, a city-state in which its citizens enjoyed unparalleled cultural and intellectual liberty, sentenced to death their greatest thinker in what is perhaps one of the most significant and obvious abridgments of a citizen's freedom of speech in Western history. In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates calls himself a "gadfly", responsible for keeping the horse that is the Athenian state from getting lazy by always asking questions and seeking justice, but according to journalist I.F. Stone, "it seems his sting was not much in evidence when Athens needed it most."<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the real guilt of the wisest man in Greece was his inaction in the face of clear injustice.

### Section C - The State as a Moral Teacher

Among the most significant political philosophers to disapprove of the state's involvement in the lives of its citizens is John Stuart Mill. In his book *On Liberty*, Mill applies his utilitarian ethics to the state and to society as a whole. He has his own ideal for the relationship between the individual and authority—one in which the state has no right to take away the liberty of its citizens in any way. There are several ways that a

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<sup>23</sup> Stone 1979.

state can threaten the liberties of its people. One way is to directly impose its will on them in such a way that the individual feels as though he cannot make his own decisions, or that he is constrained in his action. This way is quite straightforward, but Mill believes that a government also threatens its people's freedom when it uses coercion or attempts to influence them against their will. This includes manipulating public opinion or indirectly inserting certain beliefs into the minds of the masses. In Mill's most legitimate and ideal state, each individual is free to pursue his own interests and do his best to improve his own life. The only restriction on this freedom is that one's actions cannot cause harm to others.

In chapter one, Mill famously posits, "That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent one from doing harm to others."<sup>24</sup> This assertion forms the basis of Mill's 'Harm Principle', which remains the cornerstone of libertarian theory. According to the Harm Principle, any action which threatens the integrity of another individual's complete sovereignty is unjustified, even if the best interests of said individual are at the heart of the action:

His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinion of others, to do so would be wise, or even right... The only part of the conduct of anyone, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely

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<sup>24</sup> Collini, Stefan. *J. S. Mill: On Liberty and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1989. Print. 13.

concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.<sup>25</sup>

The only instances where such actions can be justified are when the the wellbeing of an individual is at stake. For example, the state is justified in making laws that keep its citizens from killing one another, or perhaps even in punishing those who break such laws. That any harmful action between men is unacceptable follows from mankind's most basic instinct: self-preservation. Mill's understanding of self-preservation is quite similar to Rousseau's, and both men agree that it is an innate and inescapable aspect of human nature. Every person has the right to protect themselves, and it is man's most natural liberty.

It would seem that a state aimed at moral education is at odds with the libertarian belief that government ought not to interfere in the lives of its citizens. Indeed, it has already been established that governments derive their legitimacy only from the people, and that the only legitimate governments act solely in accordance with the wills of its people. In a just and proper state, the individual is the master of his own fate; he is free to make decisions for himself regarding how he wants to live and how he spends his time. There are many today who resent any action taken by the government that disturbs their lives at all, even if it is for the benefit of the whole. It is essential that government not purposely act against the desires of its people or cause harm to them in any way. An ideal state reflects the nature of its citizens, and among man's most natural tendencies are pride and compassion. An ideal state is therefore not only proud and

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<sup>25</sup> Collini. *On Liberty*. 13.

compassionate in and of itself, but it aims to further cultivate these virtues within its citizens. It is in this way that a government can, and must, work to instill and perfect the virtues of pride and compassion without the possibility of conflicting with the wills of its people. The only time it is permissible for the state to involve itself in the personal lives of its citizens is to promote these most fundamental human values, which in turn encourage political activity and improve the state and the lives of its individuals.

Mill's understanding of man's most primitive nature, that is, his inherent drive to preserve his own life, fails to take both pride and compassion into account. Pride grows from the drive for self-preservation. It is what makes people work constantly to improve their lives and achieve more, even once they are safe from harm. Compassion is the cause for man's natural aversion to harming others, despite his desire to improve his own lot at any cost. These two aspects of human nature are just as deeply embedded as liberty and self-preservation in the nature of mankind and ought therefore to play just as fundamental a role in a legitimate government.

