WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

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INTRODUCTION

Definition of Political Thought

Political thought can simply be defined as *thinking* or, in the words of the *Encarta Dictionary*, "idea produced by mental activity *which is related to politics"*. Politics is defined simply as activities associated with government. Political ideas are usually expressed in words (oral or written), but also in sculpture, paintings and other art forms. They deal with the forms and functions of government—the organization and operations of national, local, clan, village and kindred authorities. In the words of Kenyan political scientists Mutiso and Rohio, "thought and politics are of the same age in the sense that, where there are political problems which call for political solutions, thought precedes actions". Thus, in every human community or society, from the smallest and primitive acephalous communities to large centralized states, political thought precedes political organization.

In simple, *pre-literate* societies, thoughts about politics were scanty. They existed in the forms of proverbs, songs, idioms and the like. Besides, they did not constitute a specialized body of knowledge that was recognized as the intellectual domain of any group of persons. Even in the large, centralized and *literate* societies of the Ancient World—kingdoms and/or empires like Ancient Egypt, Sumer and Israel—there was still a poverty of political thought. Written thoughts about politics that existed were subordinated to religious thought (ideas or beliefs about how to appease or manipulate the gods or how to establish or enter a divine kingdom). A handy example is the Old Testament of the Bible.

Owing to the limitations of *thinking…which is related to politics,* political philosophers do not accept it as an adequate definition of political thought. In their view, political thought did not start from the dawn of human society, but in the fifth century BCE, and in Ancient Greece. It was from this time that, in the words of Robert Nisbet, "the state came to be conceived, idealized indeed, as a community worthy of a status that elsewhere attended only religion". This view is based on a narrow, and

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professional, definition of political thought. Simply put, political philosophers define political thought as *extensive discourse about politics*. Such discourse is not oral, but in writing—in treatises, letters and books devoted to that purpose. Thus, what distinguishes what began in Greece from previous political thinking is that the Greeks wrote extensively about the subject. To use the words of Ira Katznelson, they wrote about "the nature and justification of political obligation and authority and the goals of political action".[1] Such thoughts were systematic: they were made up of facts and ideas that were related to one another. They were also theoretical: they were ideas arrived at through speculation or conjecture. We might add that the Greeks who are regarded as the first political philosophers were Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. We shall discuss their political works in Chapters 1 and 2.

Political thought is sometimes *descriptive*, and sometimes *prescriptive*. However, most political treatises are a combination of both description and prescription. Political thought is descriptive when it attempts an analysis of existing political systems, when it attempts to identify universal features of political systems, or when it attempts to determine trends in political processes. Political thought is prescriptive when it proposes new political systems, or advocates political reform, or advocates specific forms of political action. Sometimes prescription is made on the basis of expediency or functionality. In such cases, the system that is recommended is believed to be the only one that can prevent or minimize conflict or the only one that would enable desired objectives to be realized. Sometimes, prescription is made in the name of God or moral principles. In such cases, the policy advocated is believed to be approved by God or believed to be virtuous. When prescription is based on moral values, it is said to be *normative.*

There are two main tendencies in political thought. These are the *leftist* and *rightist* tendencies. The basic contrasts between political philosophers of the two tendencies are shown graphically as follows:

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[1] Ira Katznelson,"Political Theory". Microsoft® Student 2009 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.

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LEFT	RIGHT
Idealist	Realist
Rationalist	Empiricist
Monist	Pluralist
Radical	Conservative

The leftist political philosopher is an *idealist*: he believes in perfection and dedicates himself to effort meant to attain it. He believes that there is an ideal political system and that it is up to man to find it and adopt it. On the other hand, the *realist* does not believe there is any world outside the one that exists. He knows that in this world there is much evil as well as good, and is convinced that the world is inherently so. The idealist is usually a *rationalist*: he believes that the ideal political system can be determined by reason: he is of the view that political action should be governed by reason. In contrast, the realist is often an *empiricist*: he believes that experience—knowledge of what works and what does not work—should guide political action. He believes that there are many proposals that are quite reasonable but are not workable. This is because, in his view, human action is not guided by reason alone. The realist insists that, besides using his reason, man is emotional: he is greedy, vicious, venal, but also kind, self-sacrificing and stupid. Thus, man routinely takes some decisions that are not reasonable. The idealist (the rationalist) is often a *monist*: he is the kind of person who, for instance, does not understand why institutions offering the same service, or political institutions dedicated to the same goals, should exist in large numbers and allowed to engage in wasteful, destructive competition, which often undermines the unity of the state. Hence, the monist is often an advocate of centralization. In contrast, the *pluralist*, as the man of experience, believes that centralization, while reasonable, does not conduce to efficiency, often leads to oppression of man by man and, in the long run, to political conflicts of greater dimensions than those that routinely occur between competing interests groups. Hence, the realist often supports the decentralization of political authority and, in economic and social matters, of the existence of competing interest groups that render the same kind of service (e.g. supermarkets, churches, and schools). Finally, the man who believes in the existence of an ideal political system, who thinks he can determine it by reason, who believes in centralizing authority so that waste and conflicts are minimized, is, not surprisingly, often a *radical*. He is often an advocate of *revolution* (far-reaching change)—change that would enable man to build the perfect

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political community. In the same vein, it is not surprising that the man who believes the world is inherently imperfect, who is guided by experience, who believes that plurality conduces to efficiency and to stability on a long-term basis, would be a *conservative*. The realist believes that, while the world is imperfect, there is much that is good in it. Thus, he would like the *status quo* to be preserved and, if need be, improved upon through *reform* (correction of faults and removal of abuses).

We end this contrast between rightist and leftist tendencies in political philosophy by mentioning some of the world's leading idealist and realist philosophers. Plato, Thomas Hobbes, St. Augustine, Hegel and Karl Marx were idealists. Aristotle, Niccolò Machiavelli, John Locke, and Montesquieu were realists. Except Montesquieu, the works of the above-named philosophers are discussed in this book.

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PART ONE: WESTERN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHERS

We have already made the assertion that political thought began in Ancient Greece, which is considered a part of the Western world (Western Europe and North America). This means that political thought is one of the legacies of the Western world to civilization. The Greeks have been described as the greatest culture carriers of the Ancient World. It is believed that their civilization laid the basis for Western civilization. The Greeks lived in the area known today as Greece, on the islands near Greece, and in colonies in distant places like Sicily and some parts of Spain. Greece is one of the countries on the eastern periphery of the Western world.

It is pertinent to note that civilization did not begin in Greece; it did not even begin in the West. The Greeks were inheritors of the legacies of the civilizations that had existed in the surrounding area—the area that is historically called the Fertile Crescent (the somewhat semicircular area that extends from the Nile valley in present-day Egypt through the coastline of present-day Israel and Lebanon and terminates in the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in present-day Iraq). Today, the region is called the Middle East. The oldest civilizations of this region, which were also the world's oldest civilizations, were those of Sumer and Egypt. These were civilizations of the fourth millennium BCE. The civilizations of these two areas were succeeded in the same region by several others. These included the Amorite, Assyrian, Chaldean, and Persian civilizations. The West, and through the West the rest of the world, were inheritors of the legacies of the above civilizations. As civilization spread from its cradles in Mesopotamia and Egypt, it is not surprising that the Greeks (which includes the Minoans and Mycenaeans), being the geographically nearest Western peoples to the Fertile Crescent, would develop the first Western civilizations.

The earliest advanced cultures of the Greeks were the Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations. The former, dated c2200-c1400 BCE, was based on the island of Crete; the latter, based on the Greek mainland, existed in the period c1550-1000 BCE. The Mycenaean period was superseded by the Hellenic and Hellenistic eras. The period 1000-46 BCE (when Rome

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conquered Greece) covers both eras. Greek civilization was marked by many innovations. Here we will mention only their innovation in government. Unlike other nations that had developed advanced civilizations, the Greeks did not form a single nation-state. (This was probably because the Greek mainland was cut by many mountains and deep valleys.) Rather than a single nation-state, the Greeks formed city-states, about 150 0f them. As its name suggests, each city-state was a sovereign political entity. The city-states sometimes united to fight non-Greek enemies e.g. the Persians (490 -479 BCE). Sometimes they formed alliances ("leagues") that fought one another (e.g. the Delian and Athenian leagues that fought the Peloponnesian War in 431-404 BCE). Another innovative feature in Greek government was that political authority was more widely dispersed than in the civilized political entities of the Fertile Crescent. The latter were all ruled by kings with absolute powers, some of whom were considered divine. In Greece, on the other hand, there was a general concern in each city-state to prevent the emergence of centralized political authority. Before the 9th century BCE, Greek city-states were ruled by kings. By 800 BCE, *monarchy* had given way in most states to *oligarchy* (rule by a few). Sometimes rule by a few took the form of what the Greeks called *aristocracy* (rule by the best—those considered most qualified to rule). Occasionally an individual seized power and ruled as a tyrant. Some of the tyrants were capable rulers and were loved by the people. However, the Greeks were in principle opposed to *tyranny* or any form of one-man rule. Their concern to find a more decentralized form of political authority resulted in the adoption of *democracy*, which the Greeks simply defined as "rule by the people".

The political system of Athens, one of the largest Greek city-states, best typifies the practice of democracy in Ancient Greece. The residents of Athens were divided into three: **freeborn**, foreigners and slaves. The freeborn was a citizen and had civic rights. Foreigners and slaves did not have the same rights. Politically, civic rights included the right to vote. Every adult male citizen had the right to go to the assembly, participate in debates and vote to make laws and determine the policies of the city-state. This practice is what today is called *direct* or *pure* democracy. It is contrasted with *indirect* or *representative* democracy, whereby the people elect a small number of persons to represent them. We might add that freeborn women did not have the franchise in the Greek city-states. We might also add that the freedom to speak one's opinion in the assembly naturally extended to freedom to express opinions in writing. Thus,

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Athenians engaged in serious political debates. Not surprisingly, Athenians were the first Ancients to start writing extensively about politics.

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CHAPTER 1

PLATO

Plato is generally regarded as the father of Western philosophy. Besides being a pioneer, his influence has been profound and enduring. The extent of his influence is such that the British philosopher Alfred John Whitehead described the history of philosophy, not just political thought, as “a series of footnotes to Plato”. In the same vein, the American philosopher John Dewey paid tribute to Plato by describing Western philosophy as “little more than a series of commentaries on Plato’s fundamental ideas”.

Plato was born into an aristocratic family in Athens in 428 or 427 BCE. His father, Ariston, died when he was a child and his mother, Perictione, married Pyrilampes, an associate of the statesman, Pericles. Plato’s privileged background enabled him to get the best education available in fifth-century BCE Athens. However, the Athens of his youth was a city that had seen better days and was in decline. The decline was hastened by the city’s defeat by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE). In the years following the end of this war, a group of about thirty tyrannical and pleasure-seeking men took over the government of Athens. During the reign of the tyrants, the pursuit of learning and the morals of the city declined. Young Plato, who had wanted to participate in public affairs, became disillusioned with politics, and became more concerned to influence political affairs through political education.

When he was about twenty years of age, Plato became a disciple of Socrates. Socrates (c469-399 BCE) did not bother to write. Rather, he moved about Athens engaging in philosophical dialogue with anyone who was willing to do so with him. What is known about him comes largely from the works of contemporary writers, including Plato, Xenophon and the playwright Aristophanes. Socrates believed that rational argument was the key to knowledge. He also believed, in the words of an encyclopaedia entry, “that all vice is the result of ignorance, and that no person is willingly bad; correspondingly, virtue is knowledge, and those who know the right will act rightly”. Socrates asked questions like “What is virtue”? What is justice? And “What is courage”? He also raised questions about the nature of deities. In 399 BCE, Socrates was put on trial for alleged impiety (“not

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recognizing the gods that the city recognizes" and for "creating new divinities") and for allegedly corrupting the youth of Athens, (for turning them away from the gods and from the principles of democracy). He was convicted and executed.

After Socrates execution (through the forced drinking of poison), Plato, who was probably afraid for his safety, left the city of his birth and travelled to Egypt, Sicily, and the area of present-day Italy. He returned to Athens in 387 BCE and founded a school, better known as Plato's Academy, which is regarded as the world's first university. The Academy remained in existence till 529 CE, when it was closed by the Byzantine emperor Justinian I because of its alleged pagan teachings. Plato's Academy attracted students from outside Athens and the Greek culture area. Its most prominent pupil was Aristotle whose political philosophy we shall discuss in the next chapter. It was while Plato was running his Academy that he wrote his philosophical works. He wrote in dialogue form, in the same way his master Socrates had conducted debates. Among Plato's works are *Apology* (Socrates' defence at his trial); *Phaedo* (the death scene of Socrates which treats, among other subjects, his theory of Forms); and the *Republic* (his main work in political philosophy). Much of what we discuss below is got from the *Republic.*

We have seen above that Plato was disillusioned by the decline in Athens in the period of his youth. He was not impressed either by what he saw in the other places he visited. As in Athens, he observed that morals had degenerated and that there was so much injustice. He reasoned that things had come to this sorry state because the system of government in Athens and the other places "was bad." Hence, he concluded that the solution to cultural decline and injustice was the adoption of a *good* or the *ideal* system of government. He therefore took it upon himself to determine the ideal system of government. In his view, the ideal political system would be appropriate, not only to Athens and to the time he lived, but all other political entities and for all time.

Plato's theory of the ideal state derives in part from his theory of Forms. In his view, every being, everything and every phenomenon in the world has an ideal form or prototype. According to him, the things we see every day in the physical world are mere imperfections of the ideal form. As long as man depends on the senses, Plato believed, he cannot see beyond

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the imperfect forms that exist in the universe. However, through philosophical enquiry—by reasoning—it is possible to see beyond what the senses can perceive and, in so doing, determine the nature of the prototype. "In the knowledgeable realm", to use his owns words,

> the form of the good is the last thing to be seen, and it is reached only with difficulty. Once one has seen it, however, one must conclude that it is the cause of all that is correct and beautiful in anything, that it produces both light and its source in the visible realm, and in the intelligible realm it controls and provides truth and understanding, so that anyone who is to act sensibly in private or public must see it.

Extending this idea to politics, Plato asserted that all existing political systems were imperfect forms of the ideal form, and that man could determine the ideal political system through reasoning.

