



Political Philosophy

Week 3.
Democracy is joy?

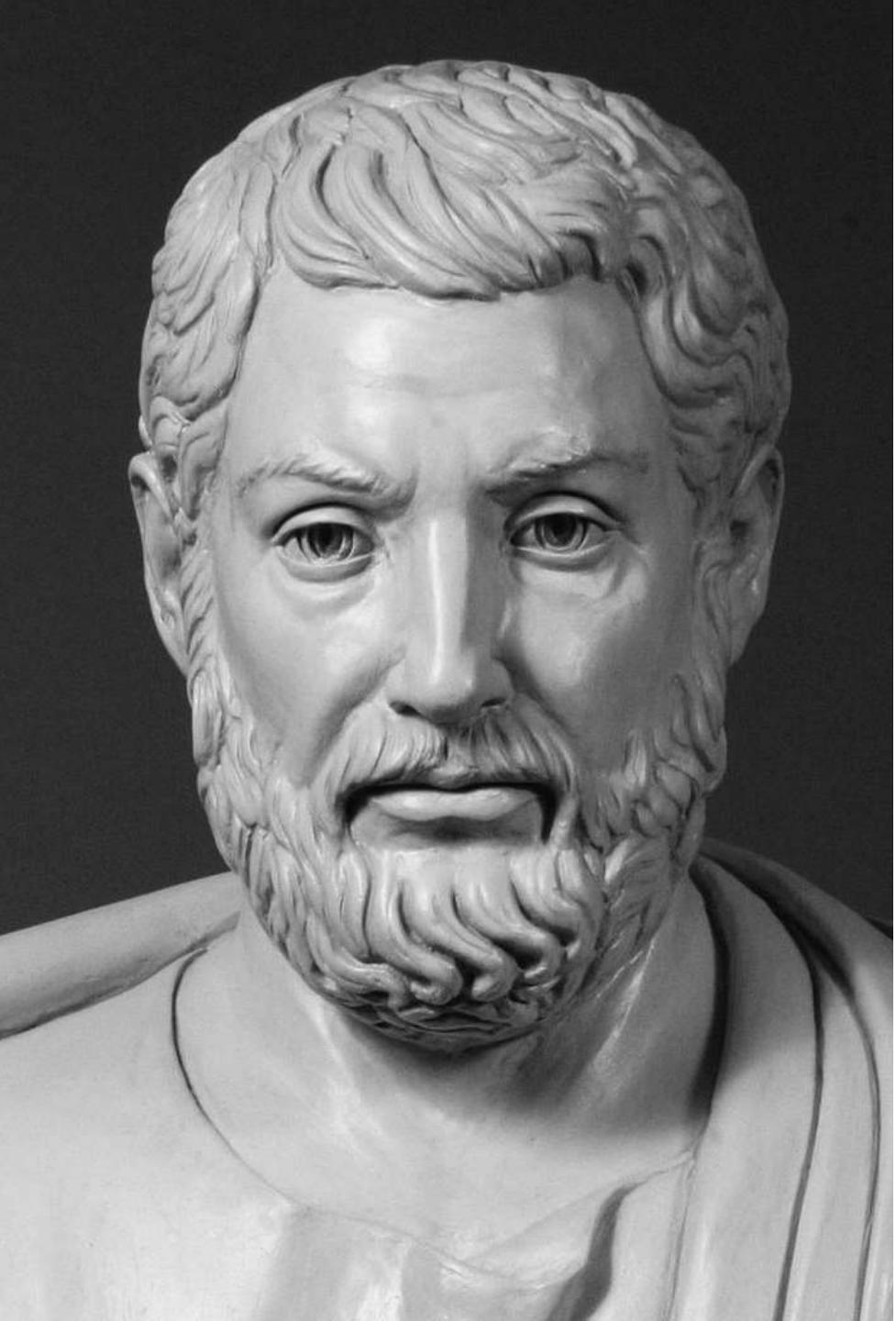


DECENCY
MATTERS

THIS
IS NOT
NORMAL





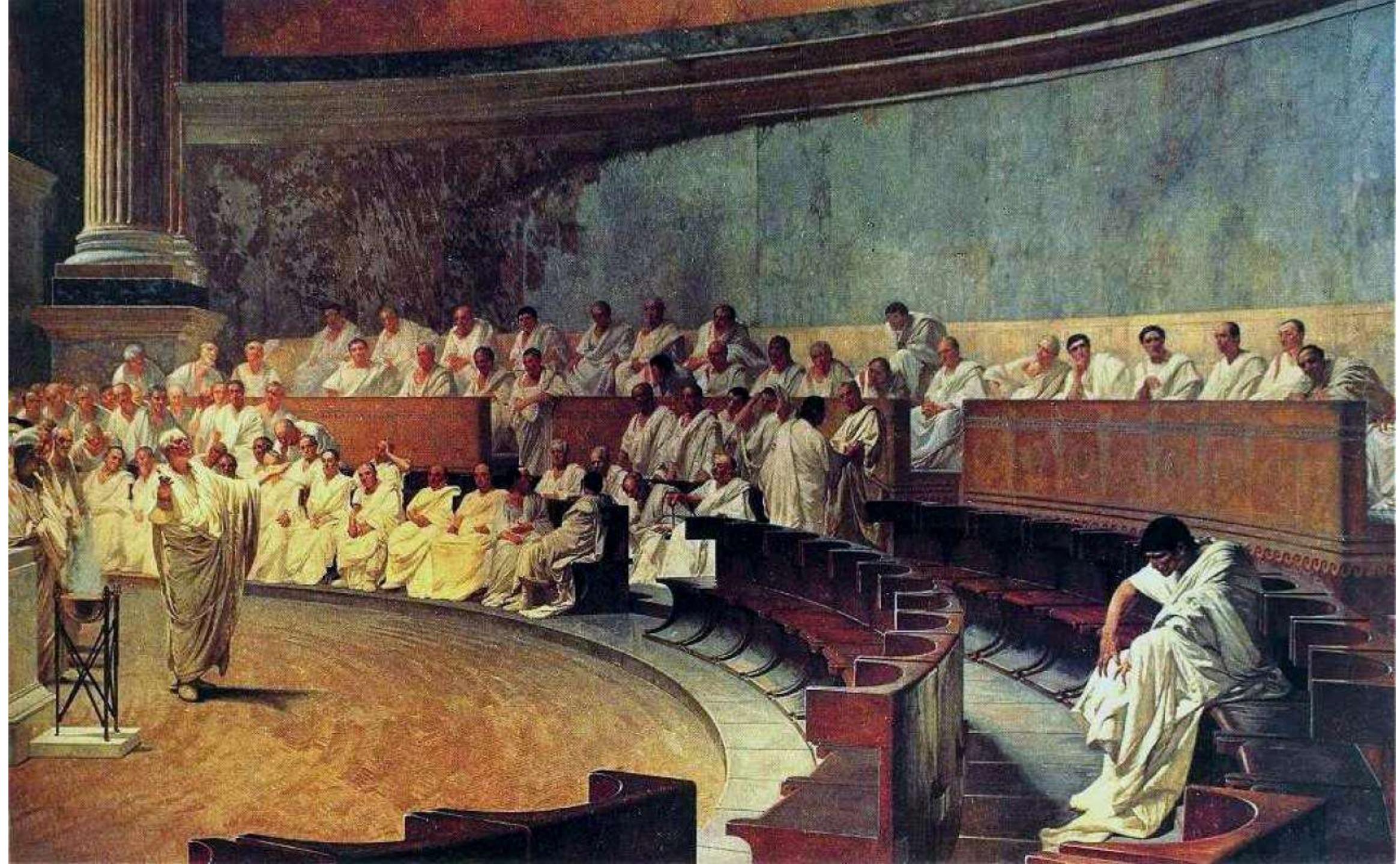


Demokratia

- Rule by the people is often traced back to ancient Athens
- Cleisthenes reformed the constitution around 508 BCE, increasing the power of the citizens' assembly and limiting that of the nobility
- Isonomy – equality in law = equal rights for all citizens
- Also introduces the punishment of exile by democratic vote for 10 years, which he was soon punished with...
- the 'worst form of government except all the others that have been tried' (Churchill)

Democracy in Ancient Athens

- A *direct democracy*, where every citizen voted on legislation and bills
- Established by Solon after the people rose up against a corrupt and self-serving aristocracy
- Equality of all citizens...
- ... But not all human beings
- Women, children, servants and foreigners were all excluded from taking part
- This idea of democracy would remain prevalent until the 20th century





Democracy since

- Rome continued with elections (by a small number of citizens), and there's examples of decision-making by small assemblies throughout the Middle Ages
- E.g. Viking assemblies in Scandinavia and Mann, England's parliament, or republics like Venice
- In the early modern period, representative assemblies were demanded in the English Civil War, and established in the American colonies and Netherlands
- Throughout: a very small number of equal citizens
- Universal suffrage only appears from the mid 19thc...



The Six Points OF THE PEOPLE'S CHARTER.