It is absolutely crucial that a legitimate government foster pride and compassion within its people because without these it is impossible to achieve an ideal democracy. The most ideal democracy is one in which the greatest number of citizens is actively involved in the affairs of the state. The two forces of pride and compassion inspire and condition political action, which is necessary if a state is to accurately and continuously reflect the wills of its citizens. Each citizen ought to feel connected to the state as if it were something he himself worked tirelessly to create. He ought to feel pride in his state for this reason, just like an artist feels pride in his artwork or a doctor feels pride in

helping someone. This is not a selfish pride, but rather an appreciation of a job well done. In fact, pride in ones state can be characterized as the least selfish action achievable, since it inspires action in the service of something greater than any individual. Political action is most often aimed at the benefit of the community, and one rarely takes such action for the sake of himself.

Compassion is what tempers his intrinsic drive to please only himself, and motivates him to desire the welfare of others. American politics are dominated by a perpetual power struggle between two opposing parties, each seeking to undermine the other in an attempt to appease their advocates and increase their credibility. Too often the success of one party is at the expense of the other, and it seems that each decision made in favor of one is taking something from the other. Indeed, the success of one party is often described in terms of its curtailing of the other's agenda; one cannot thrive while the other does not suffer. A dominant percentage of Americans align themselves with one political party and will never stray from it. Polls over the last several presidencies have shown that the majority of citizens will vote for their party's candidate regardless of who that candidate is or what they represent, and without considering the other party's candidate whatsoever. The problem is, of course, a fundamental one rooted deeply in party politics, but one can imagine that in a world where one's interests extend beyond his own personal wellbeing to include the wellbeing of neighbors and distant countrymen alike, one might be more likely to make political decisions based on something more than party allegiance. With the proper manifestations of pride and compassion, one should feel personal fulfillment in the flourishing of his state. In this way, the interests of the state and the interests of the individual are aligned.

In response to Mill's assertion that a government has no right to threaten the sovereignty of the individual, or to interfere in the lives of its people, I posit that pride and compassion are fundamental to achieving true sovereignty. Pride and compassion are necessary for political action, which is the means by which one affirms his sovereignty and protects his liberty. In this sense, the cultivation of pride and compassion by the state is principally responsible for both sovereignty and liberty, and any state that does not work to instill these values in its citizens is keeping them from achieving the highest, most valuable form of free political action.

#### Section D: Nationalism and Compassionate Politics

Though the proper cultivation of pride and compassion within a citizen should result in a strong sense of nationalism, it is important to distinguish this well-founded attachment to one's state from the harmful manifestation of national pride that results in bigotry and xenophobia. Nationalist sentiment is most often built upon feelings of pride that one develops for his own people. This pride, though, frequently involves more than just love for one's country. History has shown that nationalist sentiment often corresponds directly with xenophobia, or hatred of foreigners. In other words, the more someone loves their country, the less they like people of different nationalities. It has also been shown that levels of nationalism and xenophobia both decrease with increases in education.<sup>26</sup> That is to say, the more educated people are, the less likely

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<sup>26</sup> Hjerm, Mikael. "Education, Xenophobia and Nationalism: A Comparative Analysis." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001).



they are to express nationalist sentiment and the less likely they are to express feelings of xenophobia. This leads to the somewhat unfair conclusion that intelligent people are, in general, less bigoted and less attached to their state than unintelligent people, who are more hateful and ignorantly nationalistic. Both xenophobia and nationalism, though, should be considered entirely separate from intelligence. The former is the result of a misled sense of pride and a lack of true compassion, and the latter is the result of a properly developed sense of pride that is conditioned by compassion.

