

PARADISE LOST,
PARADISE REGAINED

*The True Meaning
of Democracy*



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For the Children Everywhere:

May they inherit a World that is Free, Just and Joyous.

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PART I

Paradise Lost

Democracy In Historical Context

INTRODUCTION

The Specter of Government

*“... what in me is dark,
Illumine; what is low, raise and support...”^a*

Government is a means for organizing ourselves into a cohesive unit with an identity. In the past the unit was the tribe. Presently it is the nation state. But the functions have not changed. We expect our government to protect us, to provide for justice, to make it easier for us to take care of the basic necessities in life like food, shelter and some kind of useful work. It has another function, too frequently overlooked, that of providing us with the opportunity of participation, an expansion of our intellect and sense of self as we partake in the process of making choices which affect our collective destiny.

It is my assumption that there are many who are not happy with the government they have but firmly believe that any alternative is both inconceivable and undesirable. Like many a bad marriage the relationship between the citizen and his government endures not out of love, or necessarily even respect, but out of habit. The energy necessary to envision an alternative, to believe in it and to work towards it have all been dissipated in exchange for the security and familiarity of a long standing relationship.

The first step in changing a relationship is the acquisition of a new perspective. Things have changed gradually, by accretion. But we are so used to what we “see” that we don’t “see” the change. We see what used to be.

In order to re-orient ourselves with regard to government we need to ask some very simple questions. What kind of government do we live under, a monarchy, an oligarchy or a democracy? Is that government designed to serve the common good, i.e. the eco-system? Are there structural changes that could be made to the current government so that it would be better able to fulfill its fundamental purpose? What are different kinds of solutions to the problems of government that have been arrived at in the past and in other parts of the world? These and other questions will be addressed during the course of this book.

^a John Milton (1608 – 1674) was an English poet, best known for his epic poem, “Paradise Lost.” The quotes at the head of each chapter are borrowed from this masterpiece. Milton has given some of his best lines to Satan, lines that I have redirected to suit the chapter content. I hope Satan won’t mind.

1.

WHAT IS HISTORY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

*“ ... War wearied hath perform'd what war can do,
And to disorder'd rage let loose the reins...”^b*

We have come to think of history as something fixed and objective. In fact, it is the creation of historians, whose allegiance to power often blinds them to the true meaning of the events they describe.

We read history because we want to understand how we as a society have ended up where we are. What we learn can be used to help us make choices for our collective well-being. Was democracy a good thing? Did it succeed? Where did it fail? What is history all about and how does democracy fit into the picture? Is the violence necessary and where does it lead? These are the questions. Rarely do our historians supply us with the answers. It is up to us to make the connections between the events and the social consequences that follow.

It is reasonably clear, in the case of Ancient Athens, that in order for democracy to thrive there needed to be peace. As the wars continued, power became more centralized and concentrated. The individual retreated from the community and sought solace in a private existence. The strength and integrity of character, indicative of Athens at its height, was worn down with the stress of constant war. Athens as a unique form of government, founded in citizen participation at all levels, disappeared.

Considered in this light, one could argue that democracy is a bulwark against war. For where democracy and democratic values prevail, where power is widely dispersed, energies are directed towards self-rule, economic productivity and civilized living. There is no opportunity for warriors to take charge of government. Thus one can argue that democracy holds out a two-fold benefit: 1) Individual and culture reach their highest levels of development; 2) The worth of each human life is at a premium.

^b John Milton (1608 – 1674) was an English poet, best known for his epic poem, “Paradise Lost.” The quotes at the head of each chapter are borrowed from this masterpiece. Milton has given some of his best lines to Satan, lines that I have redirected to suit the chapter content. I hope Satan won’t mind.

2.

FALSE FRIENDS

*“...By falsities and lies the greatest part
Of mankind they corrupted....”*

Unfortunately, many of those who write about democracy, political philosophers, academics and the like have little genuine enthusiasm for their subject matter. They cringe at the thought that the citizenry might take itself up by its own bootstraps. I am referring to these writers and thinkers who appear to align themselves with the democratic cause while simultaneously undermining its foundation as “false friends.”

Eighteenth century philosophers in France and England, writers like Rousseau, Montesquieu and Locke were often cited by those involved in writing the United States Constitution. None of them are true friends of democracy. In theory they would seem to be. In practice they are not.

James Madison has been hailed by many as the father of the American constitution. Certainly he will offer support for democracy. Unfortunately, not. He explicitly rejects the possibility of “reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights.” It is he who uttered the oft quoted dictum, “Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob.”

Alexis De Tocqueville visited America when he was twenty-seven years old. His insights into the American mentality are as valid today as the day he penned them. De Tocqueville was an ardent supporter of the American experiment. Most of his criticisms were directed at the consequences of social equality, not political equality. His remedy was to introduce an aristocratic element into the American equation.

John Stuart Mill was an ardent advocate of civic democracy, not political democracy. He argued eloquently on behalf of the individual’s right to self-expression. He also expressed the belief that the best government is one in which sovereignty is exercised by the community as a whole. However, in this representative government, the representatives are not to advocate for the wishes of those inferior to them, i.e. those who elected them. They are to speak for themselves, the only ones fit to govern, the intellectually elite.

Writing in the twentieth century, Joseph Schumpeter believed like Mill, that the electorate was not clever enough to govern. He saw democracy as a competition among leaders for ascendancy. Once the leader was chosen it was the responsibility of the voter to retreat into the shadows and let the politician do his job.