Plato's ideal state is a political entity where there is a hierarchical division of labour between three classes: the guardian class, the soldiers, and the common people. The last class is made up of merchants, farmers, artisans and labourers. The guardian class is made up of intellectually gifted persons that are selected at birth on eugenic grounds[2], and trained to provide the state with political leadership. The responsibility of the soldier class is to defend the state. Like members of the guardian class, the soldiers are to be selected on eugenic grounds. The common people, composed of the least endowed persons in intellectual ability, are to provide the material needs of the society. Plato believed that every job, however menial, is important. The just state, he asserted, is the one in which the various classes function harmoniously, a state where each class

[2] Eugenics is defined (in the words of History.com editors) as "the practice or advocacy of improving the human species by selectively mating people with specific desirable hereditary traits". Plato was among the earliest advocates of eugenics in writing. Based on his belief that children inherit the qualities of their parents, Plato's suggestion is that the children of intellectually gifted persons would also be intellectually gifted. Thus, they should be trained from birth to become philosophers. Based on this belief, he suggested that the state should control procreation. This was to ensure, among other things, that philosophers and children with other desirable qualities would continue to be produced, and that the weak do not produce children. He wrote in the *Republic* that '[w]eak parents should not procreate, [b]ecause their children would inherit their inferior qualities [and] they would have no strength to lead a meaningful life, or in any way contribute to the state"

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does its duty and confines itself within its limits.

Central to Plato's concept of the ideal state is the role of the philosopher-king, who is picked from and is the leader of the guardian class. He was convinced that only a king grounded in philosophy, especially the "correct philosophy", can rule his state with justice and efficiency. Like Socrates, Plato believed that ignorance is the source of injustice and bad policy. Thus he stressed:

> The human race will not see better days until either the stock of those who rightly and genuinely follow philosophy acquire political authority or else the class who have political control be led by some dispensation of providence to become real philosophers.

Besides being grounded in philosophy, the members of the guardian class are to be abstemious. They must be willing to refrain from the pursuit of pleasure and to live with only the minimum amount of money and property needed for their physical well being. Besides, they must be willing to, in the words of Robert Nisbet, "abjure the ordinary comforts of family life, neighbourhood and idle companionship". In other words, they are not to marry, belong to families and social clubs. Generally, the ideal state is a communist state. There is no private property, not even private dwelling houses. The interest of the state is to take precedence over that of the individual. To ensure the citizen does not have divided loyalties, Plato's ideal state would not have guilds, clubs or business enterprises. Plato went as far as suggesting that there should be sexual communism, especially for the guardian class. This means that there will be no marriages. Any two members of the two sexes that fancy each other and belong to the same class can have sex and produce children. Children are to be brought up communally, not by their parents. In Plato's view, this kind of arrangement would ensure that children will develop no loyalties to their families. Thus, they would have undivided loyalty to the state.

Indeed, Plato insisted that no other forms of authority other than the government of the state, and no other functions other than those approved by and meant to serve the interest of the state, should be permitted. If allowed to exist, he reasoned, different non-state authorities

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would divide the state into factions and, thus, undermine its harmony. Clearly, Plato's ideal state is monolithic and totalitarian.

To ensure the ideal state is not defeated by its enemies, Plato held that it must be militaristic. Plato advocacy of militarism probably stemmed from his grudging admiration of the militaristic city-state of Sparta. Despite its cultural backwardness, which Plato deplored, Sparta was militarily strong and had defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War. He suggested therefore that, while the ideal state must be culturally advanced as Athens, it must be as militaristic as Sparta. For this reason, the ideal state should have a strong soldier class and the other citizens should be trained to develop the martial qualities of courage, boldness and aggressiveness.

Concerning education, Plato view was that it should come under totalitarian control. He was of the view that education should have a clearly defined purpose: to produce for specific functions in the state persons that would work in harmony with one another for the common good. If the state wants artisans, soldiers or physicians, there is no better way of producing them than by training people for such posts and teaching them to co-operate with one another to advance the interests of the state. There is no need for a general education: there is no need to teach philosophy to those that are meant to be artisans; and no need to teach masonry to a person with the talent to become a philosopher. This kind of education should start from infancy, for, as he put it, "the beginning is the most important part of any work, especially in the case of a young and tender thing". To further ensure that the above goals of education are achieved in the ideal state, Plato suggested that curriculum should be designed and strictly controlled by the state and that a censor's board should be established for the purpose of determining books that should be circulated and those that should be banned.

Comparing his ideal state with other systems of government, Plato asserted that it is the most *just* and *efficient* state—*just* because it is ruled by those that are most qualified to rule, and *efficient* because each citizen does the kind of work he is best suited to do. In his view, such a state is better than democracy, because democracy enables mediocrities to take control of government. He deplored what, according to him, is the presumption that "everyone who knows how to gets votes knows how to administer a city or a state". In his view, the most capable politicians are

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not necessarily the handsomest or the most eloquent persons. Plato also believed that rule by the philosophers is better than oligarchy or *plutocracy* (rule by the rich). Under any of these systems, the rulers are devoted to the pursuit of wealth and often neglect the interests of the people. Plato also asserted that his ideal state is better than tyranny, which he dismissed as rule by irresponsible people (criminals) who rely mainly on force and whose policies are not informed by philosophy.

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Before he died in 347 BCE, Plato was rather eager to see the emergence of states modelled upon his ideal state. In 367 BCE and again in 361 BCE, he visited Sicily (which was a Greek colony) in an attempt to educate and advice Dionysus the Younger, dictator of the island. Nothing came out of his efforts. However, though he failed to make any state of his time an "ideal state", he laid the foundation of the monistic and idealistic school in Western philosophy. His philosophy is monistic because it presents the political state as the only community that should exist in human society. His philosophy is idealistic because it expresses the view that there is an ideal or perfect political system upon which all political entities should be modelled. Many political philosophers after him adopted his monistic and idealistic approach to philosophy. Others opposed his views. Thus, Plato started the age-old and continuing debate in Western philosophy between idealists and realists, monists and pluralists, rationalists and empiricists, and radicals and conservatives. It is for this reason that he is called the father of Western philosophy.

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CHAPTER 2

ARISTOTLE

Born in Stagira, Macedonia, in 384 BCE, Aristotle was the son of a physician of the royal court. During his lifetime (384-322 BCE), Macedonia under Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE) became a world power. The Macedonian empire included the Greek city-states and extended from the Aegean Sea to India. The Macedonians, who are ethnically related to the Greeks, adopted Greek culture and spread it all over their large empire. In 366 BCE, Aristotle went to Athens and enrolled in Plato's Academy. He remained there for the next twenty years, first as a student and later as a teacher. At the end of this period, which was marked by Plato's death, Aristotle went to live in Assos, a city in Asia Minor, where a friend of his (Hermias) was the ruler. After Hermias was captured and killed by the Persians in 345 BCE, Aristotle moved to the Macedonian capital, Pella, where, in 339, he was engaged by King Philip of Macedonia to serve as a tutor to his teenage son, Alexander (the future Alexander the Great). After Alexander became king four years later, Aristotle returned to Athens and founded his own school, the *Lyceum.* Much of the discussion in his school took place when he and his students were strolling about the compound. He has thus been called the *peripatetic* teacher.

Aristotle and his students carried out investigations in Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, and Biology. He also wrote on Literary Criticism, Philosophy and Politics. His studies resulted in many books on the above subjects. They include *Organon* (a treatise on logic), *Physics* (writings on the natural sciences), *Poetics* (writings on literary criticism), and *Aesthetics* (a treatise on the dramatic arts). Other works include *Metaphysics* (on the nature, scope and properties of existence), *Nichomachean Ethics* (on ethical questions), and *Politics* (on government). Aristotle is regarded as the world's first social scientist. This is because he pioneered the adoption of what is called the *empirical* approach to philosophical and other forms of enquiry. This approach is based upon observation and experiment. It is contrasted with the *rationalist* approach (which is based upon reason) and the *intuitive* approach (which is based upon vision or feeling). He extended the bounds of logic by adding what he called *analysis* (making deductions on the basis of observation and experience) to *dialectic* (making

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deductions on the basis of logical consistency). Plato had relied entirely on dialectic, and was thus a rationalist. By adding analysis, Aristotle became an empiricist.

Given his approach to philosophical enquiry, it is logical that Aristotle would reject the unverifiable belief in the existence of the ideal state. Thus, he did not advocate radical changes in political systems. Instead, he suggested that existing political systems be reformed so as to enable the people of each state to "realise their ideals of life".

Aristotle was a pluralist. He rejected Plato's view that the state should be monolithic (united and centralized). Rather than strengthen the state as Plato believed, Aristotle believed that centralization would weaken it. In his own words,

> Unity there should be, both of the family and of the state, but in some respects only. For there is a point at which a state may attain such a degree of unity as to be no longer a state, or at which it will become an inferior state, like harmony passing into unism, or rhythm which has been reduced to a single foot.

By way of elucidation, Aristotle added that, in a state where everybody is compelled to live the same way, the special talents of individuals—talents that would have been useful if allowed to develop—would be wasted. Initiative would be suppressed. The society would lack variety. There would just be sterile conformity and cultural atrophy. Hence, Aristotle suggested that differences between individuals be, as far as is possible, recognized and perfected by the state. He opined, or rather warned, that if the state tries to achieve monolithic unity as in a military organization, human nature will resist it. Thus, the state would have to rely heavily on force to maintain its dysfunctional system.

In consonance with the above view, Aristotle rejected Plato's view that only the political community (community held together only by the machinery of government) should be allowed to exist in the state. He suggested instead that other communities—the family, the guild, the intellectual community, etc.—be allowed to co-exist with the political community. The existence of other communities, he argued, would make individuals better able to realize their ideals of life, and minimize the need

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for the state to use force to control its citizens.

Aristotle rejected communism, both of property and of wives and children. He conceded that Plato's view about communism—the view that common ownership would conduce to unity—is logical. But he argued that real life experience does not support Plato's view. Besides, Aristotle added, the communist state would be inefficient. To support his views about communism, Aristotle argued as follows. The members of a small community (a family, monastery or guild) have a sense of being different from all that are outside their fold. This sense of being apart fosters unity among them and they become loyal to their group. Hence, every member of the group is willing to advance the interests of his group. He is ready to defend its property and its right to exist. Individuals, continued Aristotle, have this kind of attitude towards their personal property. Every person is so closely attached to his own property, and is willing to improve upon it and to defend his right to it. Basically because of this practice, he observed, children and property are properly taken care of in the pluralist state. In contrast, he added,

> That which is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it. Everyone thinks chiefly of his own, hardly at all of the common interest. For besides other considerations, everybody is more inclined to neglect the duty which he expects another to fulfil. As in the family, many attendants are often less useful than a few.

Thus Aristotle concluded that ownership of personal property conduces to efficiency in the state.

Another likely setback of communism, Aristotle continued, is that it would make hardworking persons resent lazy ones. This is because, in a communist system, lazy persons would get as much from the common wealth as hardworking ones. Hence the latter would have no incentive to continue working hard. Thus, the state would become inefficient.

Unlike his master Plato, Aristotle was not definite on the issue of what class of people should rule the state. According to him, it does not matter much whether a state is a monarchy, oligarchy, aristocracy or democracy. The important thing, he stressed, is that government should

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protect private property and allow other communities (associations or organizations) to coexist with the political community. However, Aristotle preferred some systems of government to others. He condemned tyranny: he believed that “there is no wickedness too great for a tyrant”. He also condemned oligarchy (which he defined as government by the rich) and aristocracy (government by the best, according to him). He believed that the members of oligarchic or aristocratic governments would be too snobbish and remote from the lower classes that they can hardly seek to advance the interests of all classes. He further argued that democracy would give control of government to the poor. He was not in favour of democracy, however: he believed that the poor would ignore the interests of the rich. Aristotle believed that rule by the middle class would be the least disadvantageous form of government. In his view, the middle class is close to both the rich and poor and are thus more likely to protect the interests of all the classes in the state.

Aristotle supported slavery. In his view, slavery is expedient and right. It is expedient because slave labour is needed for the production of goods and services; and it is right because, in his view, some people are marked out from birth to be the slaves of others. He called them “natural slaves”. Aristotle also believed that races are naturally unequal. Superior individuals and races, he continued, should enslave inferior ones. He insisted that to enslave inferior individual and groups is neither unjust nor against the interests of the enslaved. Indeed, it is in the slave’s interest to be enslaved by his superiors. For in the same way that the lives of animals are improved when domesticated by humans, the lives of inferior persons and groups are improved when enslaved by their superiors. Thus, Aristotle suggested that superior races (such as the Greeks) should enslave inferior ones (non-Greeks or barbarians). He added that, if necessary, war should be waged against inferior peoples for the purpose of enslaving them.

Aristotle had a low opinion of trading. He held that it was an unnatural way of acquiring wealth. To him, the natural way of acquiring wealth is careful management of buildings and land. He was of the view that the amount of wealth that can be acquired from lands and buildings is limited. On the other hand, there is no limit to the amount of wealth that can be made from trading. The Macedonian philosopher added that “the most hated sort of trade is usury [lending at a high rate of interest] which makes a gain out of money itself”.

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After the death of Alexander the Great (323 BCE), a wave of anti-Macedonian feeling swept through Athens. Because of his Macedonian origin, Aristotle came under severe criticism and was accused of being irreverent to authority. Probably remembering the fate of Socrates, the Macedonian left Athens, settling in the nearby island of Euboea. He died there the following year.

In his assessment of Aristotle's *Politics*, the English philosopher Bertrand Russell opined that it is

> both interesting and important—interesting as showing the common prejudices of educated Greeks in his time and important as the source of many principles which remained influential until the end of the Middle Ages.

The "many principles" include Aristotle's condemnation of usury and his defence of slavery. Ecclesiastical scholars, who dominated Western thought in the Middle Ages, adopted these and several other Aristotelian principles and used them to justify their religious beliefs. The most famous ecclesiastical philosopher of the period was the Italian philosopher and theologian St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). In *Summa Theologica* and other works, Aquinas used the principles of Aristotle in an attempt to reconcile faith with science. His theology was accepted by the Catholic Church. Aristotle's writings were also influential in the Arab/Islamic world during the Middle Ages. Arabic translations of his works began to appear in the 9th century. Indeed, many of Aristotle's principles in politics and economics, as well as in literary criticism, drama and zoology, were not seriously questioned until after the medieval era. For instance, his condemnation of usury was adopted by the Catholic Church. Thus, it was not until the period of the Reformation (the sixteenth century) that Christian thinkers began to support the practice. His support for slavery was also adopted by the Catholic Church and, after the Reformation, by the Protestant churches. Thus, it was not until the eighteenth century (the era of the Enlightenment) that religious leaders in Christendom began to see

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evil in and attack the institution of slavery. In drama, if we might add, it was not until the Shakespearean era (sixteenth century) that play directors began to feature scenes depicting the shedding of blood on stage. (Aristotle had condemned this in his *Aesthetics*.) Generally, apart from influencing the thoughts and policies of the Middle ages, Aristotle's critique of Plato's *Republic* has remained till today one of the most important sources of criticisms of communist philosophy, the totalitarian state and radical politics.