1. A VOTE for every man twenty-one years of age, of sound mind, and not undergoing punishment for crime.
2. THE BALLOT.—To protect the elector in the exercise of his vote.
3. NO PROPERTY QUALIFICATION for Members of Parliament—thus enabling the constituencies to return the man of their choice, be he rich or poor.
4. PAYMENT OF MEMBERS, thus enabling an honest tradesman, working man, or other person, to serve a constituency, when taken from his business to attend to the interests of the country.
5. EQUAL CONSTITUENCIES, securing the same amount of representation for the same number of electors, instead of allowing small constituencies to swamp the votes of large ones.
6. ANNUAL PARLIAMENTS, thus presenting the most effectual check to bribery and intimidation, since though a constituency might be bought once in seven years (even with the ballot), no purse could buy a constituency (under a system of universal suffrage) in each ensuing twelve-month; and since members, when elected for a year only, would not be able to defy and betray their constituents as now.



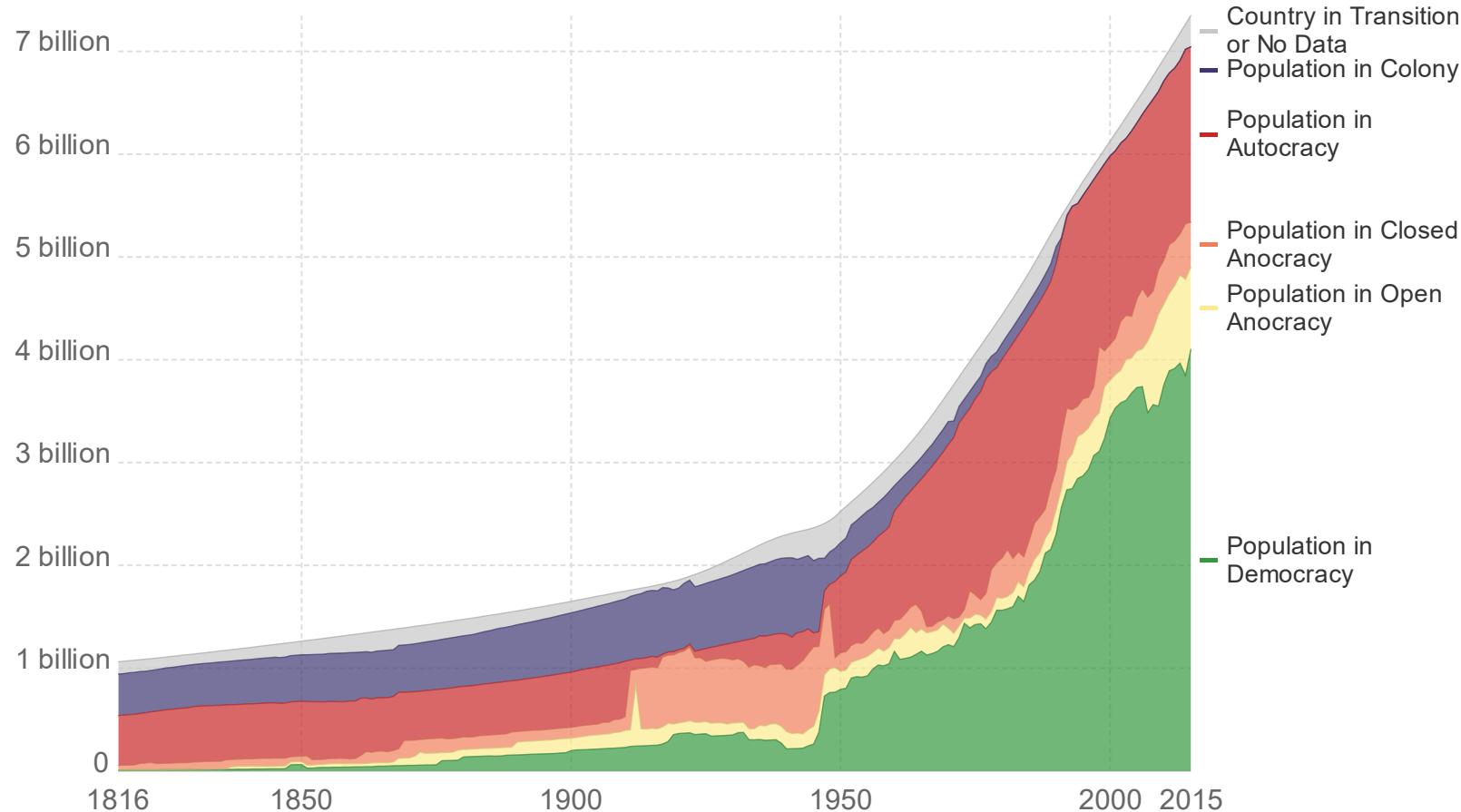
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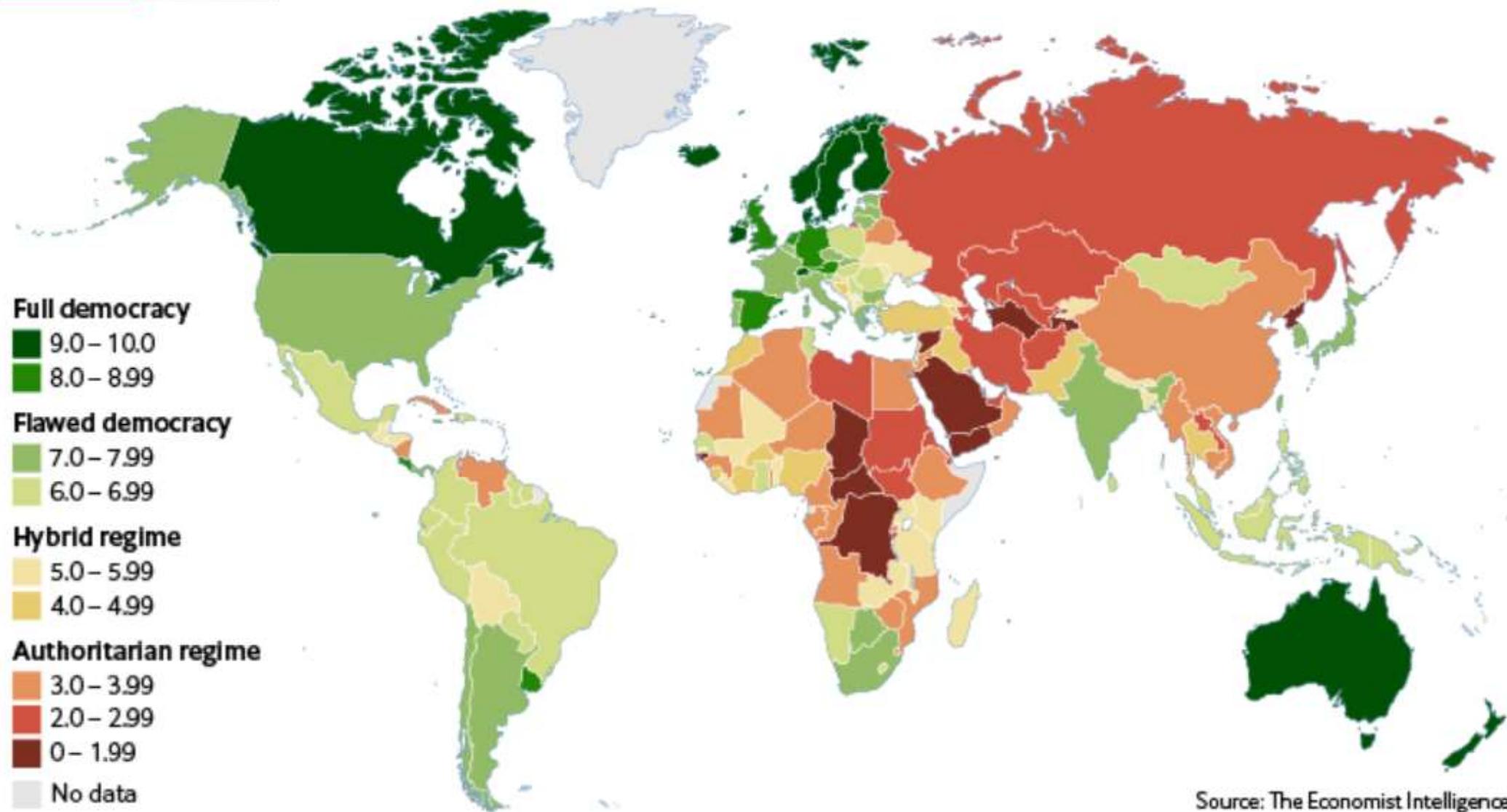
Number of world citizens living under different political regimes