ANCIENT ATHENS: WELLSPRING OF DEMOCRACY

*“.. All things invite
To peaceful counsels, and the settled state
Of order...”*

We must turn to Ancient Athens for the truest example of democracy the world has ever known. In this first and only citizen-state, the people -- not their representatives -- about six thousand of them, gathered in the Assembly (*ekklesia*) at least once a month and more frequently as required. In addition to participating in the debates, the Athenian citizen would serve as a juror, serve in an administrative capacity as magistrate, and serve on the Council of 500, known as the *boule*, responsible for drafting preparatory legislation for consideration by the assembly, overseeing the meetings of the assembly.

If one considers broadly the form of government in Ancient Athens and its system of justice, one discovers one overriding dynamic: fear of the concentration and abuse of power. This was reflected in the use of large juries, the absence of lawyers, the absence of a police force, the wide use of arbitration, the use of a citizen army, the use of sortition, rather than election as a means of choosing magistrates and members of the Boule. Specific procedures were instituted as means of preventing the kinds of snap votes in the assembly which enabled the aristocracy to overthrow the democracy in 411 B.C. and 404 B.C.

4.

GOVERNMENT AND CHARACTER: LESSONS FROM ATHENS

*“... And now his heart
Distends with pride, and, hardening in his strength,
Glories...”*

Government conduct has intellectual, moral, psychological and emotional consequences for its citizens. The moral fiber of the individual citizens and of the nation taken as a collective is a consequence of the degree of honest involvement in government by those who are governed, which leads Mill to the conclusion that a “completely popular government... promotes a better and higher form of national character, than any other polity whatsoever.”

What kind of individual did Athenian democracy produce? Neither passive, nor docile, the Athenian was outspoken, self-assured, courageous, open minded and tolerant. No one was revered. No one was too important or powerful to be poked fun at. Not even the gods escaped ridicule.

Even those of the most humble origin, achieved an unusually high level of intellectual development. The theatre, staged for the masses, required considerable verbal and intellectual sophistication to grasp its deepest meanings and refined subtleties. As a consequence of their daily involvement in self-government, Athenians were thoughtful about ideals, justice and the ultimate purpose of life.

This capacity for abstract thought as witnessed in its philosophy and theatre is probably what distinguishes this Greek culture from any that came before or has come since. Undoubtedly the multitude, complexity and weightiness of the matters the average Athenian confronted on a daily basis was instrumental in developing this unusual gift

THE ROMAN REPUBLIC: OLIGARCHY WITH A HINT OF DEMOCRACY

*“... round he throws his baleful eyes,
That witness'd huge affliction and dismay,
Mix'd with obdurate pride, and steadfast hate...”*

What about Rome, was there anything democratic about the Roman Republic? Certainly not in the early years. Before and during the period of the Republic, the ultimate and enduring power lay with the Senate, which was composed principally of wealthy families and former magistrates. For the most part, it was the senators—that is, the leading men of the most prominent families—who established foreign policy, extended imperial reach, and maintained control of finance and state religion.

The domestic conflict that was the ultimate undoing of the Republic—the Conflict of the Orders—began early on. The plebeians (the population at large), whose interests were being ignored by the patricians (the wealthy aristocracy, who controlled the Senate), made their voices heard for the first time in 494 B.C. The first negotiators for the plebeians were known as “tribunes.” What began as a temporary form of representation went on to become a fixture of the Roman Republic.

It was only after considerable pressure from among the population at large as well as from within its own ranks, that the oligarchy, reluctantly and often temporarily would cede some power to the common folk and address its needs in the form of legislation and policy. There are two democratic achievements that stand out. Going to war was voted by those who were going to risk their lives in fighting it. Although most legislative initiatives came from the senate, only those proposals became law that the people agreed to accept.

6.

EXPERIMENTS IN GOVERNMENT: THE ITALIAN CITY- STATES

*“... darkness fled,
Light shone, and order from disorder sprung...”*

There are moments in history when societies are organizing themselves for the first time. There is experimentation and innovation. The Italian city-states in northern Italy during the early phase of their development at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance offer one example. There emerged a form of local political authority known as the *commune*. These communes, though highly selective as to legal membership, were nonetheless exercises in self-government. All positions were rotated at two month intervals, chosen by lot from a predetermined pool of candidates whose names were stored in a pouch known as a *borse*, in the Santa Croce church.

The general assembly elected between four and twenty consuls, usually for a term of six months to one year. The consulate wielded executive and judicial authority on a day-to-day basis. As a check on their authority, the consuls were answerable to the general assembly on critical matters.

Numerically speaking, the extent of citizen involvement was considerable. The size of the greater councils could run to a thousand or more. In Genoa, in 1292, a council of six hundred members debated for seven days on the subject of war between France and Sicily. One hundred five councilors made speeches. In the communes, there were many posts to be filled. In Pisa, in 1162, there were ninety-one. In Siena, in 1257, there were eight hundred sixty offices. Thus, a high proportion of the male population had some form of direct participation in government. It has been estimated that in ancient Athens, in a given year, one-third of the citizenry served in government in some capacity. A similar level of participation is said to have occurred in the Italian city-states.

PART II

Democracy In America

Opportunity Missed

EARLY VOICES IN AMERICA

*“... but other powers as great
Fell not, but stand unshaken, from within
Or from without, to all temptations arm’d...”*

The years between 1776, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and 1788, the ratification of the Constitution, are critical in the history of the United States government. Any discussion of these important years needs to make reference to the Federalists – supporters of a new Constitution and a new form of government -- and the Anti-Federalists opponents of the Constitution and supporters of the Articles of Confederation.

The Federalists were in favor of a strong, centralized oligarchic form of government and were opposed to democracy. The Anti-Federalists favored decentralized, local governments which provided for the maximum participation of the largest number of citizens. They spoke the language of democracy.