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CHAPTER 3

ST. AUGUSTINE

The man and his views

St. Augustine is counted as one of the four Latin Fathers of the Christian church. That means he is one of the early Christian writers (who wrote in Latin) whose works are considered orthodox and authoritative. The other Latin Fathers were as follows: St. Ambrose (339?-397 CE), who converted Augustine to Christianity; St. Jerome (347?-419 or 420 CE), who translated the Bible into Latin; and St. Gregory the Great (540?-604 CE), who made the Papacy the supreme authority in the Catholic Church and sponsored the missionary expedition that converted England to Christianity.

St. Augustine was born on 13 November 354 CE, in Tagaste, Numidia (now in Algeria). Tagaste was a town in the Roman province of North Africa. His mother, who later became St. Monica, was a devout Catholic; his father, Patricius, was a pagan but became a Christian convert in his last years. Augustine was sent to school early in life where he studied Latin and Rhetoric; he did not show much interest in Greek. After he left school, he became a teacher of Rhetoric in his native North Africa.

Although the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire had ended (from 312 CE), although the Nicene Creed had been proclaimed the official doctrine of the Christian Church (325 CE), and although Christianity had been proclaimed the official religion of the Roman Empire (330 CE), rival Christian doctrines and rival religions continued to flourish in the domain of the Roman emperors. One of the rival religions was Manichaeism. This religion was founded in the third century of the Common Era by a Persian called Mani. Mani claimed to be the last and greatest of all the prophets. He taught his followers that there is an ongoing conflict between light and darkness in the world. He added that, in the human being, the soul represents light while the body represents darkness. Mani further taught that human beings that live an ascetic life (life of self denial)—those who allow the soul to prevail over the body—will be saved. On the other hand, those that lead a life of pleasure—those that allow the body to prevail over the soul—will be damned. It was this religion

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that Augustine adhered to in his youth.

As a young man, Augustine pursued pleasure. When he lived in Carthage (370 CE), he had a mistress, with whom he fathered a son. He also planned to marry another girl, to whom he was even engaged. However, unlike most other young men that pursued pleasure, Augustine was deeply interested in study and moral questions. While teaching in Carthage and at the same time preaching Manichaeism, he began studying Philosophy and Astrology. With time he became doubtful of the Manichean faith. Probably in 383 CE, after spending about thirteen years in Carthage, Augustine left the North African city for Rome, where he continued to teach Rhetoric and study Philosophy. He also continued to associate with fellow adherents of Manichaeism. In 384 CE, he went to Milan to continue his teaching and studies. In this north Italian city, Augustine became acquainted with Ambrose, who was fourteen years older than him. Ambrose impressed him as a kind and God-fearing man. As this association became closer, Augustine's faith in Manichaeism eroded rapidly and his interest in Catholicism grew correspondingly. But he still found it difficult to renounce Manichaeism in preference to Christianity. It was not until his mother came to Milan and joined forces with the other Christians that were trying to convert him that he finally converted. On Easter Sunday in 387 CE, he was baptized a Catholic by Ambrose.

As Robert Nisbet has it, Augustine's conversion, "in the light of subsequent Western history, proved nearly as momentous as the earlier one of Saul on the road to Damascus". Like Paul after his conversion, Augustine condemned all his pre-Christian life and, with fanatical zeal, defended and propagated his new faith. In his first book, an autobiography entitled *Confessions*, he gives in detail and with candour an account of his past life. It includes much information about his parents, his schooling, his sins of the flesh, his acceptance of Manichaeism, and the mental and spiritual agony he went through before his conversion to Christianity.

Augustine's reputation rests, not on *Confessions*, but another book which he entitled *The City of God*. The background to *The City of God* was the sacking of Rome by the Visigoths (an ancient Germanic people) in 410 CE. Pagans and weak Christians in the empire attributed the defeat of the Romans by the Visigoths to the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the empire. They noted that, when in the past they worshipped

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Jupiter and other Roman deities, Rome defeated all her enemies. Thus, in their view, the gods punished Rome through the Visigoths because the Romans had neglected to worship them and embraced the Christian God. Augustine's main objective in the *The City of God* was to refute the above view about the sacking of Rome.

Probably because Rome was in decline during his life time and he did not know through study or experience any earthly city that was better than Rome, Augustine was convinced that no earthly city was ideal. By relying partly on the Scriptures and partly on imagination, he visualized another city, a perfect one, which he called the city of God. *The City of God* is partly a theological work and partly a Christian philosophy of history. He treated the world as a single unified community where events occur according to God's plan. The histories of the different societies or socio-political entities of the world are but stages in the evolution of the history of the entire human race towards a definite end as designed by God. His words:

> [T]he education of the human race represented by the people of God has advanced like that of an individual through certain epochs or as it were ages, so that it might gradually rise from earthly to heavenly things.

Based upon this view, Augustine held that the troubles of the Roman Empire were not due to the neglect of pagan gods. Rather, he continued, they were manifestations of the last days of the world and a presage of Armageddon. In other words, just as the individual grows from infancy through adulthood and old age to death, the world will pass through its infancy, youth, maturity, old age, and will ultimately be brought to an end by fire, as it had earlier been ended by a flood. In accordance with God's plan, Augustine continued, the world has passed through infancy, youth and adulthood. All these stages in the history of the world were represented by all the kingdoms, empires, and city-states that existed before the rise of the Roman Empire. In the Roman Empire, the world reached maturity. The sacking of Rome by the Barbarians and the subsequent decline of the city meant that the world had reached old age. Thus, as death follows old age, he predicted, the world would come to an end in no distant time.

Augustine's scheme of history, which is derived from the Bible, differed from those of Plato and Aristotle. Neither of the Classical

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philosophers saw the world as something of a play written by God, with a beginning and an end. Instead they had what is called the *cyclic view of history*—the view that, from time to time, states or civilizations would rise, flourish, decline, and, after being defeated by another power, cease to exist. The Greeks pioneers of philosophy believed that this cyclic process is eternal—that it would continue forever. Besides, Plato and Aristotle applied this view to particular communities: they did not conceive the world as a place with a common history and moving towards a common destiny. With reference to the cyclic view of the Greek philosophers, Augustine stated categorically that history is not cyclic. To support his view, he pointed out that "Christ died once for our sins". We might add that Augustine's thesis on the historical process is called the *linear view of history*.

According to Augustine, nothing happens by chance in the world. All events occur inevitably and, whether good or evil, are necessary to realize God's plan for the earth. The evil deeds recorded in the Old Testament led to the Deluge. In the same way, the evil deeds of the Christian era, including Christ's betrayal by Judas and the Crucifixion, will cumulatively lead to the Second Coming. Augustine noted that, despite the evil deeds of men from the time of the fall of Adam and Eve, there has been human progress in knowledge, culture, and the arts. However, he hastened to add, all the developments that improve man's intellectual and cultural progress also led to his moral decline.

The connection between cultural progress and moral decay, Augustine continued, is the basis of the conflict between what he called the city of God and the city of Man. In his own words,

> [The] two cities are formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former in a word glorifies self while the latter glorifies God.

In the city of Man, good things can and indeed have been produced. Intellectual and cultural progress reached its zenith in Rome. However, as progress was accompanied with moral decay, Rome would collapse and, thereafter, the city of God will come into existence. While the city of Man is temporal, Augustine added, the city of God will be eternal.

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Every human being, Augustine continued, has to live in the city of Man for some time before he can get to the city of God. Those that will get into the eternal city, whom he called the Elect or pilgrims on earth, will live together in the city of Man with those that will go to hell. It is not within the ability of man to know who will go to heaven. This is because many who profess Christianity on earth are really wicked, and, thus, cannot be among the Elect. However, what man needs to do to get to heaven is not in doubt: the person must accept Christ wholeheartedly, love him obsessively, praise him ceaselessly, and adhere strictly to his commandments. Those that fail in any of the above obligations will be go to hell, where their bodies will burn but will not be consumed by fire (where damnation, like salvation, is eternal).

In the last section of *The City of God*, Augustine gives glimpses of what he described as the "eternal blessedness of the city of God". According to him, it will be a place where "all the citizens shall be immortal, [where] men now for the first time [will be] enjoying what the holy angels have never lost", where "the material of their sustenance and blessedness is God Himself, as it were their common food and nourishment". The city of God will be a place "which shall be tainted with no evil, which shall lack no good, and which shall afford leisure for the praises of God, who shall be all in all"! Although there will be inequality in the city of God, there will be harmony and perfect happiness. Thus

> [N]o inferior shall envy any superior, as now the archangels are not envied by the angels, because no one will wish to be what he has not received, though bound in strictest concord with him who has received; as in the body the finger does not seek to be the eye, though both members are harmoniously included in the complete structure of the body.

Apart from the historical process and the two cities mentioned above, Augustine wrote on several moral, social and political issues of his time. One of them was rape. Augustine held that virginity is a virtue of the mind. What makes a virgin lose her innocence, he continued, is not just the physical act of using the male organ to penetrate the female for the first time. Rather it is the desire to be disvirgined. Thus, rape does not make a virgin lose her chastity: in the spiritual sense, the victim of rape is still a virgin. In the same vein, the desire to be disvirgined, even if it is not

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physically realized, is a sin, and in the spiritual sense amounts to a loss of virginity. Augustine added that while rape does not ordinarily lead to a loss of virginity, it would do so if in the course of the action the victim enjoys it!

Like St. Paul, Augustine saw sex as an activity that is incompatible with a virtuous life. According to him, intercourse between married couples is not sinful if the only intention of having it is to produce children. When it is not intended to produce children, then the couple involved must have yielded to lust and, therefore, sinned. He added that lust (excessive or inordinate desire) is sinful because it is independent of the will: that it is not a product of reason. He traced the origin of lust to the fall of man and held that God created it. According to him, God made lust one of the hurdles man has to clear before he can enter the city of God. Those that are able to suppress it have a chance of making heaven; those that yield to it will go to hell.

Augustine affirmed St. Paul's view that unbaptized infants will go to hell. He further held that it is proper that they go to hell. According to him, infants, like adults, commit many sins, among which are greed, gluttony, and envy!

Influence

Augustine returned to North Africa after his baptism and, in 391 CE, was ordained a priest of the Catholic Church. He rose rapidly in the church and, in 395 CE, was consecrated Bishop of Hippo. At this time, there was a bitter rivalry in North Africa between the Catholic Church and the Donatist Schismatic Church.[3] There were also theological disputes between

[3] The Donatists were members of a North African religious movement that broke away from the Catholic Church in the 4th century CE. The movement began in 311 when some bishops opposed the consecration of a bishop who they considered a traitor to the church during the Great Persecution (303-305 CE). Subsequently, the movement was associated with the position that sacraments administered by sinful priests were invalid. With the support of Roman emperors, Donatists were persecuted in North Africa in the 4th and 5th centuries. See "Donatism." Microsoft® Student 2009 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.

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Catholics and Pelagians[4]. As an ardent Catholic and Bishop of Hippo, Augustine got heavily involved in the disputes. He attacked Donatism in numerous writings. In 411 CE, he suggested a meeting of Catholic and Donatist bishops. After the meeting, its chairman, Marcellinus (a Catholic) issued a one-sided report that declared the Catholic Church as the only true one. On the basis of this view, Marcellinus banned Donatist assemblies and ordered the confiscation of their property. An edict by Emperor Honorius in 412 CE ordered the persecution of Donatists. As Bishop of Hippo, Augustine implemented the edict.

Augustine's struggle against Pelagianism occurred mainly in the form of theological debates. Disputing the Pelagian view that there was no *original sin*, Augustine held that the spiritual disobedience of mankind's first parents put all their descendants in a state of sin which neither human nature nor actions can change. Salvation, he held, can only come through *divine grace*. He added that grace is attained through the ministry of the church particularly through baptism and the other sacraments. In the course of his debates with Pelagians as well as Manicheans, Augustine developed his concept of *predestination*: the belief that the eternal destiny of each person is predetermined by God. The scriptural basis for this view (Romans 8: 29-30) implies that God pre-determines those that will receive salvation. This is called single predestination. Augustine added the concept of double predestination: that if God predetermines those that will be salvaged, it means he also predetermines those that will be damned!

Augustine's theological views were largely adopted by the Catholic Church: the church's doctrines of original sin, divine grace, and infant baptism are all derived from Augustine. After Augustine, the Catholic Church rejected the doctrine of double predestination. It adopted the doctrine of single predestination. Today, the doctrine is liberally interpreted: the prevailing view is that all that accept Christ, follow his ways, and keep the commandments of the church, are entitled to salvation. The leading theologians of the Reformation, notably Martin Luther and John Calvin,

[4] Pelagianism was a Christian religious movement that was founded in the late 4th century by Pelagius, a British monk. Pelagius held that original sin did not exist, and, thus, that there was no need for infant baptism. He also argued that works, rather than faith, was the essence of religion. See Margaret A. Schatkin, "Pelagianism," Microsoft® Student 2009 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.

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were considerably influenced by Augustine. Among other Augustinian concepts, both theologians adopted the doctrines of original sin and divine grace. Calvin was one of the few post-Augustinian theologians to adopt the doctrine of double predestination, which remains an important tenet of the Calvinist churches.[5]

We will now focus on the influence of Augustine in politics and social life. The victory of the Catholic Church over Donatism in North West Africa was followed soon by the invasion of the region by the Vandals. The invasion began in 429 CE. The invaders were on the verge of capturing Hippo when Augustine died, in 430 CE. The Vandals were soon converted to Christianity. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire (476 CE), Catholicism faced serious challenges from other bodies of Christian beliefs. These included Monophysitism and Eastern Orthodoxy. It survived the challenges, and remained the dominant Christian church in Africa till the Muslim conquest of the region in the 7th century. Islam wiped out Christianity in this region. Christianity survived in Egypt and Europe, and in Western Europe the Catholic Church triumphed over rival Christian churches and remained, until the Reformation, the only recognized church in Western Christendom.

During the Middle Ages (476 CE to 1453), the political and social policies of the political entities of Western Christendom were based largely on the teachings of Augustine. Church authorities persuaded their secular counterparts to model their realms on the city of God. Thus the polities of Western Europe became somewhat theocratic. The church exercised a great influence on the state. It dominated learning, owned large estates, and supplied the state with a large number of its officials. The head of the Catholic Church, the Pope, gradually acquired much power and influence. Secular rulers recognized the Pope as the final authority on religious

[5] Calvin's doctrine of double predestination is summarized in this excerpt from his most influential work:

> "We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he determined within himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others" (*Institutes* 3. 21. 5).

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matters. Following the example of Charlemagne (who was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800 CE), secular rulers helped to enforce the laws of the church.

Augustine's *The City of God* was used by the Catholic Church and secular authorities to justify the hierarchical structure of Western European society in the Middle Ages. Feudal society was divided into different social classes: kings, clergy, nobility, merchant classes, and serfs. The church held that this was proper: that, as in the city of God, residents of earthly realms cannot be equal and that inferiors should accept their place and not be envious of superiors.