The two sides of nationalism, the constructive and the destructive, can be seen even in short periods of history. The birth of German nationalism in the 19th century demonstrates well the power of national pride paired with compassion. At a time when Germany was merely a collection of independent states, enlightenment philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder created a concept of German nationalism based on collective self determination and cultural identity. His concept echoed many of the naturalistic sentiments of Rousseau, and asserted that the German nation derives its legitimacy from the shared language and culture of its people. In his *Addresses to the German Nation*, Johann Gottlieb Fichte posited:

Just as it is true beyond doubt that, wherever a separate language is found, there a separate nation exists, which has the right to take independent charge of its affairs and to govern itself.<sup>27</sup>

The German people shared an identity and they were drawn to one another naturally. This nationalist movement would endure the Napoleonic Wars before eventually achieving tentative unification in 1848 and forming a national spirit based on equal

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<sup>27</sup> Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, Reginald Foy Jones, and George Henry. Turnbull. *Addresses to the German Nation*. Chicago: Open court Pub. Co., 1922. 215.

representation, popular sovereignty, and most importantly, inclusion. In this instance, as well as in the example of 5th century Athens, the positive force of a healthy sense of nationalism is evident.

The negative manifestation of nationalism—one lacking in compassion—can be seen in Germany just a few short years later. The emergence of the German Empire in 1871 marked a fundamental shift in the way national identity was conceived of. What was once a government based on liberal, egalitarian values quickly became authoritarian in nature, as the goal of the newly formed nation changed from unification to asserting political, military, and cultural dominance on its citizens and its neighbors. German nationalism no longer served to inspire pride and compassion within its people, but instead indoctrinated its people with racism and social Darwinism. These sentiments would remain pervasive in Germany politics throughout the First and Second World Wars, during which Germany would be motivated by naked aggression and unchecked pride to commit heinous crimes against their enemies.

Though every human has the innate capacity for compassion, the type of compassion necessary to counter the potential destructiveness of national pride is not easy to cultivate. As is discussed earlier, it takes a degree of maturity and habituation in order for one's compassion to truly extend beyond his own countrymen, let alone his own peers. Compassion is rooted in a shared identity, and it can be quite difficult for someone to feel a shared identity with someone from a different culture. But even people of different culture, color, or language are united in the most important and fundamental way: they are all members of the human race and can therefore empathize with one another profoundly. Though not every human being is able to recognize this

shared global identity, it is much stronger than it may seem. During wartime, it is common practice to develop racist or dehumanizing attitudes toward ones enemies as a way of justifying or necessitating violence towards them. Reducing ones enemies to a subhuman level makes it easier for one to fight his compassionate nature, since it severs their shared identity and makes it more difficult to empathize. But to do harm to another human being is a betrayal of man's most intrinsic nature. It is the capacity for universal compassion that keeps pride in ones state from becoming a motivator for violence. The ideal citizen has pride in the flourishing of his state in addition to a keen sense of compassion for his fellow human beings.

This is Rousseau's concept of pity expanded beyond the individual to include the affairs of the state. His maxim for life within the State of Nature, "*do what is good for you with as little harm as possible to others*", can be understood in a much broader sense than Rousseau entails. If violence between people in the State of Nature is discouraged, if not avoided entirely, by their innate repulsion to causing harm to one another, then why can't this same drive also characterize international politics? Global interactions are largely governed by the same laws as the State of Nature, in the sense that there are no laws, nor a central government, to keep the peace. Order is maintained between nations by necessity. Although there have been times when this order has been lost, it is found again when man's natural compassion is allowed to take over. Compassion is what keeps international disputes from turning violent, and what encourages nations to work together to solve world problems instead of constantly waging war against one another. Just as in the State of Nature, the international players

always seek to protect themselves and improve their own positions, but rarely does this drive take the form of physical violence.

An ideal state is one governed by the principles of pride and compassion, which are the two drives most fundamental to human nature. It is comprised of citizens that feel a deep sense of pride in the flourishing of their state and for the role they play in its operation. But despite their desire to improve it as much as they are able, they will always stop short of causing harm to other states. They will also respect the pride others feel for their states because they understand the connection that exists between citizen and state if the latter is legitimate.