The Polity IV score captures the type of political regime for each country on a range from -10 (full autocracy) to +10 (full democracy). Regimes that fall into the middle of this spectrum are called anocracies.



Source: World Population by Political Regime they live in (OWID (2016))
OurWorldInData.org/a-history-of-global-living-conditions-in-5-charts/ • CC BY-SA

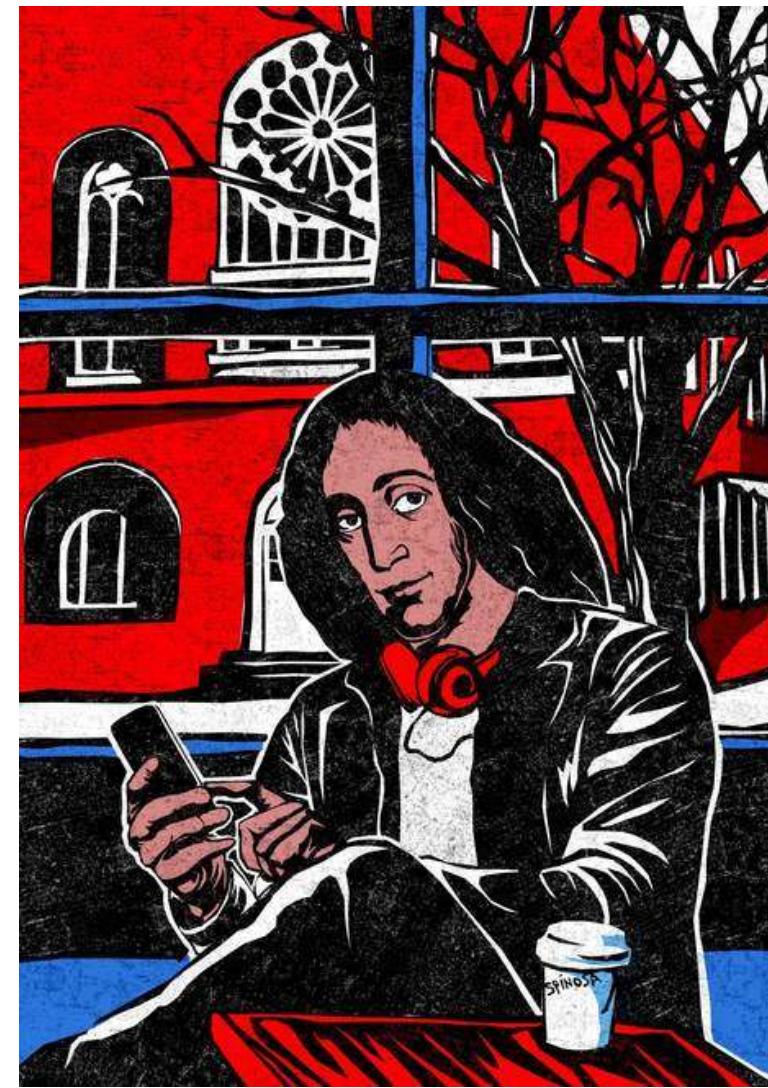
Democracy Index 2018



Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

- Why have so many liberation movements demanded democracy?
- What makes democracy so appealing?
- What are the dangers to democracy?
- How might we go about protecting or extending democracy in the 21st century?

- What is democracy? Why is it preferable?
- How it fits with psychology / human nature – H and M recap
- Introducing Spinoza
- Qs on why democracy is most natural – what nature is to S
- Summarising S's democratic theory and free speech
- Introducing Rousseau
- Idea of a 'radical Enlightenment'
- General will and limits of this view



‘Spinoza, then, emerged as the supreme philosophical bogeyman of early Enlightenment Europe. Admittedly, historians have rarely emphasised this. It has been much more common, and still is, to claim that Spinoza was rarely understood and had very little influence ... In fact, no one else during the century 1650-1750 remotely rivalled Spinoza’s notoriety as the chief challenger of the fundamentals of revealed religion, received ideas, tradition, morality, and what was everywhere regarded, in absolutist and non-absolutist states alike, as divinely constituted political authority.’

– Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*



Spinoza in a nutshell

- Benedictus de Spinoza, 1632-1677
- Dutch philosopher and lens-grinder
- Renowned for his grasp of Descartes and unconventional views on God
- Major works include the *Ethics* (1677) and *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670)
- Makes some of the most strident claims for philosophical and political freedom in the history of thought

The Tyger

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies,
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?



‘Nature is not constrained by the laws of human reason, which aim only at man’s true advantage and preservation. It is governed by infinite other laws, which look to the eternal order of the whole of nature, of which man is only a small part. It is only by the necessity of this order that all individuals are determined to exist and have effects in a definite way. So when anything in nature seems to us ridiculous, absurd, or evil, that’s because we know things only in part, and for the most part are ignorant of the order and coherence of the whole of nature, and because we want everything to be directed according to the usage of our reason—even though what reason says is evil is not evil in relation to the order and laws of nature as a whole, but only in relation to the laws of our nature.’ TTP ch 16