The Medieval Era was characterized by religious intolerance. Those that did not accept Catholicism were declared heretics and forced to recant. Those that refused to do so were severely punished. Punishment included being burnt at the stake. Among those that suffered persecution were the Jews. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christians despised Jews as a people who refused to accept the Messiah, and many religious and secular leaders suggested their expulsion from the empire if they refused to convert. Augustine intervened in the debate about Jews. Rather than expulsion, the Bishop of Hippo suggested that Jews be compelled to live in a state of poverty and humiliation. The church and the state adopted this position. Subsequently, in the Middle Ages, Jews suffered discrimination and persecution in Christendom. It is argued, in the words of Jay Harris, that "although harsh, Augustine's position often served to save Jews in Christendom from annihilation".[6]

As we have seen, Augustine's view on sex was austere. But, curiously, he adopted a rather liberal position on prostitution. He was convinced that men would continue to seek sex outside marriage, and opined that the abolition of prostitution would make many seek gratification through acts more perverse than prostitution—acts like homosexuality and bestiality. His view was adopted by the Catholic Church and the states of Western Christendom. During the Middle Ages, the church preached to men and women to refrain from prostitution, and tried to rehabilitate individual prostitutes. But it did not try to abolish the institution itself. Prostitution

[6] Jay M. Harris "Jews." Microsoft® Student 2009 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.

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flourished during the era: there were licensed brothels in Europe in the late Middle Ages.[7]

Writing in the 20th century about Augustine's influence, the American philosopher Robert Nisbet asserted:

> The society of the European Middle Ages was an entire social order constructed substantially, rationalized entirely in terms of a prophetic-religious ideal. This ideal, transferred from the heavenly to the earthly realm, was St. Augustine's.

Many secular philosophers disapprove of this social order. The English mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell is one of them. He expressed dismay that Augustine as well as other philosophers of the Middle Ages "were concerned not with saving civilization or reforming the abuses of the administration but with preaching the merit of virginity and the damnation of unbaptized infants". No wonder, he added, "the ...age surpassed almost all other fully historical periods in cruelty and superstition".

[7] See Jennifer James. "Prostitution." Microsoft® Student 2009 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.

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CHAPTER 4

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) was born in Florence, one of the five principal cities of Renaissance Italy. His father was a lawyer. During his lifetime, there was a revival of classical learning in Italy. This period in the city's history was also marked by much loss of faith in Christian doctrines, decline in moral standards, political instability, foreign intervention, and internecine leadership rivalries. Machiavelli studied and wrote about these issues. His writings appeared in the forms of history, political treatises and imaginative literature.

From 1434 the politics of Florence had been dominated by the Medici family, whose long reign (1434-1737, with a few breaks) was notorious for corruption and ruthlessness. One of the breaks was the period 1494-98, when a pious priest Girolamo Savonarola ruled the city. Savonarola preached against the corruption of the Papacy and advocated reforms similar to the ones made in the next century by the German priest Martin Luther. During the rather short period he ruled Florence, he succeeded in raising moral standards and making his people take religion more seriously. Mainly because of his stand against corruption in the Papacy, Savonarola came into conflict with the Pope and gradually lost popular support. In 1498 he was forced out of office by the mob. Accused of heresy, he was convicted and executed.

Savonarola's brief rule made a deep impression upon the mind of Machiavelli. As he was to write later, Savonarola had relied more on persuasion rather than force to emerge as ruler and to rule for as long as he did. His enemies, Machiavelli continued, could not effectively debunk his points: they merely repeated orthodox views which they did not really believe in. However, by relying mainly upon force, they were able to overthrow and execute Savonarola. On the basis of this triumph of sheer force over morality, Machiavelli drew the conclusion that "all armed prophets have conquered and unarmed ones failed". He added that Savonarola was a classic example of an unarmed prophet.

Following the fall of Savonarola, Florence was proclaimed a republic.

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In the same year, Machiavelli was appointed secretary of a ten-man council that conducted diplomatic negotiations on behalf of the new republic. His duties included negotiations with the governments of France (1504, 1510-11), and the Holy See (1506). From 1503 to 1506 he reorganized the military defence of his native city. In 1512 the Medici family regained power in Florence and the republic was dissolved. The new rulers removed him from office and detained him for sometime on suspicion of conspiracy against them. After he was cleared of the charge, he was allowed to retire to his estate near Florence.

It seems that beginning retirement at the age of forty-three did not suit the ambitions and disposition of Machiavelli. Thus he kept himself busy by writing. But his reason for writing was not only to fight boredom: he also wrote to win the favour of the new rulers of Florence, hoping that they would restore him to public office. Machiavelli dedicated his first and most important book to the Medici rulers. He failed to realise his immediate goals (returning to public office). However, he made a far more enduring achievement: writing a book that has since been a classic in political philosophy.

The first and most famous of Machiavelli's works is *The Prince,* which was written in 1513. As said above, Machiavelli wrote to win the favour of the Medici family. In particular he wanted the favour of the reigning Medici ruler, Lorenzo. Lorenzo was a relation of Cesare Borgia (1476?-1507), illegitimate son of Pope Alexander VI and conqueror of several cities in Italy. Borgia had been an unscrupulous and ruthless ruler. Thus to win the favour of Lorenzo, Machiavelli found it necessary to praise Cesare Borgia. And he did so by writing approvingly of his deeds.

According to Machiavelli, *The Prince* was meant to discover from a study of past and contemporary events how the control of "principalities" (states) is won, how it is retained, and how it is lost. In other words, it was meant to teach any interested person how to become a prince, and how to hold on to power. It also warns princes against certain habits and practices which he believed could lead to their fall. To validate his assertions, Machiavelli referred to events of ancient history. Among others things, he cited Moses, Cyrus, and Remus and Romulus (founders of Rome) as armed prophets. However, the bulk of his illustrations came from the contemporary history of Italy. Italian history in his time was characterized

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by numerous wars, treachery, murder and other forms of physical violence. On the basis of his study, Machiavelli concluded that, in order to acquire principalities, any aspiring prince has to use treachery and violence.

In *The Prince* Machiavelli was mainly concerned to see that princes attain their objectives. He was less concerned as to ends: he was not as bothered as to whether the ends were noble or ignoble, progressive or reactionary. This does not mean that he did not have political ideals. But he was convinced that noble objectives that cannot be realized are useless. He stressed that what matters is that the political objectives of the prince are realized. Thus he approved of any measures, whether morally good or bad, which could be used to attain the political objectives of the prince. For Machiavelli, therefore, a good prince is the one that uses any means, including vicious ones, to achieve his objectives. In the same vein, a bad prince is the one that loses power because he disdains and refrains from using vicious methods when it is clear that they are the only effective ones. Machiavelli cited Cesare Borgia as an example of a good prince. According to him, Borgia wanted to become the ruler of Florence as his father Pope Alexander VI had wished. With the pretext of extending the domain of the Pope, he was able to conquer large territories which he meant to rule after his father's death. Borgia also planned to ensure that a favourite cardinal of his was elected Pope in succession to his father. In pursuit of these objectives, Borgia lied to, deceived and killed many people. However, continued Machiavelli, Borgia was seriously ill when his father died. Thus he could not install the successor of his choice and was later killed in action in a military expedition. Considering the magnitude of Borgia's mission, Machiavelli approved the methods he adopted. In his own words,

> I find nothing to blame [him for]. On the contrary I feel bound, as I have done, to hold him as an example to be imitated by all who by fortune and with the arms of others have risen to power.

Machiavelli further advised the "good prince" to hide his real character from his enemies and his subjects. In his view, the prince should be "a great feigner and dissembler". He cited Pope Alexander VI as one such person. According to him,

> Alexander VI did nothing else but deceive men. He thought of

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> nothing else and always found the occasion for it; no man was ever more able to give assurances or affirm things with stronger oaths, and no man observed them less.

He commended these qualities of the father of Cesare Borgia to other rulers. He insisted that princes should not be judged like ordinary men. In his view, the position of the prince is special and deserves exceptional measures for its protection. Thus the prince should not be bound by traditional ethical norms. Because whatever happens to him affects the destiny of every person in his realm, he is entitled to, among other things, use cunning and violence to defend himself and advance his interests. In brief, Machiavelli's advice to the prince can be gleaned from the following quotations from *The Prince*:

> The prince must renounce good or it will prove his ruin.

> A prudent prince cannot and ought not to keep his word, except when he can do it without injury to himself.

> The prince must be a lion but he must also know how to play the fox.

> [If] you have to make a choice, to be feared is much safer than to be loved. For it is a general rule among men that they are ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain.

> While you serve their welfare, they are all yours ... so long as the danger is remote. But when the danger is close at hand, they turn against you.... People are less concerned with offending a man who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared; the reason is that love is a link of obligation which men, because they are rotten, will break any time they think doing so serves their advantages; but fear involves dread of punishment, from which they can never escape.

> Still…it is perfectly possible to be feared and not hated, and this will be the result if only the prince will keep his hands off the

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> property of his subjects and citizens, and off their women.
>
> [The prince] should not confiscate people's property, because men are quicker to forget the death of a father than the loss of a patrimony.
>
> [A] prince at the head of his armies and commanding a multitude of soldiers should not care a bit if he is considered cruel; without such a reputation, he could never hold his army together and ready for action.
>
> [W]hoever is the cause of another becoming powerful is ruined himself; for that power is produced by him either through craft or force; and both of these are suspected by the one who has been raised to power.
>
> [W]hoever thinks that in high personages new benefits cause old offences to be forgotten makes a great mistake.

Experience teaches that most of Machiavelli's views are realistic. But they are cold and shocking: they do not appeal to humane sentiments; and they are disdainful of moral values.

In his second book, *Discourses,* Machiavelli's thoughts are less shocking and more progressive. *The Prince* tells the ruler what he needs to do and tells his subjects that they have to appreciate why the ruler would do such things. But *Discourses* contains Machiavelli's political ideals—how he would like the state to be, even though it may be difficult to achieve. One of his ideals, which is also contained in his first book, is that Italy should be united and liberated from foreign (French and Spanish) rule. Generally, and more importantly, he preferred popular government (government headed by leaders that acquire power in free competitions) to government based on claims of legitimacy. Legitimacy, according to him, means biological or spiritual association with a previous prince or the Pope. Machiavelli's ideal political system is one with a well-ordered constitution, a constitution that shares rights and powers between the prince, the nobles and the people. Such a constitution, he argued, would conduce to political stability and make revolutions rare. He further suggested that more power should be

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given to the people. This, he added, would conduce to stability.

Also in *Discourses*, Machiavelli attacked the Church of his day. He claimed that the Church's bad moral conduct and evil ways had corrupted the Italian people and made them lose interest in religion. He asserted: "the nearer people are to the Church of Rome, the less religious are they". We might add that Machiavelli's opinions about the Catholic Church were shared by many Italians but very few of them had the courage to express them in writing.

* * * *

As we have seen, Niccolò Machiavelli's hope of using *The Prince* to return to office was not realized. Similarly, his dream of a united Italy was not realized in his lifetime: it was not until the second half of the 19th century that Italy became a united nation-state. But, as we have also seen, Machiavelli achieved an enduring reputation as a political writer. William Shakespeare wrote in the 16th century (the same century that Machiavelli essayed his political treatises) that "the evil that men do live after them; the good are often interred with the bones". So it has been with this ex-diplomat-turned writer of Renaissance Florence. His progressive political ideals in *Discourses* are hardly remembered. He is better known as a writer that wrote approvingly of the use of cunning and viciousness in politics. His work was published in 1532 and translated into other European languages in the 17th century. Since then it has been a handbook of autocratic rulers. William of Orange, Otto von Bismarck, Benito Mussolini and Adolph Hitler are examples of statesmen that took seriously the advice Machiavelli gave to the prince in *The Prince.* Many other persons who are not statesmen, men that are concerned to dominate those they associate with, also adopt the principles of Machiavelli. Thus the term "Machiavellian" is a by-word for cunning, duplicity and viciousness.

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CHAPTER 5

THOMAS HOBBES

Thomas Hobbes was the greatest political philosopher of the 17th century. His reputation derives from *Leviathan*. "Leviathan" means a sea animal of enormous size. In Hobbes' book, the work symbolizes government. We will make a brief exposition of the book below.

Like Plato, and to a lesser extent Aristotle, Hobbes was of the view that the political state should have primacy over all other institutions. He was indeed a monist: he believed that absolute sovereignty, which was a highly centralized system of government, was the ideal political system. Like Machiavelli, he did not base his views on the scriptures or on church doctrines. Indeed, he had a low opinion of religion. According to him, religion is the same thing as superstition: fear of the invisible. He added that the distinction between them is that religion is publicly permitted and encouraged while superstition is not permitted! Hobbes was a rationalist. He had a very logical mind. However, like most rationalists, he tended to ignore reality, basing his views solely upon reason. Thus, as Bertrand Russell has it,

> [Hobbes] is impatient of subtleties and much too inclined to cut the Gordian seal. His solutions to problems are logical but are attained by omitting awkward facts.

Born in 1588 in Malmesbury, England, the son of a vicar, Thomas Hobbes studied Classics early in life. At 15, he entered Oxford where he studied Logic and Aristotelian Philosophy. He was a political activist. When Charles I, King of England, Scotland and Ireland (r1625-49) fell out with the English parliament, Hobbes supported the King. Fearing that he would be killed by the King's enemies, he fled to France (1640). He published *Leviathan* as a political exile in France in 1650. Although he was pro-royalist (and France was still a monarchy), the anti-religious feelings contained in the book cost Hobbes the friendship of the French government and of other English exiles in the country. Hence Hobbes decided to return to

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England, where he pledged his loyalty to Oliver Cromwell's government.

It is clear from the previous paragraph that *Leviathan* was written during a period of conflict in England, a conflict between the King and Anglicans on the one hand and, on the other hand, the Parliament, Puritans, and Presbyterians. The conflict, which became a civil war from 1642, ended with the defeat, trial and execution of the king in 1649. Oliver Cromwell, who adopted the title of Lord Protector, headed a parliamentary group that ruled England until the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

The war strengthened Hobbes' belief that absolute monarchy was the ideal system of government. He was convinced that the war in England was rooted in the pluralistic nature of the country's political system. Thus he asserted that conflicts of that nature can only be avoided through the establishment of a monolithic state headed by an absolute monarch. As Robert Nisbet has it, Hobbes was "concerned with justifying and rationalizing the absolute political community which is founded on illimitable sovereignty and upon boundless obedience of the individual to the sovereign".

Hobbes viewed the political state as the culmination of an age-long process of man's search for community. This process, he continued, began in the age when, according to him, there was no society and, hence, no government. During this age, there was no industry, no art, and no co-operation between man and his fellow men. Human instincts, rather than laws or norms, determined the relations between man and his fellow men. This, he added, was the "state of nature".