### Part Three

#### Section A: Citizen/State as Parent/Child

The relationship that one has with his state both guides his political action and grows from it. That one feels a connection to his countrymen and for his state should not be taken for granted, though. For example, a citizen of one state might find it easier to identify with the policies of another state if his appears to not reflect his values or beliefs. This is the fault of both the individual and his state. Just as a citizen has the responsibility to actively participate in the operation of his state through engaging in political action, the state has an obligation to foster the relationship between itself and its citizens. In an ideal state, a citizen will neither shy away from political action nor divorce himself from his national identity should his government make a decision he cannot support. Instead, his resolve is strengthened and his desire to engage in political

life is renewed. Just as each citizen is a child of the state, so too is the state a creation of its citizens—an amalgamation of their wills.

The necessary relationship between citizen and state is similar to the relationship between parent and child. A child is a reflection of his parents in some way, just as the state is a reflection of its citizens. But every parent wants his child to be somehow better than him, so he tries to pass down only his most positive and desirable traits. This is the same for a state, which models itself after a set of ideals that transcend the individual citizen. Although human beings are imperfect in nature, they must believe that through combined effort they can create a state that encompasses all of their best features, and as few of their negative ones as possible. Most importantly, a parent never gives up on his child. No matter what the child has done, a parent is never free of his parental responsibility. To abandon one's state just because it is not, at that moment, reflective of one's interests is to abandon his responsibility to his country and his countrymen. One must instead act as a parent would: he must do whatever is in his power to cause the change he wishes to see. Disappointment must be met with resiliency.

#### Section B: Beerbohm on Complicity

In his book *In Our Name: The Ethics of Democracy*, Eric Beerbohm of Harvard University discusses the complex relationship between citizen and state in a representative democracy. Though a representative democracy is less ideal than a direct one, the responsibilities of citizenship are the same. To him, the democratic citizen is bound to the state at birth, even though he doesn't necessarily choose to be

—“All of us were born into a political structure that we did not preselect.”<sup>28</sup> Just because one doesn’t chose which state he is born into doesn’t mean he can simply disavow his citizenship. Not every responsibility is volunteered for or agreed to, some are just inherent. Take morality for example. There are certain moral responsibilities the individual has when it comes to interacting with others that are unspoken, unenforced, and may be difficult to carry out. For instance, someone is obligated to report a crime or prevent injustices from being committed. If that person were to neglect those responsibilities simply by claiming that he didn’t consent to take them on, he would no doubt still be wrong, if not complicit in the crime for doing nothing to stop it.

This idea of moral complicity is central to Beerbohm’s piece. The question posed in the book’s short back-cover synopsis is, “When a government in a democracy acts in our name, are we, as citizens, responsible for those acts?” And his answer is simple: yes. Early on, he makes the assertion: “there are responsibilities of the democratic citizen that are nondelegable... I take complicity to be the professional hazard of democratic citizenship.”<sup>29</sup> That is to say, accountability on the part of the individual citizen for the acts of his state is implicit within a democratic system. His explanation is that since citizens in a democracy are causally bound to political outcomes, whether they actively contribute to them or not, they bear responsibility for both the just and the unjust actions of their state.

It may seem like a stretch in a representative democracy to consider voters legitimate agents because of how far removed they are from the actual decision-making

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<sup>28</sup> Beerbohm, Eric Anthony. *In Our Name: The Ethics of Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Beerbohm. 17.

process, but Beerbohm reasons that when voters elect individuals to represent their interests, they become morally liable for the actions those individuals take in their name. He posits, "Because our primary mode of political agency is mediated, we are vulnerable to the charge of participating in the wrongdoing of another."<sup>30</sup> But are individuals who voted against a specific candidate still guilty when that candidate takes office and goes on to commit injustice? Beerbohm says yes. He rationalizes this on the basis of association and mutual benefit. As supporters and recipients of the state, each and every citizen shares the burden of accountability for its actions. Complicity is completely unavoidable, and he is right to point this out.