Three laws of human societies

Chapter 16 presents three ‘universal’ laws of nature

- 1. The conatus**

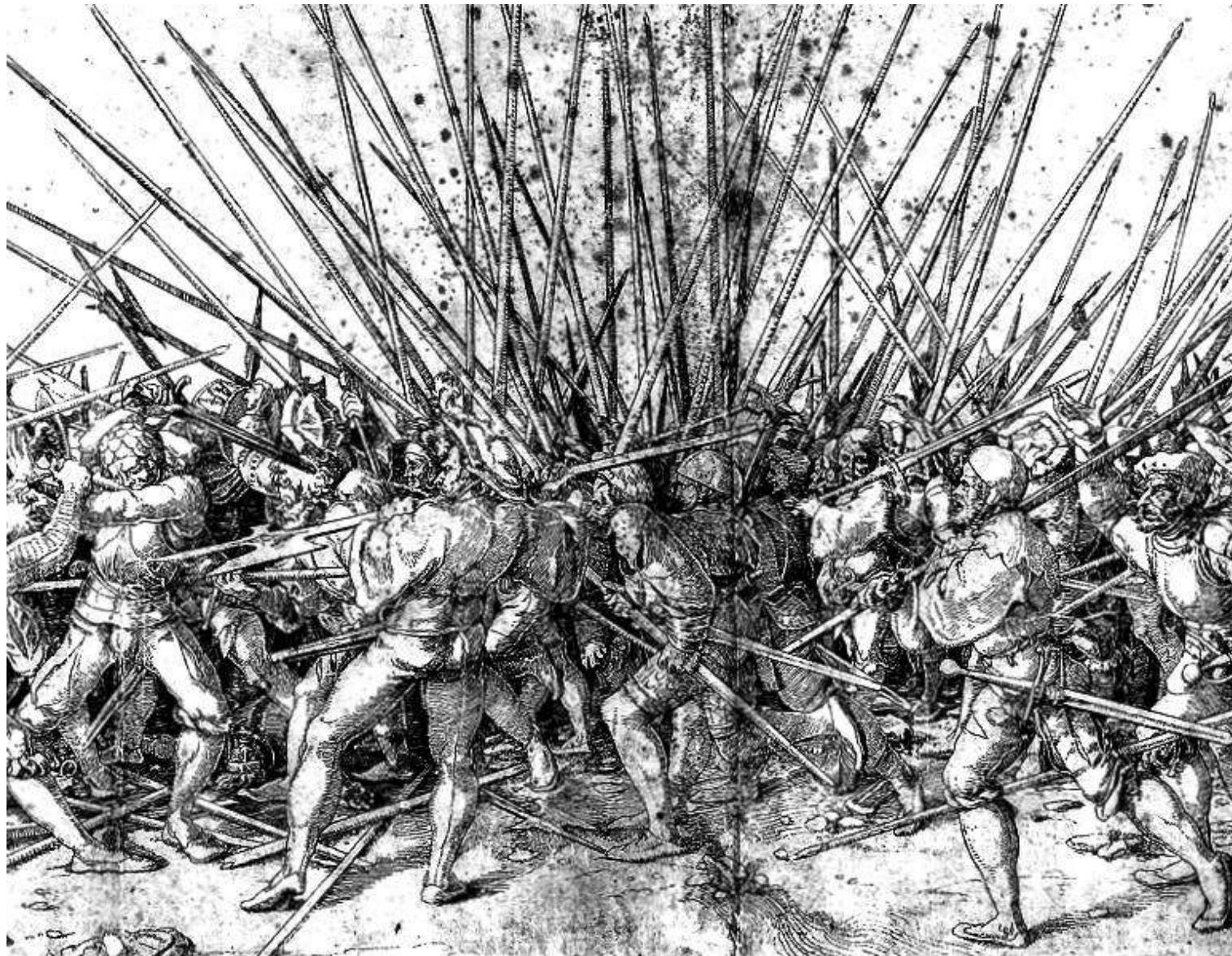
‘each thing strives to persevere in its state, as far as it can by its own power’

- 2. That hope or fear decide our judgements**

‘no one neglects to pursue what he judges to be good, unless he hopes for a greater good, or fears a greater harm’

- 3. The common good is the most secure basis of the state**

‘But in a Republic, and a state where the supreme law is the well-being of the whole people, not that of the ruler, someone who obeys the supreme power in everything should not be called a slave, useless to himself, but a subject’



Natural right

- All beings, from animals, wise men to fools, share naturally a fundamental striving to do everything they can do
- Each person lives in thrall to their appetites, which inevitably leads them into contact and conflict with others
- Everyone ultimately desires to live in security and peace...
- And for this reason, Spinoza argues, people live together in societies, where they give up part of their freedom to pursue their own unbridled appetites...
- And in return, they enjoy some mutual security and peace

Natural right

- ‘Also, if we consider that without mutual aid men must live most wretchedly and without any cultivation of reason, we shall see very clearly that to live, not only securely, but very well, men had to agree in having one purpose. So they brought it about that they would have collectively the natural right each one had to all things. It would no longer be determined according to the force and appetite of each one, but according to the power and will of everyone together.’