Every man, Hobbes continued, has a natural desire to be free. Paradoxically, every man also has a natural desire to dominate others. These two desires are meant to ensure the self preservation of each person. However, because these two desires are common to each man, and since they contradict each other, life in the state of nature is one of constant war of "all against all"—a life of "continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man [was] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short".

However, Hobbes continued, because of another natural attribute of man—his ability to reason—it is possible to leave the state of nature and lead a better life. This is done when people come together to select from

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among themselves one person (a sovereign) or a few persons (a sovereign body), preferably the former, to rule them. To this sovereign they surrender their rights, retaining only the ones that the sovereign wishes to give them. Hobbes called this agreement a “social contract”. Hobbes stressed that it is when this agreement is reached that society is formed. Subsequently, it is the duty of the sovereign to put an end to the universal war of “all against all” and to organize his subjects to defend themselves from external enemies and to attain higher living standards. Hobbes added that what confers legitimacy on the sovereign is not his closer relationship to God or his superior biological attributes: it is, he stressed, the sovereign’s contract with his people.

Hobbes stressed that, to ensure that the sovereign is effective, he needs to be given absolute power. He must be armed to crush all opposition and impose his will upon his people. “Covenants without the sword are but words”, he wrote. Besides, Hobbes continued, the sovereign should be the sole source of law and morality. Neither tradition nor religion should determine the law or norms of the society. Even the very important issue of the ownership of private property should be determined solely by the sovereign. To further ensure that the sovereign’s power is absolute, no other authorities should be allowed to exist. According to him, other authorities included parliaments, guilds (including guilds of beggars), associations of nobles and church leaders. Like Plato, Hobbes was convinced that centralization of authority was needed to bring unity and stability to the state. He wrote:

> For what is it to divide the power of the commonwealth but to dissolve it, for powers divided mutually destroy each other?

Referring again to the English civil war, Hobbes asserted that it arose from the division of power between the King and the Parliament, and warned that such a war would occur in future wherever power is shared between sovereign and parliament.

Like Plato again, Hobbes advocated totalitarian control of education. He suggested that all teachers be employed by the state and compelled to teach only what the sovereign considers necessary. He believed that universities were sources of ideas that undermined the unity of the state.

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Hence Hobbes suggested that their curricula be censored by the state.

As we have seen above, Hobbes preferred rule by a sovereign to rule by a sovereign body. He gave various reasons to support this view. He held that, like a monarch, an assembly is easily susceptible to the following weaknesses: pursuit of self interest at the expense of public interest; and having favourites. In a state ruled by an assembly, the effect of the latter weakness is likely to be more harmful to the state. Assuming that each member of the assembly would have his own favourites, he argued, the number of persons that are likely to benefit unduly at the state's expense would be a lot more than in a situation where only one person is in power.

The second reason given by Hobbes in support of his preference to one-man rule is that, unlike the assembly, the monarch can take advice in secret. The point here is that secrecy is sometimes needed in government, and that it would be easier for government to operate in secrecy if it is headed by a monarch.

The last reason given by Hobbes in support of one-man rule is that it is more conducive to unity than rule by an assembly. Being a single person, he reasoned, the monarch cannot be divided against himself. On the other hand, the assembly can easily be divided against itself, and the division could lead to civil war. Hobbes conceded that monarchical rule could be despotic, but added that despotism is preferable to anarchy or civil war.

Hobbes defined liberty as the absence of external barriers to motion. But he hastened to stress that the sovereign should determine how much liberty his subjects should have. The sovereign should not be bound by any law and should do whatever he deems fit to advance the interests of the state. Thus subjects should submit totally to the sovereign. However, Hobbes added, the subject has an absolute right to self preservation. Thus he can refuse to take part in war if required to do so. He further added that a subject does not have to submit to the authority of any sovereign that has proved incapable of protecting him e.g. a sovereign defeated by either domestic or external enemies.

* * * *

Thomas Hobbes died in 1679, at 91, after publishing a few other books,

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including an autobiography and English translations of the Greek classics *Iliad* and *Odyssey.* In 1995 three essays of his were published for the first time. These posthumous essays suggest that the writings of Machiavelli had some influence on Hobbes' political and ethical views. Like Machiavelli, his work helped to provide a secular justification for the political state and, thus, helped to prepare Europe for the Enlightenment.

CHAPTER 6

JOHN LOCKE

John Locke was born in the village of Wrington, Somerset, on 29 August 1632. When the English civil war started in 1642, his father, a Puritan, fought on the side of the parliament. The younger Locke studied at the University of Oxford and later became a tutor there (1661-64). His subjects were Greek, Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy. He also experimented in Chemistry and Meteorology, and practised Medicine. In 1667 Locke became confidential secretary as well as physician to Baron Ashley Cooper, the First Earl of Shaftesbury. Twice during that turbulent century in England, the Earl fell out of favour and fled England, taking his confidential secretary with him. Thus Locke lived in France in 1675-79 and in the Netherlands in 1683-89. He returned finally to England in 1689, after the Glorious Revolution. He was employed for a few years at the Board of Trade, and later devoted himself to writing. He died in 1704.

Locke had started writing in the Netherlands. It was there that he published his first work, *The First Letter on Toleration* (1689). (Two other letters on toleration were published in 1690 and 1692.) In the *First Letter*, he made a case for religious toleration but did not want Catholics and atheists to benefit from it. His *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), a treatise in epistemology, is considered his greatest work. In this work, he put forward the theory of empiricism—the doctrine that all knowledge derives from experience (that is, from the five senses and inner

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reflection). He asserted that at birth a person's mind is like a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) upon which experience imprints knowledge. He stressed that reason alone is not an adequate source of knowledge. Besides, unlike other philosophers of his age who believed in God, Locke was not convinced that knowledge could be acquired through intuition.

Aside from achieving a solid reputation as an epistemologist, Locke also made a name for himself, and indeed is better known, as a political philosopher. His political ideas are contained mainly in his *Treatise on Government*, which appeared in two volumes. The first one was published in 1689, the second in 1690.

In the first *Treatise*, Locke attempted a rebuttal of the thesis of *Patriachia*, a book by Sir Robert Filmer, a royalist during the English civil war, who was a staunch defender of the doctrine of the divine right of kings. Filmer had argued that it is wrong to believe that man is born free and has the right to choose the kind of government he likes. Filmer also held that it is wrong to believe that kings derive their power from social contracts. According to him, kings are Adam's royal descendants. God, he continued, had bestowed kingly power upon Adam, who passed it to his heirs, and from his heirs to the monarchs of his time (the 17th century). Since they derived their power from God, Filmer held, kings should not be challenged by other men and should not be compelled to share their power with the people. Indeed, it is not proper for men to desire liberty, for, according to him, the desire for liberty was the cause of the fall of Adam. Filmer likened monarchical power to paternal power, asserting that a king is to his subjects what a father is to his son. Just as a son is always subject to his father, he reasoned, a subject should always accept the authority of his king.

In his review of Filmer's book, Locke stated that Adam could not have had more than one heir, which means that only one of the monarchs in the world would be Adam's heir. He then asked whether Filmer would subscribe to a proposal that, in the event that the descendant of Adam's heir was found, he should be recognized as the king of the entire world! Locke proceeded to declare that paternal power is not absolute. According to him, paternal power is temporary and does not extend to life and property. Thus, he concluded, the analogy with paternal power should not be used as a basis for giving absolute power to the monarch.

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Locke started his second treatise by setting out what he believed was the true origin of government. Like Thomas Hobbes, he believed that, prior to the institution of government, man lived in the state of nature. He wrote of this state of nature:

> Man living together according to reason without a common superior on earth with authority to judge between them is properly [in] the state of nature.

Unlike that of Hobbes, Locke's state of nature was not one of constant struggle of all against all. Rather it was an idyllic one. He believed that men are born free and equal and that they lived freely and as equals in the state of nature. There were no laws, no police, no courts—yet there was no anarchy. He asserted that, because the affairs of men were governed by *natural law,* they were able to exist in the state of nature without anarchy. According to him, the law of nature is made up of divine commands, not human legislations.

It is needful to point out here that the idea of natural law was not originally conceived by John Locke. He derived it from the works of medieval philosophers, notably St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74). Exponents of this idea believe that all positive (or enacted) laws should derive from natural law. Any law that does not derive from it, they insist, is bad law. Locke believed that in the state of nature man's instinctive knowledge of natural law enabled him to know what were right and wrong and, hence, to act accordingly.

However, Hobbes continued, things were not perfect in the state of nature. This was because everyone was his own judge and had the right to defend himself and his property. Man's judgement and actions were sometimes arbitrary. Thus there was the danger that evil doers would become so many and so powerful that it would be difficult to control them through individual efforts. For these reasons, men came together to institute government. They surrendered to the government the power to judge and punish offenders and defend private property. Locke stressed that the defence of private property was the chief *raison d'etre* of government. In his own words:

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> The great and chief end of men uniting into commonwealth and putting themselves under government is the preservation of property to which in the state of nature there [were] many things wanting.

Like Hobbes, Locke was of the view that the origin of government was the social contract: he stressed that government was established by men, not God. Unlike Hobbes, however, Locke condemned absolute sovereignty. The sovereign's power, he stressed, must be limited by the social contract. Thus whenever the sovereign breaches the contract, the people have the right to rise against him. Locke further argued that absolute monarchy is not a civil form of government. (By civil government he meant a government whose relation with the people is regulated by law.) In an absolute monarchy, he continued, there is no neutral authority empowered to settle disputes between the sovereign and his subjects. The absolute monarch is still his own judge and is free to attack other men without recourse to any legal process. Thus he cannot but be tyrannical and arbitrary. Locke further asserted that majority rule, a situation whereby the sovereign rules in accordance with laws made by a majority of the people, is fundamental to civil government. We might add that, in keeping with the sentiments of his age, Locke excluded men and women without property from the political process. In other words, he held that they should not be counted among the people entitled to institute civil government.

To ensure that the monarch does not abuse his power, Locke suggested the separation of the executive and legislative functions of government. This view, we should add, had long been popular in England and was one of the major issues in the conflict between Charles I and his country's parliament. Locke's importance in this matter is that he was the first person to clearly formulate a case for the separation of powers. One of the highlights of Locke's case for separation of powers is that the parliament should be supreme in its relation with the monarch. But, he added, the legislature itself should be removable by the people through elections. He believed that the parliament is virtuous and the king wicked. Since virtue should triumph over evil, the parliament should prevail over the king whenever there is a disagreement between them. If the king insists on having his way (as, according to him, Charles I did), it should be assumed that the king is at war with the people and should be removed, if necessary by force. "Force," he wrote, "is to be opposed to nothing but unjust and

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unlawful force". It is needful to add that Locke was so obsessed with majority rule that he could not, or neglected to, conceive of a situation where the majority is wrong and unjustly oppresses the king or minority groups. Using the standards of today, it is equally needful to point out that his idea of separation of powers did not include the judiciary.

* * * *

As a political philosopher, John Locke was not much of an original thinker. In the words of Nisbet, he was "a derivative philosopher"—a man adept at taking prevailing ideas and developing, embellishing and popularizing them. However, as Bertrand Russell put it, "Locke is the most fortunate of all philosophers". This was because his writings heavily influenced political thought and legislation on constitutional matters in the West in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Locke was a prophet with honour in his homeland, as it were. For it was in England that his ideas were first put into practice. This was after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Many of the laws made after this event, like the English Bill of Rights (1689) and Act of Settlement (1701), were based on the ideas of Locke. These laws finally ended absolute monarchy in England, excluded Catholics from the throne, made the parliament more powerful than the king, and even gave the parliament the power to determine who would be king or queen.

Locke's political views were also popular in France. This was largely due to the efforts of Voltaire (1694-1778), a French writer and philosopher. Voltaire's translations of Locke's works were popular in France. The bulk of the French revolutionists of 1789 were, through Voltaire, philosophical disciples of Locke. Through their influence, much of the English Bill of Rights was included in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789).

Across the Atlantic, particularly in the United States, the doctrines of John Locke were also used as a basis for legislation. Locke's political views came indirectly to American revolutionists—through Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755), another French political writer and jurist. His analyses of Locke's writings, especially those dealing with the separation

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of powers, fascinated the American revolutionaries. James Madison, a future President of the United States, wrote in 1787 that "the oracle who is always consulted and cited on this subject is the celebrated Montesquieu". He added: "If he be not the author of this invaluable precept in the science of politics, he has the merit of displaying and recommending it most effectually to the attention of mankind".[8] Thus, through Montesquieu, many of Locke's principles are entrenched in the Constitution of the United States. See Chapter 8.

[8] James Madison, Essay No. 47 in *The Federalist Papers* (New York: New American Library of World Literature, 1961), 301.

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CHAPTER 7

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

Born in 1712 in Geneva, the son of a poor watchmaker, Jean Jacques Rousseau lost his mother at birth, and was brought up by an aunt. Geneva was a Calvinist city, and Rousseau received a Calvinist education. He left school at 12, then tried to learn many trades, abandoned them all and, at 16, fled his native city to Savoy. He later moved to Turin, where he converted to Catholicism. In 1742 he moved to Paris where he spent most of what was left of his life. In Paris he earned a living as a music teacher, music copyist and political secretary. Rousseau was involved with several women, none of whom he married. With one of them, Therese La Vasseur, an illiterate servant at a hotel in Paris, he had five children, all of whom he sent to orphanage. Throughout his life, he shunned establishment manners and spent much of his time in the company of the poor.

In 1750, Rousseau, then 38, achieved his first literary success: he won the first prize in an essay competition in which candidates were asked whether the arts and sciences had been of benefit to mankind. In his contribution, Rousseau asserted that the arts and sciences had not contributed positively to the welfare of mankind. He held that they were sources of immorality and, through the creation of wants, of slavery. The ideal life, according to him, is the life of the barbarian, the “noble savage” in his own words. The noble savage, he continued, was free from want and bondage, and all savages were equal. The savage was not jealous, did not want to kill anybody and, generally, was not prone to doing evil. By contrast, Rousseau continued, the man of culture is jealous, brutal and immoral. The differences between savage and civilized man, Rousseau stressed, were rooted in the arts and sciences.

In *Discourse on Equality*, an essay published in 1754, Rousseau dwelt upon the views expressed in his prize-winning essay. He asserted than “man is naturally good, and only by institutions is he made bad”. Rousseau blamed cultural decay and social instability on the existence of inequality. Originally, he continued, man lived in a state of natural simplicity where no form of coercion was needed or used in the relation between man and man: a state where moral principles derived, not from philosophy, but from

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nature (the heart).