Though it may not sound fair, it is rationally sound. However, the fact that a representative could possibly misrepresent the interests of his constituents points to the fundamental flaw of representative democracy: one's will cannot be delegated. It's been said before that the only adequate representation and self-representation and this is essential if the individual is to maintain his freedom and sovereignty. The disadvantages of representative democracy will be discussed further shortly, but for now it must suffice since it is the closest thing to an ideal government that exists today.

On the assumption that responsibility for the injustices of one's state is inevitable, one must do whatever is in his power to counteract these injustices. The principle cause of injustice is a lack of compassion. Without compassion, nothing is to stop a state from committing ethical crimes against another in order to advance its own agenda. Compassion must prevail because it is in man's nature for it to. But in order for it to be able to, each citizen must fulfill his responsibility to his state and to his countrymen by

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<sup>30</sup> Beerbohm. 17.

engaging in the political realm. To simply remove oneself from politics in the hopes of disassociating from the wrong-doers is morally impossible. This is like the example of a person witnessing a crime and doing nothing. Of course he is not actively participating in the crime, but he is at the very least an accessory to it.

### Section C: The “Moral Voter Complex” and Deliberation

Standing in the way of political engagement is what Beerbohm calls the “Moral Voter Complex”, which appears to be a struggle between morality and rationality within the voting individual. In a democratic system, the effect that one person can have on the outcome of a major decision is minuscule. When the typical citizen comes to realize this fact, he may be dissuaded from voting, or worse, disillusioned with the democratic system entirely. It seems that the individual is helpless in the face of injustice.

Beerbohm explains:

Once prudential citizens recognize that their ballot will be ineffectual, they will decide not only that participating in the polls flies in the face of rationality. Expending any epistemic effort into their vote is equally pointless. For it is nearly certain that any mental energy and time they invest will have no payoff. They lack incentives to lead an active mental life about politics, save the small minority who share an aesthetic appreciation for the topic.<sup>31</sup>

It may be rational for one to conclude that his vote will have no significant effect on the result of an election or the trajectory of his state’s policies, but this does not mean it is acceptable to abandon the political system to which he belongs. Rationality alone will not provide the incentive necessary for meaningful political engagement, which does not

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<sup>31</sup> Beerbohm. 69.



entail only voting occasionally for representatives in local or national elections. There is a moral component to democratic participation that is fundamental to the proper functioning of any legitimate state.

This moral component is ultimately what must prevail over rationality in Beerbohm's view. He begins his line of inquiry by asking, "Do citizens have moral reason to aim to reform unjust institutions, given their diminishing chances of playing a decisive role?"<sup>32</sup> This question of morality gets to the heart of the voter's inner conflict. On the one hand, the voter recognizes that his power to independently enact change on the scale that he wishes to is insignificant. On the other hand though, he has an ethical responsibility to fight injustice that he perceives in the actions of his state. Since each is essentially guilty by association, "citizens have reason to reduce their "complicity footprint" through more active participation."<sup>33</sup> What this means is to take active measures to try and neutralize the injustices committed by the state in the name of its citizens. Political activism, increases in voter turnout, and mediums of social and political dialogue are all demonstrations of the type of response to institutional wrongdoing that Beerbohm wishes to see.<sup>34</sup>

The "Moral Voter Complex" requires that one transcend his rational response—that the act of voting, when taken individually, is almost entirely inconsequential—and act from a place of moral necessity. But what morals is Beerbohm most concerned with? The Aristotelian virtues of wisdom, temperance, and justice? Does he mean the

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<sup>32</sup> Beerbohm. 67.

<sup>33</sup> Beerbohm. 24.