“Trust us with power,” say the Federalists of themselves, “we are virtuous. We wish you no harm. Why would we want to betray you? Anyway, you, the people, have all the power.” The theoretical, rhetorical, granting of power to the people was one of the Federalists chief means of seeking to manipulate the doubters into lining up behind the Constitution. The Anti-Federalists did not trust their would-be rulers. They saw the theorizing and rhetoric for what it was, a bid for power that was self-serving and without limit.

The strong, centralized government sought by men like Madison and Hamilton would produce a certain kind of economy, a certain culture, a certain way of life. It would lead to a strong military establishment and a yearning for empire, a word which is used at least three times in the Federalist Papers. The Anti-Federalists were of a different mentality. They wanted a peaceful, harmonious, unassuming government that would leave the citizenry free to pursue lives of quiet productivity and domestic tranquility.

DEMOCRACY DENIED

*“... But far within...
The great seraphic lords and cherubim,
In close recess and secret conclave, sat;
A thousand demi-gods on golden seats
Frequent and full...”*

When convened and during the course of its deliberations, the Constitutional Convention enjoyed little popular support. For one thing, it seemed to be the doing of a cabal operating in secret. For another, it represented a radical change in direction. Some might say a coup had taken place. Prior to the convention, it was the general understanding that the Articles of Confederation were to remain in force. There had been no groundswell for abandoning one form government in favor of another. Yet that is what happened.

Aware that the Constitution as written would probably not be adopted without extensive debate and amendments, the organizers did their best to force it through with great haste, insisting that it must be accepted in toto or not at all. As testimony to the weakness of their position and in violation of the thirteenth article of the Articles of Confederation, they required that only nine of thirteen states ratify the document for it to become the law of the land, despite the pleas of Benjamin Franklin for unanimity.

Once agreement was reached on the final document it was up to the states to ratify the Constitution, one at a time. Every effort was made by the Federalists to stifle open debate and force through a form of government for which there was no popular support. Not only did the Federalists tamper with elections, print falsehoods, use intimidation and manipulation to win votes, they also exercised control over the mails, thereby delaying the arrival of critical news and sometimes not delivering the mail at all, always selectively handicapping their opponents.

AMERICA'S EARLY OLIGARCHY

*“...And thou, sly hypocrite, who now wouldst seem
Patron of liberty...”*

For more than two hundred years, the key figures in early American history have been looked up to as benign, selfless men of virtue and good intentions. A closer look reveals that there was nothing democratic in world outlook, character or social standing about any of them. They were, to a man, powerful elitists. And they set up a government which they knew they could bend to their wishes at the expense of the common good.

Alexander Hamilton, though of humble birth, married into one of the wealthiest families in the state of New York. Through his brother-in-law, John Barker Church, he was connected with powerful financial interests in the United States and England. He was a monarchist and loyal to the British cause once the revolution was over.

One of Hamilton's closest collaborators was Gouverneur Morris, born into one of New York's wealthiest, landed families. During the Revolution, his mother, a Loyalist, gave her estate over to the British for military use. Like Hamilton, Morris was a blue-blood with nothing but scorn for the people. Seeing around him men of modest means becoming politicized, he lamented the fact that, “the mob began to think and reason.”

The third member of the triumvirate was Robert Morris, no relation to Gouverneur Morris. At the time of the Revolution his import, export and banking businesses made him one of the most prosperous men in Pennsylvania. Though he resented the British Stamp Act of 1765, Morris nonetheless wanted to remain a loyal British subject. He was a reluctant signer of the Declaration of Independence. His business profited enormously during the war with Britain so much so that men like Thomas Paine saw him as a war profiteer.

James Madison was an outspoken member of the southern, slave-holding, landed aristocracy. At the time of the Constitutional Convention he was a devoted ally of Alexander Hamilton, with whom he composed the essays known as The Federalist Papers. Madison was adamant in his opposition to any form of democracy.

George Washington led a life modeled on that of a British aristocrat. He ended up with over 50,000 acres of land, a fair amount of which was pilfered from the Indians and the officers in his army. Fox hunting became something of an obsession. In 1768, according to his own notes, he spent forty-nine days – two to five hours each day – chasing down fox on horseback. He purchased his Madeira in quantities of one hundred fifty gallons. His coats, shirts, pants and shoes were all ordered from London. In attendance were two man servants.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON AND THE BRITISH CONNECTION

“...*he seem’d*
For dignity composed, and high exploit:
But all was false and hollow...”

If there were a *coup d’état*, was there some other, darker purpose, that needed to be hidden from public view? Hamilton is the man to follow. It was he who set the direction for the new country immediately after the ratification of the Constitution.

It was Hamilton’s goal – via a national bank – to wed the “interest of the monied [sic] men with the resources of government.” A national debt he maintained is a “national blessing. It will be powerful cement of our union.” Three years later, in 1784, Hamilton founded the Bank of New York.

When Hamilton married into the Schuyler family he acquired a brother-in-law by the name of John Barker Church. Church was a British subject who had fled Britain under suspicious circumstances. Church became influential in American affairs and appears to have amassed a fortune as a profiteer during the Revolutionary war with Britain. With his new found wealth, he returned to England, found himself at the center of a high society in London. Eventually, he was elected to Parliament. On leaving for England, he assigned Hamilton the role of his American business agent.

In 1790, Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton delivered a report to Congress outlining his proposal for dealing with public debt. It was Hamilton’s decision to have the war bonds redeemed at full face value thus providing speculators with a windfall. It turns out that the Schuyler family and Church were among the chief beneficiaries.

Less than a year and a half into Washington’s first term, Hamilton proposed a central bank to be known as “The Bank of the United States.” Hamilton’s bank, like the Bank of England, was to be a private, not a public institution. Like the Bank of England, the names of its shareholders were to remain secret. It was open to domestic as well as foreign investors.