According to Rousseau, man would have remained in this idyllic state of nature but for the discovery of agriculture and metals, which produced more complex relations among human beings. The adoption of the idea of private property made these relations even more complex. Indeed, he stressed, private property was the cause of civil society. In his own words,

> The first man having enclosed the piece of land, bethought himself of saying "this is mine" and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society.

Due to the struggle to acquire private property, Rousseau continued, the world has been filled with strife, envy, jealousy, and exploitation. As society became more complicated, inequality increased and men became increasingly interdependent. The extended family, the guild, and religion came into being. All these institutions increased interdependence among men and further entrenched inequality. Rousseau added that Europe was the unhappiest continent in the world, because it had moved farthest away from the state of nature. To salvage Europe, he suggested that Europeans abandon civilization and return to the happy state of nature. Interestingly, when a copy of this essay reached Voltaire, who was Rousseau's contemporary, he described it as "a new book against the human race", adding that "never was such a cleverness used in the design of making us all stupid".

Rousseau's greatest works appeared in the period 1760-62. In 1760 he published a novel entitled *La Nouvelle Heloise.* In 1762 he published *Emile* and *The Social Contract. Emile* is a treatise on education while *The Social Contract*, his most famous work, deals with politics. We will focus now on the latter.

Like Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau rejected the doctrine of the divine right of kings, and held that the origin of government was the social contract. He added, like Hobbes and Locke, too, that the contract was made for the preservation of individuals in society. Contrary to his view in *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau asserted in *The Social Contract* that it was no longer possible to return to the state of nature. But he still clung to his view that life in the state of nature was idyllic, stressing that its chief

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virtues were liberty and equality. He still believed that civilized society was bad. The new idea in *The Social Contract* is the suggestion that civilized society be allowed to exist but on the condition that liberty and equality be realized in it.

In what kind of state did Rousseau think that the above ideals would be realized? In other words, in what kind of society did he think that would men collectively defend the right of each person to his private property and at the same time each person is free, not required to obey any other person or body of persons, and still be his own judge?

Like Plato and Hobbes, Rousseau was of the view that the totalitarian state is the most suitable political system. However, while Plato and Hobbes advocated totalitarianism for the purpose of attaining unity, order and harmony, Rousseau did so in the name of liberty and equality. In Rousseau's monolithic state, every citizen would surrender himself completely to the sovereign—a body of elected officials or a monarch. Individuals would not retain any rights, as this would make them judge one another, resulting in a society in which some are rich and powerful and, thus, able to oppress others.

Things would be better for all, Rousseau continued, if the sovereign alone has the power to make laws and pass judgements. Anybody that refuses to obey him should be forced to so. The primary duty of the sovereign is to ensure that each citizen is completely free from control by his fellow citizens and that inequality is abolished. Thus the only difference between the noble savage and the civilized man is that the latter would submit to the authority of a sovereign and depend upon him for the protection of his life and his rights.

Rousseau believed that traditional institutions—the family, church, guild and local community—militate against the freedom of the individual. According to him, these institutions are hypocritical, and shackle their members with rules and moral principles which prevent them from living their lives freely. Besides, these institutions make man dependent on fellow men; sanction inequality; foster conflict; and oppress their members. Hence, Rousseau held, traditional institutions should be proscribed by the state. Thus there would be what he called "Absolute Government" in the state.

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The most distinctive feature of Rousseau's political philosophy is probably his doctrine of the *general will.* According to him, the general will is the desire of the political community as a whole. The political community, he held, is like the human body. Just as the latter has a mind that directs all of its activities, the political community has a mind which directs all of its affairs. The mind of the political community is the general will.

Rousseau made a distinction between what he said were the real interests of the people and their private or selfish interests. According to him, the real interests of the people are the same for every person but their private interests are different. The general will is the sum total of the real interests of the people. If it were possible to isolate every person and then ask each person to list his interests, their private interests, being at variance with one another, would cancel themselves out. The remaining interests in each person's list would be the common interests of all. The sum of the common interests is the general will of the community.

However, Rousseau continued, it is impossible in real life to prevent the people of any community from sharing ideas with one another. Thus if they are asked to vote in order to determine the community's general will, it is likely that the process will produce the will of the majority of the people, what he called the *will of all.* He defined the will of all as the sum of the private interests of the members of the community, rather than the sum of their real interests. For this reason, Rousseau held that the democratic process is not the appropriate way to determine the general will of any community. Rather than through voting, Rousseau suggested that the sovereign should determine the general will of his domain. In his own words,

> The ruler will know that the general will is always on the side which is most favourable to the public interest…. So it is needful only to act justly to be certain of following the general will.

How can the ruler be certain that he is acting justly? Rousseau's answer is that the ruler must be virtuous. He then went on to define virtue as acting in conformity with the general will. The ruler and his subjects are virtuous only when they act in accordance with the general will, he stressed. The general will, Rousseau continued, is always right. Thus any sovereign that rules according to the general will is running a democratic government

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and cannot be unjust. Any opposition to such a sovereign is opposition to the general will. Hence such opposition should be crushed, if necessary by force.

Rousseau made a case for state control of religion, education and family relationships. In respect of religion, he opposed the existence of any independent church. According to him, the church is one of the enemies of human freedom and also undermines spiritual unity in the state. The church has its own general will, which is usually different from that of the state. Thus attempts to implement the general will of the church often hinder the implementation of the general will of the state. However, despite his opposition to the church, Rousseau cautioned against any attempts to repress the religious tendencies of man. Indeed, he asserted, it is necessary for every citizen to have a religion, for religion "will make him love his duty". Thus Rousseau suggested the replacement of the religion of independent churches with the religion of the state—a civil or political religion. The state religion should be established by the sovereign and used to make the people good citizens. No citizen should be compelled to accept the doctrines of the state's religion. However, it would be an offence, punishable by death, for anyone to renounce it publicly or "behave as if he does not believe them". Rousseau added that other religions apart from that of the state should be tolerated as long as their doctrines do not militate against the development of citizenship and their adherents do not establish churches.

Concerning education and family relationships, Rousseau suggested that the state should play an important role in the upbringing of children. According to him, the state should use its control of education to achieve the following: make children learn to cherish one another mutually as brothers; free children from bondage to their families; and teach children to be loyal to the state rather than their various families. To achieve these objectives, Rousseau suggested the break-up of the family, at least of the extended family, and the common upbringing of children in places like orphanages, to which he had sent his own children.

* * * *

After the publication of his essay on the evils of civilization (1750), Jean

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Jacques Rousseau became famous. Subsequently, the government of the Geneva, his place of birth, sought to be identified with him. It issued an invitation to him to visit the city provided that he did so as a Calvinist. Rousseau accepted the invitation, with the condition attached to it. He renounced the Catholic faith, became a Calvinist once again, and visited Geneva. He returned to Paris after the visit.

The publication of *Emile* and *The Social Contract* made Rousseau even more famous. However, these books also made authorities in Geneva and France hostile to him. The Catholic and Protestant churches condemned *Emile* for its attack on revealed religion; they condemned *The Social Contract* for its rejection of the doctrine of the divine right of kings and its populist democratic ideals. Harassed in France by those that hated the contents of these two books, Rousseau found it necessary to leave the country. He could not return to Geneva, where an order for his arrest had been issued. King Frederick the Great of Prussia (1712-86), who was a patron of culture, felt pity for him and permitted him to settle in a Prussian village called Motiers. Rousseau lived there for three years, and fled when he suspected the villagers wanted to kill him. He then went to England where he was sheltered by the philosopher David Hume (1711-76). Many English philosophers and writers visited him and treated him with respect. After about eighteen months in England, Rousseau quarrelled with his host and left the country. He wandered around Europe and returned to Paris in 1770. Back in Paris, Rousseau lived in extreme poverty and became paranoid. When he died in 1778, it was suspected that he committed suicide.

As a political philosopher, Rousseau's influence was great. The enemies of the *ancien regime* in France were fascinated with his doctrines. *The Social Contract*, in the words of Bertrand Russell, was "the bible of most of the leaders of the French Revolution". The revolutionaries were inspired by his campaign for individual liberty and his strident attack on oppression—by statements like "Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains". However, some of them did not accept his idea that the totalitarian state should be used to end oppression and restore individual liberty. The principles enunciated in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen and other libertarian documents issued by the revolutionaries in 1789 were inspired, not by the writings of Rousseau, but those of John Locke.

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However, Rousseau's most ardent followers in the 18th century were not the authors of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen: they were the Jacobins, who dominated the affairs of France in 1792-94. Led by Maximilien Robespierre (1758-94), the Jacobins propagated Rousseau's ideas and, when they became rulers, tried to implement them. They assumed unlimited power in the name of the masses. They also assumed the right to determine the general will—the exclusive right to make laws for France. Those that opposed them were regarded as enemies of the state and killed at the guillotine. In keeping with Rousseau's views on religion, Robespierre and his comrades proclaimed as the official religion of France the Cult of the Supreme Being (1794). Catholics and atheists were required to adhere to this religion. The Jacobins also brought education under state control. Robespierre believed that the above measures were needed to bring democracy to France and, in so doing, make her a republic of virtue and justice. Indeed, he believed he was liberating France from tyranny and implementing their general will. Thus Rousseau, in the words of one literary historian, "tyrannized over France in the person of his disciple Robespierre".

It is pertinent to add that Robespierre's reign of terror in France ended on 28 July 1794, when he took his own turn at the guillotine. However, Rousseau's doctrines were adopted by many members of the European intelligentsia in succeeding generations. Some of them—like the Fascists of the 20th century—succeeded in taking control of states where some of Rousseau's pseudo-democratic principles were adopted. Notable examples are Mussolini's Italy (1922-43) and Hitler's Germany (1933-45).

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CHAPTER 8

CLASSICAL ECONOMISTS AND FEDERALISTS

Between Rousseau and the subject of the next chapter (Karl Marx), several other philosophers made important contributions to philosophy, especially to the branch of philosophy that was given the name political economy—"the study of ways in which economics and government policies interact".[9] Their writings have influenced to a great extent the economic and political policies of many nations since the late 18th century. There were also several political writers and leaders in the area that became the United States whose innovations in constitution making became precedents for many national constitutions that have been adopted since the second half of the 18th century. The political economists that are treated here belong to what has been called the Classical School. A small group of the political writers of English North America wrote a series of essays that were collected and published under the title *The Federalist*.[10] For convenience, we will adopt the term *Federalists* for the political writers and politicians that made the United States Constitution.

The Classical School

The main ideas of the Classical School were first expounded in modern times by a group of French writers called the Physiocrats. Their doctrines were popular in the middle of the 18th century. The credit for a systematic formulation of the views of the School goes however to Scottish philosopher Adam Smith (1723-90). We will summarize below the main ideas of this so-called Father of Modern Economics.

Adam Smith was born in Kirkcaldy, Scotland, in 1823. He studied at the universities of Glasgow and Oxford. He worked as different times as a lecturer in logic and belles-lettres at Edinburgh, professor of logic and of moral philosophy at Glasgow, tutor to Henry Scott (Duke of Buccleuch), and commissioner of customs. He associated with other philosophers of his

[9] Microsoft Encarta, 2009.

[10] The authors of The Federalist were Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison.

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time, notably David Hume (a fellow Scotsman). He was influenced considerably by the writings of French philosophers Francois Quesnay and Jacques Turgot. His first major literary effort was *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), a book of ethical teachings. Between 1866 and 1876, he wrote his most famous book, which was published in the latter year. Entitled *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations,* this book, which we shall subsequently abbreviate as the *Wealth of Nations*, is a thorough analysis and critique of the way wealth is produced and distributed.

Here are some of the highlights of Smith's political economy. He gave economics the term "division of labour" (a system of production whereby the making of a good is divided into separate tasks which are allocated to separate workers or groups of workers). He asserted that division of labour was "the greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour". He argued against government intervention in business. In his view, government is wasteful, corrupt, and inefficient. Besides, government often grants special privileges to a few prominent persons or associations. He added that this practice is detrimental to the rest of the society. Rather than government intervention, Smith supported free enterprise within each country and free trade among nations. He was convinced that free enterprise benefits society—that as the individual seeks private gain, he satisfies the needs of the rest of the society (those that buy his products). In support of free trade, he supported the principle of comparative advantage (each country or company producing the goods which, because of the proximity of raw materials or some other advantage, it can more efficiently produce than others). He added that, just as different households have found it expedient to produce only one or a few products, different countries should do the same. Through trade, he added, each nation would get at a cheaper rate the goods it does not produce.

To ensure that greedy producers do not take undue advantage of the consuming public by selling their goods at high prices, Smith opposed monopolies and held that the laws should permit the existence of many producers and traders. He also made a case for the abolition of laws that bar the free movement of labour. Where producers and traders are many, he held, it would be difficult for them to combine to raise prices. Rather, they will compete among themselves. As they compete, prices fall, and the interest of the public is protected. Where there are many producers,

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middlemen (traders), and buyers, and there is no price regulation by government, there would be a *perfect market*—whereby the forces of supply and demand determine the rise and fall of prices. To further protect the public—the people of all nations—Smith supported free trade (as stated above) and opposed the grant of "bounties" (subsidies) by government to enable goods produced in any country to be sold abroad. He held that bounties hurt the citizens of all nations as it prevents them from buying the cheapest available goods in the world market.

As indicated above, Smith advocated a reduced role for government in public affairs. In his view the functions of government should be limited to the following: defence from external attacks; administration of justice (enforcement of contracts); construction and maintenance of public works and institutions (responsibilities that private enterprises cannot profitably engage in); some control over interest rates; issuing and regulation of currency; issuing patents and copyrights for short periods of time; protection of industry needed for national defence; security for the agricultural tenant; and tariff to equalize taxes on domestic industry. Besides, he supported taxation, which, he added, was needed to finance government activities.

Some of Adam Smith's important views are contained in the following quotations from the *Wealth of Nations*:

> It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own selfish interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and we never talk to them of our necessities but of their advantages.

> [The individual is] led by an invisible hand to promote an end which [is] not part of his intentions.

> People of the same trade seldom meet together but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices.

> There is no art which one government sooner learns of another

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than that of draining money from the pockets of the people.

> When the law prohibits interest altogether, it does not prevent it. Many people must borrow, and nobody will lend without such a consideration for the use of their money as is suitable, not only to what can be made by the use of it, but to the difficulty and danger of evading the law.

Other classical economic theorists include Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), Thomas Malthus (1766-1834), David Ricardo (1772-1823), and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Bentham and Mill helped to develop the concept of utilitarianism, which, in the words of Sidney Hook, is "the doctrine that what is useful is good, and consequently, that the ethical value of conduct is determined by the utility of its results".[11] The doctrine promoted the idea that each government policy as well as any action taken by an individual and a group should be adjudged appropriate or otherwise, not on the basis of conscience, but on whether it gives the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people in society. David Ricardo supported the dismantling of international trade barriers. Like Smith, he was of the view that trade barriers hurt consumers in all nations, and supported the principle of comparative advantage. Thomas Malthus warned against population growth, as he feared that it would soon outstrip food supply. He wanted the rate of population growth to be slowed down through late marriages. John Stuart Mill, sharing Malthus' view about rapid population growth, advocated birth control. He also campaigned for the equality of the sexes. We might add that Mills gave the discipline of Economics the principle of *opportunity cost* (the view that cost of a commercial decision is the value of the alternative decision that was not taken).

While there are differences of views among classical political economists, they agreed on the following major principles: private property, free trade, competition, and minimum government. Their ideas helped to bring about the following changes in the Western world. Firstly, they brought respect to business people (manufacturers and merchants). These

[11] Sidney Hook, "Utilitarianism." Microsoft® Student 2009 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.

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economic actors now got as much respect from the public as the landed gentry. With increased respect, business people challenged the landed gentry for political power in the 19th century and over time became dominant in the parliaments of the West. Secondly, mercantilist restrictions on domestic business and international trade were greatly reduced, and for quite some time in the second half of the 19th century, many Western countries adopted free trade. Thirdly, classical economic theories discouraged governments from establishing business enterprises, thus enabling the private sector to become dominant in the 19th and 20th centuries. We might add that the implementation of the ideas of the classical economists helped to boost economic growth in Europe. Thus, it seems, their ideas were quite appropriate to the time.

Classical economic theory was the main source of economic policy in the West until the 1930s, when the economic difficulties of the period—difficulties attributed largely to the weaknesses of Classical economics—led to changes in economic policy. The changes were characterized mainly by increased government intervention in economic affairs. Government intervention was meant to address the problems of wide gaps between the rich and the poor, high prices charged by monopolies and oligopolies (which made impossible the Classical dream of a perfect market), international economic inequality, and business fluctuations (cycles of boom and bust).

The ideas of the Classical economists were implemented, not by the economists themselves, but by political leaders. Going by our classification of political philosophers in the Introduction, these were political leaders of the right. They were challenged by political leaders of the left, whose economic platform emphasized greater government intervention. We will discuss the contrasts between them in the Conclusion.

The Federalists

Thirteen of Britain's North American colonies revolted against the mother country in the eight decade of the 18th century. Their grouse was simply that the British Parliament was taking important decisions about the colonies without the colonies' participation. The rider to the grouse was that the Parliament's decisions subordinated the interests of the colonies to those of the mother country. In the 7th and 8th decades of the 18th century,

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Britain was particularly concerned to increase taxes to relieve debts accumulated during the Seven Year War (1756-63). Resistance of the colonies to the imposition of taxes was summed up in the slogan “No taxation without representation”. (This has been one of the popular slogans of nations fighting for independence.) The thirteen colonies declared their independence in 1776, and fought a war of independence with the mother country. The war ended in 1781, and Britain recognized the independence of the United States in 1783. After the colonies won their independence, they held several conferences that produced the United States Constitution. The legislature established by the Constitution made eleven constitutional amendments by the end of the 18th century. The Constitution and the amendments of the period became models for the constitutions of many other countries in the world in the next two centuries.

As stated in Chapter 6, the American constitutionalists were inspired by the works of John Locke, Baron de Montesquieu, and other liberal writers of 18th century Europe. Before the independence struggle by Britain’s American colonies, each colony had much power over its internal affairs. There was no central colonial government: the government of each colony reported directly to the British parliament. After independence, the colonies were reluctant to give up their powers to a central government. Thus they adopted a constitution called the Articles of Confederation, which provided the rules for the first experiment in confederalism in modern times. The Articles of Confederation were in force from 1 March 1781 to 21 June 1788. The American experience of confederalism exposed the weaknesses of confederal systems of government, and has probably discouraged many other nations that adopted their constitutions in the next two centuries from adopting the system. In the next two paragraphs, we will mention the main provisions of the Articles of Confederation and outline the reasons why the document was found unsatisfactory and, consequently, abrogated.

The Articles of Confederation provided for a single-chamber national parliament (Congress) in which each state would have just one vote. The Congress was given the power to arbitrate disputes between states, establish a national postal department, to raise armed forces to defend the nation, to enter into treaties and alliances with other countries, and to levy war with the consent of at least two-thirds of the states. There was no provision for a central executive council, a common ruler, and a national judiciary. The Congress was not given the power to levy taxes: states were

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required to donate money for the running of the federal government. In the absence of a national judiciary, it was provided that each state would recognize judicial proceedings in all the others. It was further provided that amendments to the Articles of Confederation would be unanimous, that is, all states would have to approve it.[12]

The Articles of Confederation failed to meet the expectations of the newly independent territory. It was clear that the "sovereignty, freedom and independence" which the document guaranteed to the states were impediments to the attainment of its goals of "common defence, the security of ... [l]iberties, and ... mutual and general welfare".[13] The main weaknesses of the confederal constitution were that it denied Congress the power to levy taxes and regulate trade. Congress' lack of power to levy taxes incapacitated the central government. Many states did not donate money to the fund needed to run the federal government. Hence, among other things, the Congress could not pay its debts; it could not even pay the soldiers engaged in wars. Congress' lack of power to regulate trade hindered inter-state commerce. The states, which had this power, engaged in tariff wars (each tried to protect its trade by levying tariffs on goods from other states). Some states ignored the Congress and had trade agreements with other countries. Dissatisfaction with this state of affairs led to the campaign, by Alexander Hamilton and others, for a federal constitution. Here are excerpts from some of the essays Hamilton and other Federalists wrote to support the case for a federal constitution:

> One government can collect and avail itself of the talents and experience of the ablest men, in whatever part of the Union they may be found. It can move on uniform principles of policy.... In the formation of treaties, it will regard the interest of the whole, and the particular interests of the parts connected with that of the whole. It can apply the resources and power of the whole to the defense of any particular part, and that more easily and expeditiously than State governments or separate confederacies can possibly do, for want of concert and unity of system. It can place the militia under one plane of discipline ... and thereby

[12] See text of the articles of confederation in "Articles of Confederation." Microsoft® Student 2009 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.

[13] See Articles II and III of the Articles of Confederation

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render them more efficient than if divided into thirteen or into three or four distinct independent bodies.[14]

Leave American divided into thirteen ... independent governments.... If one was attacked, would the others fly to its succor and spend their blood and money in its defense. Would there be no danger of their being flattered into neutrality by specious promises, or seduced by a too great fondness for peace to decline hazarding their tranquillity and present safety for the sake of their neighbours, of whom perhaps they have been jealous, and whose importance they are content to see diminished.[15]

A circumstance which crowns the defects of the Confederation remains yet to be mentioned—the want of a judiciary power. Laws are a dead letter without courts to expound and define their true meaning and operation.... To produce uniformity in [judicial] determinations, they ought to be submitted, in the last resort, to one SUPREME TRIBUNAL.[16]

The ... powers lodged in the general government [include] those which regulate the intercourse with foreign nations, to wit: treaties; to send and receive ambassadors, other public ministers, and consuls; to define and punish piracies and felonies committed on the high seas ...; to regulate foreign commerce.... This class of powers forms an obvious and essential branch of the federal administration. If we are to be one nation in any respect, it clearly ought to be in respect to other nations.[17]

The power of creating new funds upon new objects of taxation by its own authority would enable the national government to borrow

[14] John Jay, Essay No. 4 of *The Federalist Papers* (New York: The American Library of World Literature, 1961), 47-48.

[15] Ibid. 48-49.

[16] Alexander Hamilton, Essay No. 22 of *The Federalist Papers*, 150.

[17] James Madison, Essay No. 42 of *The Federalist Papers,* 264.

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> as far as its necessities might require. [For Americans and foreigners] to depend upon a government that must itself depend upon thirteen other governments for the means of fulfilling its contracts ... would require a degree of credulity not often to be met with in the pecuniary transactions of mankind, and little reconcilable with the usual sharp-sightedness of avarice.... As theory and practice conspire to prove that the power of procuring revenue is unavailing when exercised over the States ..., the federal government must of necessity be invested with an unqualified power of taxation in the ordinary models.[18]

> A NATION, without A NATIONAL GOVERNMENT, is, in my view, an awful spectacle.[19]

The federal constitution of the United States was adopted in 1787, and came into force on 21 June 1788. Here are some of its main provisions. Note that these provisions, as stated above, were adopted in many other countries in the 19th and 20th centuries. The constitution provided for a federal system of government, whereby the functions of government were divided vertically between, on the one hand, a federal government, on the other hand, the state governments. The federal government alone was given sovereign powers; the states became sub-autonomous units. Defence, external affairs, and regulation of inter-state commerce were some of the functions exclusively allotted to the federal government. The constitution provided for a single national leader (President), who would execute the functions of the federal government; he would also be the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The constitution provided for federal courts, the apex of which would be the Supreme Court. Note that, in the British constitution, there is no provision for the judiciary as a separate (and third) arm of government. The American constitution expressly provided for it, and guaranteed its independence. Not only did the United States constitution provide for three branches of government, it also provided for a system of checks and balances—a set of provisions that were meant to stop any of the three arms from dominating the others.

[18] Hamilton, Essay No. 31.

[19] Ibid, Essay No. 85.

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School certificate textbooks in Government will tell the reader more about this. It is enough to stress here that this system, which is prevalent in the world today, is a legacy of political thought in 18th century United States.

One of the highlights of the Constitution of the United States is the provision for a bicameral legislature. In the debate over representation of states in the Congress, American federalists made what they called the Great Compromise—equal representation of states in the Senate and representation according to population in the House of Representatives. In the debate leading to this decision, small states wanted equal representation. The big states objected: they were afraid that they would be outnumbered by the small ones which could use their numerical advantage to dominate the legislature. Hamilton, one of the Federalists, saw equal representation as “exceptionable”, arguing that “in operation it contradicts that fundamental maxim of republican government, which requires that the sense of the majority should prevail”. On the other hand, the small states were afraid that the big ones would dominate Congress if representation was based on population. To allay the fears of both sides, the Great Compromise was reached. Thus a league of big states can only dominate the House of Representatives; a league of small ones can only dominate the Senate. Since the Constitution provided that both houses would approve every legislation, no combination of big states or of small states can dominate the other. It is needful to add that the Great Compromise has been adopted by almost all countries with bicameral legislatures. Nigeria adopted a bi-cameral legislature based upon this model in 1958.

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CHAPTER 9

KARL MARX

Karl Marx was born in Trier, Prussia, in 1818. His parents were comfortable middle class Jews who converted to Christianity when Marx was a child. He received higher education at Bonn and Berlin, and later got a PhD at the University of Jena. In 1842 he became editor of a liberal newspaper *Rheinische Zeitung.* His articles on contemporary social and political issues were critical of government. Government censors forced him to resign his post the following year. Thereafter he went to Paris to edit a new magazine. But the publication collapsed after one issue. Marx remained in Paris, where he associated closely with French socialists and workers. His association with them reinforced the leftist tendency in him. He became a staunch socialist and soon began to propagate an extreme version of it—communism. It was in Paris that Marx met Friedrich Engels, a German factory manager in Manchester, England, who became a life-long associate and benefactor of his. Marx and Engels began making efforts to form an international working class movement. Because Marx's activities were not approved by the French government, he was expelled from France. He lived in the next three years in Belgium. Expelled in 1848, when revolutions broke out in Germany and France, Marx spent some time in Paris and then in Cologne, where he was arrested and tried on the charge of inciting an insurrection. He was acquitted of the charge but expelled from Germany (1849). He returned to Paris but was again banished from France. He then moved to London, where he spent the remainder of his life (till 1883).

Let the reader recall Bertrand Russell's description of Thomas Hobbes as a philosopher who arrived at logical but improbable or naive conclusions by omitting awkward facts. This description fits Karl Marx very well. Indeed, Marx was so concerned to reach logical conclusions that he found it expedient to simplify or manipulate historical evidence. One American critic of his, Bertram Wolfe, called him the "great simplifier". Generally, Marx did not attach much importance to the role of subjective factors in the historical process. Basic human qualities (e.g. ambition, greed, selfishness, and selflessness), and behavioural tendencies easily observable in groups (e.g. xenophobia, mass hysteria, nationalism, patriotism, and stereotyping of neighbours) are dismissed as mere

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manifestations of changes in the economic conditions of society. He did not seriously bother to determine how changes in the material conditions of society came about. Thus while his works helped to draw attention to the importance of economic factors in history, they de-emphasized non-economic factors: they are a poor reflection of the complexity of human life. More remarks about Marx's political philosophy are in the concluding paragraphs of this chapter. We will now attempt an exposition of his main ideas.

Karl Marx began his study of philosophy as a university student. Like most German philosophy students of his time, he was greatly influenced by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). Hegel is the precursor of the trend in philosophy that is called the *dialectic*: the notion that motion or development occurs through a conflict of opposites. According to Hegel, every idea or concept (*thesis*) generates an opposite idea (*antithesis*). The conflict between thesis and antithesis gives rise to a new idea (*synthesis*). The synthesis is an improvement upon both the thesis and antithesis. However, the dialectical process continues after the synthesis has been arrived at. This is because the synthesis becomes a new thesis and, thus, generates a new antithesis, and the conflict between them gives rise to a new synthesis. This process, Hegel continued, goes on until the *absolute idea* is arrived at. The absolute idea is perfect and as such cannot be further developed. As we shall see below, Marx adopted Hegel's dialectical approach and used it in his own analysis of major developments in world history.

Karl Marx was a prolific writer. His popular works include the following: *German Ideology* (1846); *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) which he co-authored with Engels; and *Capital* (1867). One of the basic ideas in Marx's political philosophy is the belief that the most important distinguishing feature between man and other animals is not rationality or political organization as one would ordinarily assume. Rather it is production, especially conscious production. Other animals, like bees, produce by instinct and their methods of production remain forever unchanged. But man alone conceives of what to produce in advance and from time to time changes his tools and methods. Aside from being the most important attribute of man, Marx continued, production also determines the contents of man's reason and of the political, social and economic organization of human society. The need to produce material

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things compelled man to develop his consciousness. To increase production and to ensure continued production, men organized themselves to form society. Thus the need to produce material things is the basis of man's consciousness and all he has achieved with it. This view is called Karl Marx's "materialist conception of history".

Expatiating on the above view, Marx further asserted that material conditions determine the character of society at every stage of its development. In every age, men use material objects—tools, animals and machines—to produce what they need. These objects and the way they are used constitute what he called "the productive forces" or "forces of production". The way men organize themselves to use the forces of production is, in his own words, the "mode of production". Marx further asserted that every set of productive forces gives rise to a corresponding mode of production. For instance, he continued, when men developed the steam mill and other sophisticated machines (productive forces), a corresponding mode of production that was characterized chiefly by factory production and wage employment came into existence.

Marx further asserted that every mode of production gives rise to a definite form of social organization. The political system, the legal system, the religions and norms of society at every stage of its development: all this is determined by the mode of production of each society. Thus, he continued, the laws, norms, religious doctrines and prevailing political and economic principles of every society rationalize and justify the prevailing mode of production. Using a metaphor from architecture, Marx held that the mode of production (the economy) is the *substructure* of society, and that this substructure determines the political, ideological, religious and legal *superstructure* of society. As he wrote in *The German Ideology* (1846),

> Assume particular stages of development in production, commerce and consumption and you will have a corresponding social structure, a corresponding organization of the family, or orders or of the classes. In a word, presuppose a particular civil society and you will get particular political conditions which are only the official expression of civil society.

He wrote later in Critique of Political Economy (1859):

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> The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.

Marx restated the above view in this striking sentence: “the hand mill gives you society with the feudal lord, the steam mill society with the industrial capitalist”.

The above thesis on the relationship between substructure (economy) and superstructure (politics, ideology, social organization and religion) was one of the analytical principles used by Marx in his study of world history. Another one was the dialectic. Marx adopted Hegel’s thesis that development occurs through the conflict of opposites. Like Hegel, he was millenarian: he believed that the dialectical process will one day come to a perfect end. But whereas Hegel’s millennium is the Absolute Idea (when man has a full grasp of reality and enjoys the greatest freedom), Marx’s millennium is the communist society (which we will define below). Other differences between Hegel and Marx include the following. Hegel believed that the *motive force* of history is the spirit; Marx believed it is the mode of production. In other words, while Hegel believed that the development of the spirit brings about other changes in society, Marx held that the development of the mode of production is the basis for all other changes. Besides, while Hegel believed that the dialectical process occurs through conflict among nations, Marx asserted that the process occurs through conflict among classes. The opening sentence in *The Communist Manifesto* is: “The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of the class struggle”. According to him, the struggle between classes occurs when there is a contradiction between the mode of production and the social relations of production. He explained that this is a struggle between the class that owns the nascent or developing mode of production and the class that owns the outmoded means of production. Before this struggle, the latter are politically and socially dominant in society. Ultimately the class that owns the new mode of production will triumph and, in the next phase of history, become politically and socially dominant in society.

Marx used the history of Western Europe to illustrate his thesis on

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class struggle. According to him, Western European society had passed three main phases in history and, in the 19th century, was at its fourth stage. The first phase was “Primitive Communalism”. During this phase, he continued, technology was rudimentary, land was abundant, and there were no classes. Production was done on a communal basis, and everybody got an equitable share of the products of communal labour. Primitive Communalism was superseded by “Slave Society”. In this phase, Marx continued, the Roman Empire reigned supreme in Europe. Technology was more developed. Land was scarce, such that wars were waged for the purpose of acquiring land. Wars were also fought for the purpose of acquiring people who would be compelled to farm on the acquired lands. Those acquired were to be called slaves. Socially, the society was divided into two classes—the class of freemen and that of slaves. Marx explained that class division resulted from unequal access to the means of production. In Slave Society, the freemen laid claim to all the land and tools. More importantly, they claimed ownership of other human beings—those they deprived of ownership of land and tools. It was in the era of Slave Society that state formation started. The states were established and ruled by the freemen. The religious doctrines, norms and laws of Slave Society served the interests of freemen. Both St. Paul and Aristotle supported slavery!

Just as classes first emerged in Slave Society, the class struggle started during the same era. The struggle between freemen and slaves, Marx continued, resulted in the emergence of “Feudal Society”. There were two main classes in feudal Europe: the lords and serfs. The lords as well as the Catholic Church claimed ownership of all the land, which the serfs were under obligation to cultivate. The products of the serfs’ labour were shared unequally between lord and serf, with the former getting a lot more than his serfs. The lord, who commanded a small army, was responsible for protecting the serf from external aggression. Thus each of the classes had an obligation towards the other. Besides, the lord did not treat his serfs as his property; they could neither sell them nor dispense of their property. Thus the power of the lord over the serf was limited: unlike the slave, the serf had certain rights. Generally speaking, therefore, feudal society was an improvement upon slave society.

In feudal Europe, Marx continued, non-agricultural goods were produced in workshops. The owners of the workshops were guild masters.

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They worked with and exploited journeymen and apprentices. Guilds were formed all over Europe to protect the interests of guild masters. In the early and middle feudal periods, workshop production was far less important than agriculture. Thus those that derived their wealth from land (lords and ecclesiastics) were richer and more powerful than workshop owners. Feudal nations or principalities were ruled by the lords, with the support of the Church. The laws, norms and religious doctrines of the feudal era supported feudalism.

A class struggle occurred in the late feudal era between lords and serfs. While this struggle was going on, another one between guild masters and journeymen also started. These struggles were exacerbated by a fundamental change in the mode of production. Some enterprising guild masters and journeymen developed machines and started using them to mass-produce goods. The Industrial Revolution, which began in the 18th century, led to the displacement of the workshop by the factory, and the guild master by the capitalist. As a result of the Revolution, too, capital became a more important factor of production than land, and the manufacturing sector of the economy more important than the agricultural. In the society at large, two new socio-economic classes—the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat*—emerged. The former, called entrepreneurs by economists today, were the owners of the means of production (machines); the latter, collectively called labour by economists today, were hired by the factory owners to operate the machines and were paid money for their services.

Like previous changes in the substructure of society, Marx continued, the Industrial Revolution also brought about a contradiction between the mode of production and the prevailing social relations of production. The new economically dominant class (the bourgeoisie) had to fight for power and influence with the feudal lords. The highlights of the struggle include the French Revolution (1789) and the passage of the Reform Bill in England (1832). Inevitably, the bourgeoisie triumphed over the feudal lords and their ecclesiastical backers. Power passed from monarchs and nobles to parliaments, which were dominated by the bourgeoisie. Church and state were separated. New political and social principles extolling the new mode of production and the accompanying political and social changes were advocated.

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Karl Marx lived in capitalist Europe. He was of the view that, basically because it had helped to increase the power of man over nature, the transition from feudalism to capitalism was a progressive change. Yet, he added, capitalist society was far from being the millennium. This was because capitalism had failed to abolish the power of man over man. Like slave society and feudalism, society was still divided into classes and the upper class dominated the lower one. Inevitably, therefore, the class struggle will continue in the capitalist phase of history.

Like the English economist David Ricardo (1772-1823), Marx asserted that the value of any product is determined by the labour used in its production. Machines, he argued, do not determine value since they are products of labour. Since value is determined by labour, the products of labour should be given to only those that expend their labour to produce goods. However, because the values and laws of capitalist society regard the capitalists as owners of the machines and factories, the capitalist, who does not use his labour to produce goods, gets a lot more of the products of labour than those that work in the factories ("workers" in Marxist terminology). Since he does not expend his labour to produce goods, the capitalist benefits from the production process by exploiting the workers. He does this by paying the worker a fraction of the value of what he has produced. The other fraction, which Marx called "surplus value", is the capitalist's profit. In plain language, the capitalist cheats his workers by denying them, and keeping for himself, much of what the workers have produced.

Marx further argued that the quest for profit by the capitalist is the root of the evils of capitalist society. Since the means of production are privately owned, goods are produced, not for the satisfaction of needs, but for the sake of profit. To maximize his profit, the capitalist is ready to sacrifice the interest of the rest of the society. Thus the profit motive distorts the values of society, Marx held.

The quest for profit, Marx further argued, leads to intense competition among capitalist firms. As firms compete, their owners find it expedient to reduce costs. Cost reduction is achieved in several ways, including the following: slashing workers' wages, reducing the workforce, overworking those that are not disengaged, and substituting machines for labour. All these measures lead to the deterioration of the condition of

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workers. Besides, competition will also lead to the closure of many firms, reducing many former capitalists to the status of workers. To minimize the effects of competition, many firms merge, with the result that each industry is dominated by one or a few firms. As monopolies or oligopolies, it is easier for the firms to raise the prices of their goods and maximize profit. Also, basically because workers cannot easily change jobs, it is easier for the firms to underpay and overlabour their workers. These and other evils of capitalist society are highlighted in this striking passage in *Capital*:

> Within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil.... They ... subject him during the labour process to a despotism more hateful for its meanness; they transform his lifetime into a working time and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the juggernauts of capital.... It established an accumulation of miseries corresponding with an accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is therefore at the same time accumulation of misery, agony..., slavery, [and] ignorance...at the opposite pole....

When capitalist development has reached this stage, the time is ripe for the transition to a new phase in human history—the communist phase. The time is ripe for revolution because, according to him, there is a contradiction between the mode of production and the social relations of production. The means of production is sufficiently advanced to satisfy virtually all the material needs of man. Yet because the means of production belong to a very small proportion of the total population who are concerned to make profit, the proletariat are condemned to live in misery. For this reason, Marx predicted, the proletariat will rise against the bourgeoisie and, given their overwhelming superiority in numbers, will prevail against their oppressors. In his own words (also in *Capital*):

> The centralization of the means of production and the socialization of labour reach a point where they prove

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> incompatible with their capitalist husk. This bursts asunder. The knell of private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.

The objective of the insurgent proletariat, Marx continued, is not to replace the bourgeoisie. Rather it is to destroy the capitalist system—to abolish private ownership of the means of production, which is the source of the inequities of the capitalist system. Thus when the bourgeoisie are defeated, private ownership of property will be replaced by common ownership. Class differences will cease to exist and the class struggle will come to an end. Subsequently, human society will enter the millennium, and the principle of "from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs" will apply in the production and distribution of goods.

Marx hastened to add that, while the transition to communist society is inevitable, it will not come easily. This is because, naturally, the bourgeoisie will not willingly give up their control of the means of production and of their political and social dominance in society. Thus communist society will result from an overthrow of bourgeois society. Towards this end, Marx urged workers to prepare for the communist revolution. He cautioned them against trying to wage the revolutionary struggle when the material conditions for it are not appropriate. He wrote:

> No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have been developed, and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the wombs of the Old Society.

In the same vein, Marx continued, when the material conditions for change are ripe, revolutionary action will merely serve as the "midwife" to the birth of a new society—communist society.

In the communist era, as envisioned by Marx, the means of production will still be the ones of the capitalist era. But the new ownership structure (common ownership) will lead a qualitatively different society. There will be no more oppression of man by man. There will be no more need for coercion in the production process. The state, which Marx saw as

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the ultimate expression of class society, will "wither" away. In its place there will be "universal brotherhood of man". Man will no longer need to work for wages or seek to make profit. Work will only be a means of self expression. Besides, Marx continued, the rigid division of labour characteristic of capitalist society will not continue in communist society. Rather than division of labour, the individual will be fully developed to perform a variety of "labours" and social functions so as to give "free scope to his own natural and acquired powers". It would be possible for him "to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner". Inequitable distribution of the products of labour, Marx added, will also come to an end. Human misery will end, and everybody will have enough to meet their needs. Convinced that the envisioned communist society was ideal, and convinced too that the 19th century was the ideal time for the revolution, Marx exhorted workers as follows:

> Working men of all countries unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains. You have a world to win.

Karl Marx was a *materialist* (a supporter of the view that the world of matter is the only reality, and that psychological states are determined by physical functions). Some materialists are called or choose to be called *atheists* (non-believers in the existence of God or deities). Aside from being a materialist, Marx believed that religion had been used all through history by rulers or the dominant classes to deceive the poor—to make them accept the injustices of class society with the hope that their reward will come in afterlife. In his *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*, he asserted: "Religion is the soul of soulless conditions, the heart of a heartless world, the opium of the people". (Opium is an addictive drug that makes its consumers feel good even when they would normally be expected to be unhappy or angry.) Convinced that religion gave the ordinary people "false consciousness" of happiness rather than true happiness, Marx called for its abolition. As he also stated in *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*, "the first requisite for the happiness of the people is the abolition of religion".

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In 1864 Karl Marx formed the first International Working Men's Association, otherwise known as the First International, in London. The association won the support of workers' associations in most of the countries of Western Europe. It held several congresses in various European cities, and took a strong stand against private property and national chauvinism. The First International broke up after its last congress in 1876, in Philadelphia. In Brussels in 1889, six years after his death, Marx's followers revived the association, under the name Second International. The association went into abeyance during World War I, because most of its members betrayed its principles, by supporting their various countries in the war. In 1919 the communist government in Russia formed the Third International. It was dissolved in 1943 when the Soviet Union was in alliance with enemies of communism in the war against Nazi Germany.

Generally, since the second half of the 19th century, the ideas of Karl Marx have formed the major principles of socialist thought. In various countries in Western Europe, his followers formed "social democratic" parties. The social democrats sought to win power through the democratic process. The German Social Democratic Party, the largest of the Marxist parties, formed Germany's first post-World War I government. They did not, and were not strong enough to, carry out far reaching changes along Marxist lines. In November 1917 radical Marxists had seized power in Russia and established the world's first socialist party. Among other things, the regime abolished private ownership of the means of production, extended education and health services to the masses, and ensured that basic material needs of man got to all. However, unlike Marx's communist utopia, the world's first communist state did not, and could not, reduce the power of man over man. Instead of equality, man acquired more power over man: as in Fascist states, the interest of the individual was subordinated to that of the state; there was minimal decentralization of authority on a territorial basis; democracy was discarded, even ridiculed; opposition parties were proscribed; and a dictatorship that was more powerful and less tolerant than absolute monarchy was established. Thus reduction in material inequality was got at the price of increased political inequality.

Karl Marx's view about religion was adopted by his followers. It became virtually an article of faith in communist parties that being a

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communist was incompatible with having religious beliefs. Aside from antipathy towards religion, communist governments, being monistic, did not tolerate social or cultural organizations outside their control. Thus, beginning in the Soviet Union as soon as the Bolsheviks came to power (1917), communist regimes (in China, Poland, Cambodia, Cuba, Vietnam, etc.), tried to undermine religion. They confiscated the property of religious organizations, banned religious instruction in schools, persecuted priests, and mounted anti-religious propaganda. Where religious organizations were powerful, as in Poland, religious observance outside places of worship was banned. Probably the most extreme case of religious persecution occurred in Cambodia in 1975-79, when Pol Pot headed a communist government in the country. Pot's government de-robed Buddhist monks, and killed people that were found praying or who, in other ways, expressed their religious beliefs. The regime also burnt temples and religious artefacts. We might add that anti-religious measures were relaxed in the Soviet Union during World War II. Religious persecution ended all over Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism (early 1990s). In China and Cuba, anti-religious measures were relaxed in the same decade.

The Soviet Union imposed communism on Eastern Europe after World War II. Communists took control of China in 1949 and in North Vietnam in 1954. Many developing countries, e.g. Cuba, Guinea, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Chile, practised communism at different times in the 20th century. To a great extent, however, communism declined worldwide after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

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