<sup>34</sup> Beerbohm. 123.

contemporary liberal virtues of egalitarianism and human rights? Is there an inherent moral standard, separate from either of these doctrines that he believes every democratic citizen should maintain? The answer is complicated. Beerbohm accepts that the typical citizen has many responsibilities outside of his political ones, and as a result, he cannot be reasonably expected to dedicate the same amount of time to political deliberation (a concept emphasized by many political theorists) as a career politician, for instance. This means that, from his view, citizens need not have a comprehensive understanding of ethics or political doctrine. Most of the work that needs to be done by the democratic citizen is described as “cognitive”.

Though his standard for deliberation is markedly lower than political theorists typically advocate, the process of deliberation is still crucial to proper political engagement. And while this deliberation does not depend on lofty or hyper-rational virtues, it does still depend on a couple more accessible ones. These are justice and the common good. He asserts, “All members of a democracy have cognitive responsibilities —moral obligations to form and manage their convictions about justice and the common good.”<sup>35</sup> ‘Common good’, in particular, is a quite vague idea, but this is the way Beerbohm intends it to be. Justice, too, is a concept that can be taken in many ways.

The broad spectrum on which different people may choose to position themselves in relation to these two values is indicative of the plurality of perspectives necessitated by Beerbohm’s unique concept of deliberation. To him, deliberation is an innately interactive process that depends on a variety of inputs in order to create a more inclusive dialogue about political issues. One cannot simply deliberate by himself in the

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<sup>35</sup> Beerbohm. 137.

privacy of his home. It must be done publicly where others can listen and respond, and each person must be willing to have their minds changed. Justice and common good mean something different to everyone, and thus they are accessible to everyone, even those without political or philosophical expertise. By leveling the political playing field, so to speak, each citizen is free to exercise their own unique voice and secure their agency and sovereignty.

Justice and common good are communally oriented values. The former deals with relations between individuals or groups of people in terms of right and wrong and the latter aims at communal benefit. Though Beerbohm does not discuss it in these terms, both seem to be closely related to the idea of compassion. Compassion, as has been stated repeatedly, is what naturally inclines human beings toward one another in a peaceful and fair fashion. The Rousseauan maxim grows from a desire for the common good and implicitly calls for justice in interpersonal endeavors. Beerbohm's deliberating voter is quite similar to the proud and compassionate political actor discussed previously in that the goal of each's actions within the political realm is the same. Ethical responsibility takes the place of pride and compassion in motivating and conditioning political action. That said, there are a few significant differences between the connection the proud and compassionate political actor has with the state and the connection the morally obligated voter has with it.

#### Section D: Selective Citizenship and the Faults of Representative Democracy

Beerbohm's account of complicity and moral responsibility paints a clear and effective picture of what it means to be a citizen in a democracy, but this picture is

incomplete. Much has been said about bearing responsibility for, and responding to, injustices by the state, but little has been said about how the relationship between citizen and state is actually characterized.

To begin, Beerbohm has the individual citizen caring for the state only when it is in peril. While he accepts that there are those who will always involve themselves in politics out of personal interest, he denies that citizens have a responsibility to engage continuously in politics, “There is, I think, little reason to think that our participatory obligations are constant... It is mistaken to claim that we have a moral duty to vote—full stop.”<sup>36</sup> The morally responsible voter responds to actions by the state that he finds disagreeable, but otherwise withholds his input. Political engagement in these terms essentially takes the form of damage control. One chooses to take political action because he feels his will is being misrepresented and he wishes to set the record straight. This response might seem commendable because it is a productive one that re-engages him with his state, as opposed to turning his back on it and pleading innocence for its wrongdoings. But this is still an inherently selfish act, motivated more by a fear of complicity than by any real obligation to the state.

Where is the pride? Where is the compassion? There is no pride, except perhaps pride in oneself for making what he perceives to be an upstanding decision in the face of injustice. There is no compassion, because what motivates his action is not genuine care for others or for his community, but a refusal to be seen as having a lower moral standard than he thinks he has. This rationale, and the way Beerbohm discusses the citizen’s obligations, serve to divorce the citizen from the state in a way that they

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<sup>36</sup> Beerbohm. 29.

shouldn't be. He depicts them as two separate entities that engage with one another mostly just when they are at odds. Instead of political action being motivated by occasional shame, it should be an unceasing commitment to mold the state into a voice for its people. The will of the state should be indistinguishable from the will of its citizens, because through proper and consistent political action the state becomes a medium for self-identity, not something for identities to be compared against.

Political involvement must be continuous if the state is to fulfill the role it was created for, and that is to be a constantly evolving expression of its citizens' will and character. In his *Social Contract*, Rousseau describes the individual as an "indivisible part of the whole."<sup>37</sup> The most essential aspect of the implicit agreement made between people upon entering into civil society is that this society be an honest and consistent reflection of its people—all of them. Unwillingness to participate in the political life of the state must be seen as a disservice to oneself and to ones fellow citizens. Every citizen plays an irreplaceable role in creating the nature of the state, which in turn helps to define each of its citizens. Political action is the vehicle of ones sovereignty, and without a political voice, one simply consents to be ruled. This would not have been sufficient to abandon the State of Nature for.

This criticism of Beerbohm is most likely rooted in the fact that his doctrine is based on a system of representative democracy and not a direct one. Representative government entails a degree of alienation between citizen and state because of the individual's inability to engage directly with the decision-making process. Forced to act through mediators, it is impossible for citizens to feel a personal stake in the state and

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<sup>37</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, and Victor Gourevitch. *The Social Contract: and other later political writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 50.

the actions it takes. This personal stake can only be developed through meaningful interaction. It comes when the individual feels a sense of ownership for his state because of the role he played in making it what it is, like the way a business owner feels in growing his business from the ground up or the way a sculptor feels in finishing a piece. This sense of ownership and belonging leads to the development of pride for ones state. This pride binds the citizen to the state, in such a way that he could never leave its governance in the hands of another. The removal of delegations would not suddenly make everyone's vote count for more, but it would increase accountability and decrease complicity among citizens.

#### Section E: Sovereignty, Agency, and Personal Stake

Representative governments are unable to meaningfully represent the wills of their citizens. It is impossible even for those in elected positions to do this, and it is through no fault of their own. This is because no one person can know or adequately express the wills of many, because each is conditioned by a unique identity with a personal connection to the state and his peers. Even in the case of consensus, the wills of each citizen cannot be delegated. It is through political involvement, through the democratic process, that a citizen lays claim to his agency and individuality. It is how he stakes his claim to his state, making it *his*. Someone could go through their entire life living within a country and never form such a profound connection because he was never able to engage with his state meaningfully and without restraint. He was never made to experience his political agency and sovereignty, and as a result he is inclined to think of the state as something that controls him or inhibits his free will.

If one does not partake in the political life of his state, no matter the system of government, he might as well be living under a monarch or dictator. If anyone other than himself makes decisions on his behalf, he is not free. Freedom entails more than just freedom to act however one chooses. One must also be free of things that may influence his thought or his actions. Mill was the first to posit that freedom must also mean the absence of coercion, arguing that coercion by the masses toward the individual is only permissible in the event that said individual is a clearly perceivable threat to others. Even in the rare circumstance of a true consensus of the people, it is not justified for them to express or impose their beliefs in such a way that it influences others. He explains:

Let us suppose, therefore, that the government is entirely at one with the people, and never thinks of exerting any power of coercion unless in agreement with what it conceives to be their voice. But I deny the right of people to exercise such coercion, either by themselves or by their government. This power is illegitimate... If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.<sup>38</sup>

Mill is right, of course, in maintaining that the masses have no more right to speak for the individual as the individual has to speak for the masses. One might attempt to justify exclusion from political life by affirming that freedom of action also allows for inaction. While this is the case in nearly every scenario, it cannot be the case when it comes to exercising ones vote or political voice. Without these, the individual puts himself at the mercy of his peers, who are unlikely to try to do him harm, but will coerce him toward

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<sup>38</sup> Mill. 20.

actions that he may not have chosen for himself. In any case, he submits himself to live in a society that he has no hand in shaping and no voice of his own.

That one consent, either tacitly or otherwise, to live within a state is completely insufficient in ensuring its legitimacy. It is irrational to claim, as Hobbes does, that people ought to submit to rule by others as a way of ensuring their survival. It is in man's most basic nature to experience freedom and self-determination as he would in the State of Nature, where the only natural law governing him is compassion. On the assumption that the State of Nature is not violent and deplorable, one must actually have an incentive to abandon it in favor of civil society. People can only be expected to consent to a society in which both their liberty and sovereignty remain intact. But, ironic as it may sound, these two things can only be protected through consistent and willful political action. It is through political action that one self-represents and exercises his sovereignty. Personal liberty, too, is at risk when one refuses to engage in political life because to not do so is to consent to the will of others. Locke describes liberty within the state as follows:

In political society, liberty consists of being under no other lawmaking power except that established by consent in the commonwealth. People are free from the dominion of any will or legal restraint apart from that enacted by their own constituted lawmaking power according to the trust put in it.<sup>39</sup>

This definition, though not intended for a direct democracy, represents the relationship between the citizen and the ideal state. The individual should at no point be under the power of a law that he did not have a hand in creating. This would essentially be like

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<sup>39</sup> Locke. 117.



consenting to a foreign legislature, since he was uninvolved in the decision-making process and the law is not reflective of his nature. What Locke calls the commonwealth should instead be considered the amalgamation of each citizens' will, which each enacts continuously alongside his fellow citizens. The law should never feel like an imposition, it should feel like an agreement, and if ever it doesn't feel this way, then it is unjust.

### Conclusion

Since society is formed by the consent of the people, its authority should rest in their hands. The state ought to be established with mankind's natural tendencies in mind if it is to legitimately represent its citizens. Since the most fundamental tendencies among them are pride and compassion, then the state must harness these to their greatest potential. If the state is not organized according to man's nature, then it will inspire resentment and limit the degree to which citizens can connect with their state. The state should not be seen as something that imposes itself on its citizens or controls them from afar, it should be seen as an extension of its citizens that grows and evolves alongside them. This cannot occur by way of delegation; each citizen must engage directly with the decision-making process. Pride is what inspires political activity, because if one feels pride for something, he will do his best to sustain and improve it. In an ideal state, each citizen feels a personal connection to the state and experiences pride in its flourishing, the same way a gardener feels pride in watching his garden grow. Just like the gardener, the citizen will want to make his state as good as it can

possibly be. Compassion, on the other hand, must not only be considered the origin of society, since it is what naturally inclines people toward one another peacefully, but also the force that guides political activity and keeps pride from becoming destructive.

In an era when Americans feel increasingly alienated from the state, it is more important than ever that political engagement take place. It seems strange that in an age of unparalleled independence and individualism, people are content to let decisions be made for them. The problem is one of identity. The identity of the individual does not align with the perceived identity of the state—they represent different things. But this does not need to be the case. Representative democracy is far from ideal, but even within the American system there exist avenues for citizens to engage directly with the political process. It is incumbent on each American to use whatever means are at their disposal to cause the change they wish to see, whether this be voting, protesting, or petitioning. Of these, the latter two require no mediation. It is only through this kind of activity that the modern citizen can build a healthy and meaningful relationship to the state. If national pride is not enough to promote political engagement, then compassion for others should be. It is time for every individual to be made accountable. To disengage oneself from his country is irrational and morally unacceptable, but it speaks to a failure on the part of both the citizen and the state. It is the citizen's role to contribute to the identity of the state, but it is equally important that the state provide the means by which its citizens can do this.

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