In *Inventing A Nation*, Gore Vidal refers to Hamilton as “English Secret Agent Number Seven.” According to Vidal, in July of 1794, while Jay was in England negotiating the treaty which bears his name, Hamilton – British Agent Number Seven – met in secret with George Hammond, British minister at Philadelphia and revealed much that would work for British and against American interests.

DEMOCRACY AFFIRMED: THE PEOPLE OF PENNSYLVANIA WRITE A
CONSTITUTION

*“... and with preamble sweet
Of charming symphony they introduce
Their sacred song...”*

Although most Americans are not aware of it, the first and only truly democratic constitution is not the United States Constitution, ratified on June 21, 1788, but the Pennsylvania State Constitution ratified eleven years earlier on September 28, 1776.

Unlike the U.S. Constitution to be drafted little more than a decade later, the Pennsylvania state Constitution had a Declaration of Rights, modeled on that of Virginia. Under the new Pennsylvania Constitution, the Assembly had supreme power. There was no second house to check its influence. No governor could veto its laws. All proceedings were to be published and opened to public inspection. All bills of a public nature were to be printed for public review before the final debate, amendment and passage.

Elections were to occur annually. A representative could serve no more than four years in any seven. There was a plural executive with powers limited to executing the law. Any councilor who served for three consecutive years, was required to wait four years until he could serve again.

As a further safeguard against corruption and abuses of power, the Pennsylvania Constitution instituted a Council of Censors, comprised of two representatives from each city and county, to be elected once every seven years. Its responsibility was to preserve the integrity of the Constitution and the rights of the citizens. In essence it was to serve as an ombudsman, to ensure that the Pennsylvania State Constitution was honored in letter and in spirit, that the citizenry was not suffering due to arbitrary governance.

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES: DEMOCRACY VS. REPUBLICANISM

"...So spake the false dissembler unperceived;
 For neither man nor angel can discern
 Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks
 Invisible..."

In 1790, under pressure from the United States Congress organized under the new, national oligarchy, Pennsylvania produced a constitution which mimicked in many ways the Federal example and just about undid everything that had been democratic about its government. But the democratic spirit did not die away. For the next decade the Pennsylvania democrats fought against oligarchic interests.

The democratic cause was taken up in Philadelphia by a newspaper known as, the *Aurora*. The paper was edited by Benjamin Franklin Bache, grandson to Benjamin Franklin. The *Aurora* was outspoken in its opposition to Federalists policies under John Adams. Adams' response was the Alien and Sedition Act whose primary purpose was to silence Bache and his paper.

In 1798, *Aurora* editor, Benjamin Franklin Bache died of yellow fever. William Duane, his assistant editor, married Bache's widow, and assumed full responsibility for the *Aurora*. He was even more outspoken than Bache had been. He spoke against the European kind of society where the many labored to support the needs of the few. He spoke for those who wanted a society in which the many governed, not the aristocratic few.

In response, there emerged another political voice in Pennsylvania, a voice more moderate, less aroused, less impassioned but no less determined. This voice spoke for a different set of interests and had its own journal— *The Freeman's Journal* — just as the Philadelphia democrats had the *Aurora*. This opposition party was known as the Quids.

The Quids spoke the language of democracy while advancing a program that would erode the very conditions necessary for it to thrive. They gave the word the meaning it has had ever since. What they did was to take the word "democracy" and link it with the word "republic," by which they meant representative government, an aristocracy of "the wise and virtuous," essentially substituting one word for the other without actually appearing to do so. With the word republic, all discussion of the common good, accountability, impeachment of the judiciary, proper legislation disappear from the conversation. In essence, the content is excised from the political dialogue. Democracy becomes a "cultural style," instead of a political program.

DEMOCRACY DEFINED

*“... alone I pass'd through ways
That brought me on a sudden to the tree
Of interdicted knowledge; fair it seem'd ...”*

Democracy is, in its Greek origin, a political word. “Demos” refers to the people, “kratos,” to power or rule. So that democracy is a form of government in which the people rule. The people, meaning all citizens living under a particular government, exercise power on their own behalf. The people and the government are one and the same.

Some time in the eighteenth century, democracy took on a second meaning. It became equated with freedom from arbitrary constraint. This kind of democracy is a negative concept in that it incorporates the wish to be free from something, to be left alone, to not be bothered. I am referring to such democracy as civic democracy. It is quite different from political democracy in that it does not describe a form of government.

In the nineteenth century, the word democracy took on yet another meaning. If we are, all of us, to be free from want, we need to live in a society where there is a relatively equal distribution of wealth. Such concerns usually fall under the heading of social democracy. While social democracy is about the distribution of wealth, political democracy is about the distribution of power.

There is yet a fourth meaning which adheres to this most sticky of words, democracy. This particular kind of democracy, however, has no form, has no program, has no content. A “democratic leader” will talk and act in a folksy, anti-elitist way, create an atmosphere of well-being but will stand for nothing in particular that he is willing to openly advocate that is truly democratic. He will speak of “prosperity” and “liberty,” but will offer no concrete proposals. This is what rhetorical democracy is all about, appearance, sleight of hand, empty promises. It is one of the reasons democracy has such bad standing and is so often the object of ridicule.

Vandana Shiva holds out another option. She calls it “Earth Democracy.” Where there is earth democracy, there is self-governance organized around issues of access to and distribution of natural resources. The local community controls its supply of water. It controls its seeds. It chooses the crops it plants and the means of fertilization. Localization becomes the answer to globalization. Diversity is the answer to uniformity and centralization, diversity of species, of crops, of peoples and cultures.

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT: THE SHAPING OF AMERICAN CHARACTER

*“... for e’en in heaven his looks and thoughts
Were always downward bent, admiring more
The riches of heaven’s pavement, trodden gold...”*

Looking at Greek society from afar, we can see how the democratic form government had a direct effect on the culture, character, intellectual and emotional make up of the typical Athenian citizen living in Athens in the fifth century B.C. Such generalizations could apply to any culture at any time. Our values, our identity, our sense of self and level of self confidence are determined, in part, by the government we live under. This becomes a lot harder to grasp as we change our focus to our own culture and our own times.

Yet, the United States offers an interesting study in government and its effects, largely because it started from scratch with a very particular form government, a constitutional oligarchy with a strong emphasis on rhetorical democracy. And in early American history, there was a change in government that parallels the change in Athens from the fifth to the fourth centuries.

Between 1776 when the thirteen colonies became thirteen states, each with its own form of government, and 1788 when the constitution was ratified, there was a period of experimentation in government. Democratic values were on the rise. Citizens were actively involved in shaping their own political destinies. With the Constitution in place there emerged a centralized government with a concentration of power in the hands of a few. Democracy was marginalized. The citizen began to disappear.

The typical American, as observed by De Tocqueville in the 1830’s, is weak and isolated, plagued with feelings of insignificance. He is at once “independent but powerless.” He is near people but not connected to them. There is a lack of courage and critical thinking which contrasts with what had been the case at an earlier time.

Over the past one hundred fifty years, other writers have made similar observations. Only De Tocqueville seems to have understood that the American character he observes is a direct consequence of the government the American lives under.

15.

DEMOCRACY AS MYTH

*“...with high words, that bore
Semblance of worth, not substance...”*

It wasn't until the twentieth century that democracy took on mythic proportions. Largely this was for purposes of propaganda. In an age where bare-fisted imperialism was no longer socially acceptable, a rationale was needed to justify the conquest. Democracy was the ideal choice. It had great rhetorical power. And it was universally accepted as a desired outcome. Populations from around the world embraced the word and longed for its liberating benefits.

It was at this time that academics assumed an important role in defining the meaning of democracy and that the phrase “liberal democracy” took on its modern meaning. “Liberal democracy” offers itself as an ideology, while implying that it is a form of government, which it isn't. As a consequence, those who would choose to install a genuinely democratic form of government are confused as to the true meaning of the word democracy. In the name of “liberal democracy” they are denied the option of self-government.

Matters are further complicated when the word “republic” is introduced into the conversation. The meaning of this word is vague. It has been applied to governments of dramatically different nature and is most often used as a palliative. The hope is that people will be content to live in a “republic” and not be too literal in demanding a democracy.

PART III

The Quest for Unbridled Power

Democracy Crushed

THE BATTLEFIELD AFTER THE BATTLE

*“... all the ground
With shiver'd armour strown, and on a heap
Chariot and charioteer lay overturn'd...”*

History, one could say, is nothing but a vast battlefield, after the battle is over, a mountain of corpses made up of men, women and children from around the world and across time who were slaughtered to satisfy the warrior in his quest for blood and glory. If this is the case, then it behooves us to get to know these warriors personally. For it is by understanding their role in history that we might come to see that the violence is avoidable and that it is an obstacle to the formation of governments designed to serve the common good.

Writers of history thrive on the moments of “glory.” Their enthusiasm for their subject matter can easily blind us to the fact that the killing is senseless and that the misery it engenders is gratuitous. Alexander, known as “The Great,” Genghis Kahn and Napoleon are just a few of the “heroes” whose stories fill the history books.

If one studies the battlefield and digs beneath the rubble one often finds that what is lost is not just human life but a democratic way of living. For example, Kievan Rus was a medieval state dominated by the city of Kiev and to a lesser degree, Novgorod, to the north. It was inhabited by Slavs, a peaceful people who were neither militarily organized nor well armed. The Golden Age of Kiev in the eleventh century saw the acceptance of Christianity and the creation of the first East Slavic written legal code, the *Russkaya Pravda*, whose tone and concerns foreshadow the *Magna Carta* issued in England, almost two hundred years later in 1215.

Kievan society lacked the class institutions that were typical of West European feudalism. Autocratic, aristocratic, and democratic institutions existed side by side. The democratic element was represented by the *veche*, or town assembly, which all freemen could attend. The Mongol invasions of 1237-1240 obliterated this burgeoning democracy and drove the civilization north to Moscow where tyranny thrived. Violence was injected into Russian society in heavy doses by the Mongol horde. A burgeoning social structure was crushed. Russia never recovered.

POWER CONCEALED

*“... and was the first
That practiced falsehood under saintly show,
Deep malice to conceal, couch'd with revenge...”*

As a means of controlling the knights, expanding the power of the Roman church and ultimately bring the Eastern Church in Constantinople to heel, in 1095, Pope Urban II addressed the Council of Clermont, calling upon the knights of Europe to stop fighting one another and to band together against the heathens in the East. Thus was the first of nine crusades initiated.

The crusades are one of the earliest examples of corporate violence in which we see the separation between the organizers of the violence and those who execute it. The Pope did not ride out on his steed, leading his men into battle. He had others do that for him. In a literal sense, there is no blood on his hands. He remains above the fray, though in essence, he is at the center of it. This style of conquest is characteristic of the modern era. Examples abound.

The crusades brought the Catholic Church an enormous increase in power, prestige and wealth. Feudalism was undermined in favor of a strong central power. It is often vaunted that doing away with feudalism was a desirable outcome. Yet feudalism was a form of government, a form of government in which power was widely dispersed and fragmented. Society was composed of small, cohesive communities in which members counted on the support of fellow community members. This is what democracy is about.

The feudal community was an agrarian society built around sustenance farming in which the common good prevailed over private interests. Each peasant had a share of the land in his village and access to commons for pasture and woodcutting. There was a sharing of plows and draft animals, a pooling of labor. Government, as such, was reduced to the barest minimum operating in response to the interests of the governed. It is worth speculating how the western world might have evolved had this kind of society with this form of government been allowed to evolve to its natural limits.

POWER REVEALED: NAPOLEON MYTH AND REALITY

*“... Towards him they bend
With awful reverence prone; and as a god
Extol him equal to the Highest in heaven...”*

Napoleon dreamt of ruling the world from his throne in Paris. He got closer than most to making his dream come true. At its peak, his empire held sway over some forty-four million souls. His wars led to the death of some 6.5 million people, close to fifteen percent of that population. Yet he was admired and continues to be for bringing down the walls of feudalism and ushering in the modern era.

Napoleon presented himself as the standard bearer for everything the Revolution stood for when in fact just the opposite is true. With his ascendancy to the throne he extinguished for good the remaining embers of democracy that first appeared in the early days of the Revolution.

It is unfortunate that the mere mention of the French Revolution evokes thoughts of the “Reign of Terror,” a period of violence lasting from September 5, 1793, to July 27, 1794, in which as many as 40,000 lives were lost. As horrible as it was, this is not the whole story. What is too often forgotten is that the French Revolution began as a peaceful experiment in government with democratic leanings. And that when Napoleon violently overthrew the Directory on November 9, 1799 (18 Brumaire by the revolutionary calendar), replaced it with a consulate of three and then, in 1804, with a dictatorship of one, i.e. himself, he was overthrowing a legitimate government that was in the process of establishing order and that could have potentially returned to its more democratic roots.

Over the ten year period from 1789 to 1799 there was experimentation with three different kinds of government, each of which had significant democratic elements. In the constitution of 1793, there were provisions for direct elections, with one delegate per 40,000 citizens, a more liberal offer than James Madison’s one per 50,000. There were to be run-off elections where there was no absolute majority and in some cases, where there was a tie, selection by lottery. Elections were to be held annually. Provision was made for an executive council comprised of twenty-four members, serving for a year only. Annual elections, an executive council of twenty-four, such provisions make this constitution one of the most democratic in modern times.

DARKNESS VISIBLE

*“...yet from those flames
No light; but rather darkness visible...where peace
And rest can never dwell...”*

Writers like Plato, Rousseau and Machiavelli believed that deception was an essential element in government, that only the wise were wise enough to understand the necessities of various government policies and actions. Without secrecy and deception, governors could not govern. This mentality seems to prevail today, a time when there is less and less government transparency.

It is generally accepted that most politicians tell the voters what they want to hear at election time to win votes and that once elected act in accordance with the wishes of those who paid the campaign bill. When listening to campaign speeches, when entering the voting booth, as one does when entering the theatre, one must willingly, subconsciously, suspend one's disbelief.

Thus, there are two realities to be maintained at once. And there are two sets of powers controlling the two complementary realities: the visible oligarchs, those elected to office, the invisible oligarchs, their paymasters and handlers. The true source of power is usually hidden. Selfish deeds often pass for “official policy” giving them a veneer of legitimacy.

There are those who have argued that the United States Constitution was written and a centralized Federal government was established so that speculators would get paid in 1789. In the year 2009, as planned, they got paid once again. But on this occasion the transaction occurred before an observing public. The invisible oligarchs are no longer invisible.

AIG has had to change its name and logo so as to protect its employees from physical assault. But the real culprits, the legislators and government officials without whose connivance none of this ever could have happened, escape unidentified. It is typical, especially in the United States, that the citizenry, even as it is being robbed and driven to destitution, never challenges and holds accountable its own government, the people in power who determine its individual and collective destinies.

THE PATHOLOGY OF POWER

*“...So stretch’d out in length the arch-fiend lay
Chain’d on the burning lake...”*

Some men and women enter public life out of a wish to serve the common good. They might have a special area of interest or expertise, a policy or a piece of legislation which they believe will be a benefit to all of us. There are others who enter public life, sometimes visibly, sometimes behind the scene, who seek power for the sake of power. They have no interest in the common good. No amount of power seems to be enough power and the power they exercise almost invariably has harmful, sometimes dreadful, consequences.

Who are these people, those who exercise deadly power without remorse? Are they like us? Are they different? According to Lord Acton, power corrupts people. One can just as easily argue the reverse, that there is a subset of people who bring the corruption with them. They are addicted to power, the way an alcoholic is addicted to alcohol.

In the good old days, the conquistador could glory in his gory acts, but in today’s culture, the warrior has to offer a benign, well-mannered, civilized veneer in order to gain the power he needs to satisfy his wish to destroy. It is in this context that words like “narcissistic personality” and “psychopath” enter the discussion.

The narcissist is one who has a grandiose sense of who he is. He is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited power. He is arrogant and exploitative. He lacks empathy. The description of the psychopath is similar. He is glib, superficially charming, can be charismatic, is cunning and manipulative. He is emotionally empty and callous and lacks empathy. He shows no remorse and refuses to or cannot accept responsibility for his actions. He craves power over others.

For people like this, violence is an escape from inner emptiness. It provides a necessary feeling of being alive. It is their own humaneness which they seek to escape. It fills them with a sense of dread and vulnerability. They must kill it in others and in themselves.

THE PATHOLOGY OF POLITICAL DISENGAGEMENT

“...*Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy:
Yet with a pleasing sorcery, could ... excite
Fallacious hope, or arm the obdured breast
With stubborn patience ...*”

When power is centralized and unresponsive, the citizen retreats into himself as a refuge against feelings of powerlessness. He makes himself his own private property, to possess, separately and apart from the community, the polis. To live without a context, to live outside of rather than within the community, is to live in a state of *exstasis*, to be out of place, to be without a place. To be without a context, to be out of place, without genuine connections to the life of the polis is, as Aristotle put it, either to be a beast or a God.

In Greek, the word stasis refers both to the stability of balanced forces, or equilibrium and the presence of such forces, or factionalism. *Ekstasis* is the condition of being beyond, without or separate from factionalism or civic strife. It is also the condition of “withdrawal of the soul into a mythic or prophetic trance” which leads to insanity and bewilderment. In medieval times *ekstasis* became *alienatio mentis* which is the basis for the English word alienation. *Lien* is the French word tie. The insane person is known as an *aliené*, “he who is without ties.” Thus insanity and separation from political process have a common origin.

The person who is a *polis* unto himself feels isolated from the processes that control the outcome of human events. He feels trapped in his body, with little or no means for release, based on freedom and mutuality. He withdraws further into himself and ends up believing that this is where he belongs. Feeling small and powerless, the citizen is like a child dependent on the all powerful government which he idealizes the way a child idealizes its parent.

Recovery from a state of *exstasis* entails a transformation of political consciousness from that of a child to that of an adult. The liberated adult is able to think critically about political realities and the nature of state power. For the first time he understands and is in a position to live out the true meaning of his adult identity. He no longer sees himself as an island unto himself. He recognizes that he is part of the main.

PART IV

Paradise Regained

Democracy In The Modern Age

EMPOWERMENT AND THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

*“... celestial light,
Shine inward, and the mind, through all her powers,
Irradiate; there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight....”*

In our films and fiction and TV, we seem to be fascinated by transcending time and space, exploring new worlds in our imagination, conceiving of super-real forces which invade the world we know in ways which are mystifying and terrifying. There is a compelling interest in other-worldliness and the implicit belief that somewhere there is a thread tying us to these fantastic forces. Eventually the unthinkable will occur.

The fanciful speculation we allow ourselves via our cultural experiences is in sharp contrast to the perspective we apply to our government and political life. Here the assumption is that things will go on for ever, just as they are, an assumption that reflects not so much conviction as it does a very intense wish that things stay the same.

We are living in a man-made world and yet treat it as if it were an alien force beyond our ken or control. We are consciously hoping for the best, while subconsciously waiting for the worst. We fail to realize that our way of understanding and thinking about the world determine the degree to which we are helpless victims of circumstances or masters of our destiny.

Too often when we think of change, we think of cyclical change, the rising and the setting of the sun, the change in the seasons. Transformative change is something different. It is non-repetitive and irreversible. It represents the development of something new, emerging from the flow of past events and movements, extending itself into an indeterminate future with consequences, not all of which can be foreseen. It has direction.

THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

*“... This must be our task
In heaven, this our delight...”*

Before democracy can sprout roots, it needs to germinate. People who share a common interest meet in small groups. That common interest is democracy, its meaning, its purpose, its possibilities. There is an unstructured exchange of ideas. There is no particular expected outcome. These discussions are exploratory and expressive. The group is tolerant of different personalities and accepting of different ideas. Respect for person and thought breeds trust and mutual growth.

We connect to each other as part of a group as a consequence of our commonly held beliefs and visions. Yet we do not fully know these beliefs and visions until we talk to one another about them. As we formulate our thoughts and hear ourselves talk we learn for the first time just how important our beliefs and visions are to ourselves and to others.

Conflict is essential to life. Where there is true democracy, it is resolved not through compromise but through creative redefinition of the problem. Democracy is inclusive, inclusive of ideas and people. Democracy is open-ended. The outcome is uncertain.

The values we prize so much -- freedom, justice, equality -- do not exist in the abstract, they are a creation, the outcome of our interaction with each other in the democratic process. Without that critical interaction, they cease to exist.

Actions are political and democratic when we are all actively engaged in taking an action that has consequences for all of us. Democratic political action is neither arbitrary nor whimsical. It is exercised in response to a common need and has as its goal the resolution on of that common need. It requires our active engagement on a sustained basis.

DEMOCRATIZING THE OLIGARCHY

*“... we may chance
Re-enter heaven; or else in some mild zone
Dwell, not unvisited of heaven’s fair light,
Secure;*

Power is the life-blood of government, as blood is for the human individual. New ideas, new perceptions, new energy, new motivation, are the equivalent of oxygen rich blood circulating throughout the body. Money in the arteries of government is the equivalent cholesterol in the arteries of our blood vessels. It thickens the arteries of government, resulting in diminution in fresh blood. It results in obesity, lethargy, an obsessive interest in consuming more of the very substance which is producing the debility.

In the United States, power clots have resulted in lack of oxygen to vital organs. It is a government that hobbles about on shaky legs, panting at the slightest exertion. The corporate money which returns the same house and senate members to their seats year after year has clogged the arteries of power. Power no longer flows through government. It coagulates and clots. Embolisms form. They get bigger and bigger. Congress becomes weaker and weaker. The only new blood is in the Presidency and so that is where the power flows.

One means of bringing government back to health is to set limits on the terms of those who serve in Congress. Under such a system Congress would become empowered by the infusion of new blood on a regular basis. The men and women who seek office would be less attentive to their corporate paymasters and more attentive to the common good.

THE EXECUTIVE

*“Forwith from every squadron and each band
The heads and leaders thither haste, where stood
Their great commander...”*

It was Alexander Hamilton’s dream to have a King in charge. Had he been alive today he probably would have been gratified to see the amount of power that has accrued to the office of the President. According to the Constitution, presidential powers are carefully outlined and rather modest. The congress legislates, coins money, raises an army, declares war, and shares with the president responsibility for appointing certain key officers and members of the Supreme Court. However, the waging of war and the creation of a permanent state of national emergency has resulted in the concentration of power in the hands of the president that would be the envy of many a monarch.

If the goal were to establish a presidency that was more consistent with the democratic ideal, there are several steps that could be taken. Tenure in office could be reduced to one four year term in a life-time. In the Articles of Confederation the president served for but one year.

The system of patronage that now exists allows the president to establish a political power base by distributing thousands of offices. An alternative would be to establish a vetted lottery. A pool of acceptable candidates is established in advance. Names are pulled by random selection.

Uniting executive power and military power in one person creates opportunities to abuse power that has ramifications throughout the country and the world. A partial remedy would be to establish a three-member war council made up of the president, a member of the House of Representatives and a member of the Senate, each selected by lottery and limited to serving for one year, only.

DIVERSITY IN THE EAST

*“...But now, at last, the sacred influence
Of light appears, and from the walls of heaven
Shoots far into the bosom of dim Night
A glimmering dawn...”*

On paper, India is a constitutional oligarchy, the parliamentary version. One could argue, however, that it is the most democratic society in the world.

To understand anything about India, one must begin by trying to understand Hinduism. In its broadest sense, Hinduism says all humans, animals, plants are part of the same universal spirit. To harm any part of the whole, even the smallest part, is to harm the whole. Hindus revere nature in all of its manifestations. It is a non-individualistic, non-controlling way of looking at life. As such, it is an ideal soil for promoting the growth of a spirit of democracy.

A Hindu will create a modest family shrine, in his own home. He will meditate and chant, worshiping and honoring those beliefs, icons, symbols and traditions that have personal meaning to him. In this broad sense there are as many versions of Hinduism as there are people who practice it.

India's religious diversity is matched by its social and political diversity. Over the course of thousands of years, there were multiple invasions, bringing various new tribes and peoples to share a common space. In the West, under similar circumstances, the different peoples merged into one. In India, they ended up living side by side, maintaining their native culture, language and forms of worship. This unusual phenomenon helps explain a lot about Indian culture and religion and its penchant for democracy.

Today, India is a country of seventeen languages and 22,000 dialects. For centuries it was a collection of hundreds of separate principalities, kingdoms, and states. When the British left India in 1947, they had to cajole, bribe, threaten over five hundred rulers into relinquishing their power in favor of a unified India. Thus, it is not surprising to learn that India has had a difficult time setting up a strong center. There is a constant tug from various well-organized and vocal local governments with party lines of their own.

Democracy is an expression of unity in diversity. It is a steady state of tension between centrifugal forces, drawing towards the centre, and centripetal forces, drawing away from the center towards the local. When democracy is working, the center will be weak. The local elements will be strong and diverse, as they are in India.

DEMOCRACY COME TRUE

*“...wherein the just shall dwell,
And, after all their tribulations long,
See golden days, fruitful of golden deeds,
With joy and love triumphing, and fair truth...”*

Currently, in Latin America the word “democracy” has taken new and intensified meaning. There are political movements declaring themselves, “democratic” in nature. Of international significance is the movement known as, “Bolivarian democracy,” which has its roots in Venezuela, under the leadership of Hugo Chavez.

Adopted in December of 1999, by popular referendum, the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela establishes a constitutional oligarchy with a weak, unicameral legislature and a strong president. Various social welfare programs, funded by oil profits, constitute “a new socialist revolution.” This is social democracy. It is not political democracy.

One of the most original experiments in self-government is taking place in Porto Alegre, the capital city of the southernmost Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. In 1989, the government of Porto Alegre initiated a form of self-government known as Participatory Budgeting that is being imitated throughout Brazil and around the world. Ordinary citizens are given the opportunity to present their demands and set priorities for improvement. Through discussions and negotiations they influence the budget allocations made by their municipalities.

In March, there are plenary assemblies in each of the city’s sixteen districts as well as assemblies dealing with such areas as transportation, health, education, sports, and economic development. These large meetings—with participation that can reach over 1,000—elect delegates to represent specific neighborhoods. The mayor and staff attend to respond to citizen concerns.

What would happen if this model were applied on the national level? One would have true democracy.

CONCLUSION

The Citizen State

*“... For who can yet believe, though after loss,
That all these puissant legions, whose exile
Hath emptied heaven, shall fail to re-ascend,
Self-raised, and re-possess their native seat?...”*

“These are the times that try men’s souls,” wrote Thomas Paine in 1776, as thirteen British colonies were becoming thirteen independent states. It was a time of crisis for the early Americans but also a time for critical thinking and experimentation in government. Were Paine alive today he might be uttering similar thoughts. Americans are once again in a state of crisis. Citizenship has dwindled to the point of disappearing. War has become a way of life. The global economy based on speculation, exploitation of resources both human and natural is teetering on the edge of total collapse. The quality of air, water and soil has deteriorated. Species are disappearing from the planet on a daily basis.

If one considers the consequences for the ecology, if one allows for the fact that by the end of the century, at present rates of economic expansion and consumption of fossil fuels, oil might have disappeared as a natural resource, then one realizes that both the economy and society need to undergo a fundamental restructuring based on different premises. Life will be less materialistic. Life will be simpler and richer. Community life will be revitalized. Small and local is where we are headed.

As the oligarchy withers the government that replaces it will be closer to a citizen-state than anything we have seen in a long time. In Iceland where the banks bankrupted the country and citizens were expected to pay off the debt, there were protests and a change in government. Icelanders decided to draft a new constitution that would free the country from the exaggerated power of international finance and virtual money. To write the new constitution, the people of Iceland elected twenty-five citizens from among 522 adults not belonging to any political party but recommended by at least thirty citizens. This document was not the work of a handful of politicians, but was written on the internet. The constituent’s meetings were streamed on-line, and citizens were able to send their comments and suggestions, witnessing the document as it took shape. This is democracy at work. When government indifference to the needs of its citizens reaches an extreme, acquiescence is no longer an option.