Democracy

- In groups, take on one of the two questions and discuss:
 1. What arguments does Spinoza present for the superiority of democracy? (e.g. Ch16, sections 8-10). Are you persuaded?
 2. Why is free speech and toleration also essential for peaceful and stable societies (e.g. chapter 20)? What makes Spinoza's argument radical, even dangerous?

‘the democratic republic ... seems to be the most natural and to be that which approaches most closely to the freedom nature bestows on every person. In a democracy no one transfers their natural right to another in such a way that they are not thereafter consulted but rather to the majority of the whole society of which they are a part. In this way all remain equal as they had been previously, in a state of nature.’

‘How pernicious it is for both religion and state to allow ministers of things sacred to acquire the right to make decrees or handle the business of government. ... Government is bound to become extremely oppressive where [dissident] opinions which are within the domain of each individual, a right of which no one can give up, are treated as a crime. Where this happens, the anger of the common people tends to prevail.’ (18.6)

Democracy

- While we can agree not to pursue our own natural right without restriction in society, we *cannot* give up our own right to think, speak and judge
- If it no longer serves our needs to follow the laws of a society, and there is little authority in place to keep us in check, then we will begin to break the laws, Spinoza argues
- A stable society isn't one then that enforces the obedience of its subjects by sheer command
- Rather, there must be sufficient motivations in place to obey and become part of a society
- The best way to realise this is through democracy, where all people agree to protect each other, and decisions are made for the benefit of all, by all

‘Were it as easy to control people's minds as to restrain their tongues, every sovereign would rule securely and there would be no oppressive governments. ... This is why a government which seeks to control people's minds is considered oppressive, and any sovereign power appears to harm its subjects and usurp their rights when it tries to tell them what they must accept as true and reject as false ... For these things are within each person's own right, which he cannot give up even were he to wish to do so.’
(20.2)

‘the purpose of the state is not to turn people from rational beings into beasts or automata, but rather to allow their minds and bodies to develop in their own ways in security and enjoy the free use of reason, and not to participate in conflicts based on hatred, anger or deceit or in malicious disputes with each other. Therefore, the true purpose of the state is in fact freedom.’ (20.6)

Democracy

- Democracy is said to be the most 'natural state', because it reflects how human beings naturally associate and assist each other, through a desire to remain alive, a fear of dying or isolation, and hopes of current and future rewards
- By providing peace and stability (by acting according to the three laws, earlier), democracies will be more stable and secure than any other society
- Philosophy, the sciences and the arts will be able to flourish
- Freedom of speech ensures that everyone is able to express their views, and the best ideas inevitably triumph...



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Six.

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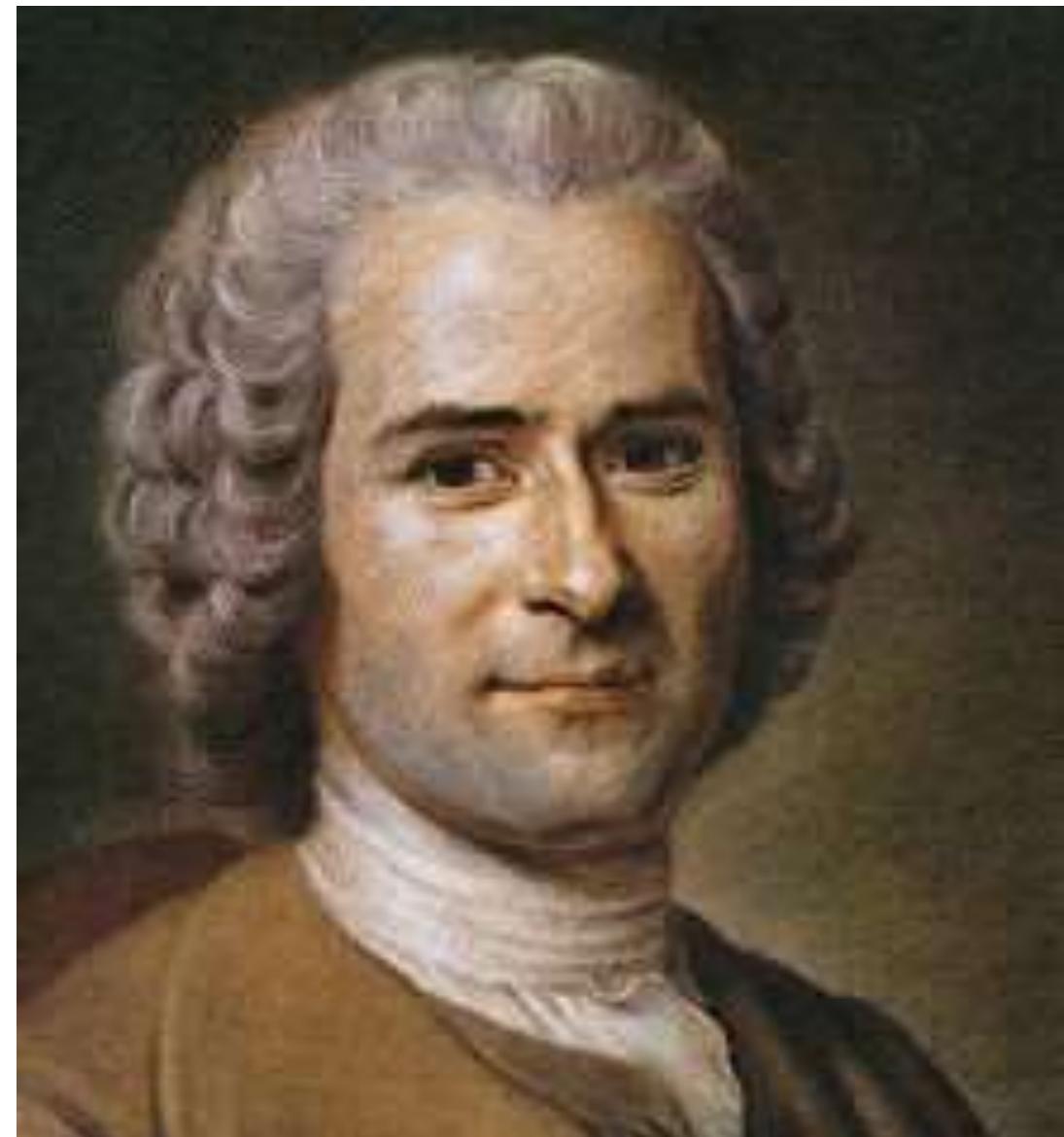
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Around
the world,
voices
cry out:

**POWER
TO THE
PEOPLE!**

Michael Goodwin on the revolt against the elite

SEE PAGES
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Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-88)

- ‘Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains’
- All human beings are naturally free, but states subvert this freedom, demanding obedience and stifling dissent
- The people themselves are sovereign, and each person shares both a particular will and a general will – aiming at the common good
- The best state will attempt to realise the general will by guaranteeing freedom and equality
- Through *The Social Contract* (1762) and *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau’s republican and naturalist political philosophy became influential across Europe

Rousseau and the General Will

Let's turn to Rousseau's writings, taking one of two questions:

1. Through submission to the general will, we become free. We might even be 'forced to be free'. What does Rousseau mean by the general will, and what kind of mode of government seems to follow from it?
2. How does society emerge in Rousseau's view? Based on its naturalistic origins, what kind of government is best suited for human nature?



The General Will

- The cause of our enslavement is our pursuit of our particular wills, which are in conflict with each other
- The solution, for Rousseau, is to submit our particular will to that of the *general will*
- ... A form of government aimed at the collective good, which aims at universal freedom and equality
- Thus we can legitimately be ‘forced to be free’
- For Rousseau, we can only genuinely be taken to have consented to submit our particular wills under a general will in a strong form of direct democracy
- The state also must be geographically small, otherwise people will just use the democratic mechanism to pursue their own particular interests



- ‘Tranquillity is found also in dungeons; but is that enough to make them desirable places to live in? To say that a man gives himself gratuitously, is to say what is absurd and inconceivable; such an act is null and illegitimate, from the mere fact that he who does it is out of his mind. To say the same of a whole people is to suppose a people of madmen; and madness creates no right. Even if each man could alienate himself, he could not alienate his children: they are born men and free; their liberty belongs to them, and no one but they has the right to dispose of it.’
- ‘To renounce liberty is to renounce being a man, to surrender the rights of humanity and even its duties. For him who renounces everything no indemnity is possible. Such a renunciation is incompatible with man's nature; to remove all liberty from his will is to remove all morality from his acts. Finally, it is an empty and contradictory convention that sets up, on the one side, absolute authority, and, on the other, unlimited obedience.’

- 'In the strict sense of the term, a true democracy has never existed, and never will exist. It is against natural order that the great number should govern and that the few should be governed.'
- 'We know for ourselves that we must put up with a bad government when it is there; the question is how to find a good one.'
- 'As soon as any man says of the affairs of the State "What does it matter to me?" the State may be given up for lost.'

- From Rousseau, *The Social Contract*

Next week... *The Rights of Men*

- What does it mean to say that all men are equal in nature, or that we are worthy of certain inalienable rights?
- For revolutionaries in France and America, it meant everything – and we'll turn to the language of nature and natural equality in John Locke, a figure of decisive significance in liberal political thought
- We'll read extensively from his *Second Treatise of Government*, as well as from the Declaration of the Rights of Man
- What does it mean to speak of human rights today, and how has such language excluded some and failed others?
- Email any questions to dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk