

## 10 Altruism and political sociology

Strong social forces oppose the philosophy of altruism, but there are also forces that promote its survival. In this chapter, the first two sections deal with the social environment in which altruism might be able to endure. The last two sections focus upon political relationships: what role do political myths play, and how superior a system is democracy?

### 10.1 Social forces against altruism

In our time, changing circumstances have altered the basis of moral philosophy. Several of these changes tend to narrow the prospects of altruism. The three most important are scientific discoveries, social effects of capitalism, and the greater power of the middle class.

#### Science

Our view of reality is profoundly influenced by advances in science. Wherever rational explanations have not been accepted, metaphysical fantasies fall upon fertile soil - for man is a curious creature and wants answers. He dislikes hearing that "there is no answer" and goes on asking until someone suggests something. Religion was long the only source of answers, but faded into the background as science arose. Most of us have ceased to imagine God as an ever-present architect, and think of Him rather as an old master-builder who retired ages ago. The residue of mysteries that religion alone can resolve has shrunk considerably.

This divine retreat, however, has affected the field of morality to a lesser degree. Modern science has answers to many questions, and thus decreases the need for metaphysics. We require no rain-dances to obtain water; nor do we depend on sermons to care about our children. Religion, like every other authority, develops its strength in a sphere which, subsequently, radiates influence into further areas. Much of religion's moral power has come from its central ability to unlock the world's secrets and, now that scientific knowledge is found to fit better, the keys of faith lose attraction.

#### Capitalism

During the 1930s it became a widespread opinion that capitalism had run aground, and that state power had to take command. This view was expressed in unison by Swedish Social Democrats, American Democrats, Italian fascists, French socialists, and German National Socialists. The crisis of capitalism was also that of democracy. Both were faced

with totalitarian opposition, while the soft Left in many democracies enjoyed political success with the welfare state, which was to be a hybrid of socialism and capitalism. It proved a triumph in terms of marketing, and even today large groups of people think that the reorientation not only has been good in itself, but actually saved the system from recession.

In no land does this account ring more false than in the United States. Given the American economy's strength, the decline there ought to have been the slightest and briefest of all. Instead, the state-arranged recovery was the most gradual in the country's history. Only with the outbreak of World War II did unemployment sink to tolerable levels, and the production rate of 1929 was first regained in 1941.<1> Franklin Roosevelt's politics were not new, either; they directly continued those of his predecessor Herbert Hoover. Government policy was connected as closely with the way into the crisis as with the long way out of it. This criticism has been overlooked by concentrating on the President as an individual, rather than to policy.

In Sweden, a similar policy was somewhat more correctly regarded as successful. Hitler's Germany also pursued an expansive economic policy, and was the country that did best with an approach of stimulation by the state. Germany recovered much faster than the democracies, and this alone should call for review of the method's suitability, as well as of its harmony with a liberal society.

The impetus behind the predominant description of the state as a guardian angel is the appeal of such a picture to its political descendants. Democrats in the United States, Social Democrats in Sweden, and Labourites in England have the same clear interest in this version of history. And when a political myth becomes strong enough, its opponents adapt to its misconceptions, which they try to exploit for their own benefit. According to the famous sociologist Vilfredo Pareto's often-embraced recommendation, the point is "to take advantage of sentiments, not wasting one's energies in futile efforts to destroy them."<2> The art of politics, after all, involves twisting each popular belief and value into support for one's policies. Rightist parties can represent themselves as the true heirs of the policy of the 1930s. They advocate a public sector as comprehensive as what the Left then proposed, while the Left now has a larger public sector on its program. Is the level, or merely the trend, most important in the ideological heritage? The discussion concerns how the triumphant approach of the 1930s should look in today's society, as everyone agrees that it was a triumph.

Since the low-water mark of the 1930s, though, capitalism has made a thundering comeback. Those who felt that it stood with one foot in the grave have been compelled to reconsider. Khrushchev's promise of a socialist victory over the United States in an economic duel was not kept. Socialism, the self-appointed successor to the throne, has lost energy. Comparisons between West and East Germany, Taiwan and China, North and South Korea, are unambiguous: starting from a position of relative equality, the differences in living standards between these peoples have increased enormously.<3>

In this glow, the Thirties have also become easier to assess. Capitalism's ailment was seemingly analogous to the weakness suffered by democracy. The machinery creaks when threatened, but the blame lies with its destructive critics who prevented it from operating normally, not with the system itself and its loyal adherents. Neither democracy in Germany, nor capitalism, were bankrupt as such - yet their enemies acquired vast popular support for radical experiments, which turned out to be failures.

A crucial, but usually neglected, aspect is the effect of capitalism on distribution among the citizens. Most people accept the Marxist notion that social forces lead to a redistribution which benefits the rich. The reformist Left claims the honor of having largely hindered this process, while the revolutionary Left maintains that nothing of the sort has happened or, indeed, can happen in the framework of capitalism. Both perspectives appear extremely unrealistic. In the feudal structure, to a great extent, the income of the upper class was used for consumption, and society accumulated little capital. The latter did, however, grow substantially in capitalist society, obviously due to the wealthier part of the population, which devotes less of its income to consumption and more to saving for investment.

Besides this change in the consumption/investment relationship, an equalization of income has occurred in comparison with pre-capitalistic conditions. Since capitalism took root, different groups' share of the national income has remained fairly stable; but in another respect, significant contrasts have emerged. Capitalism's strong focus on mass manufacture and mass consumption has a huge impact on the real distribution of living standards. Lower prices allowed by more efficient production methods have primarily benefited the multitudes who consume goods in quantity. Noble ladies had silk stockings centuries ago; the novelty is that shop-girls can now afford nylon stockings. The wealthy have moved from carriages into Rolls Royces, yet the workers' step from ox-carts into Fiats has been greater.

These effects of equality owe to the structure of industrialism, as the degree of progress rises with the production volume for the class in question. The masses' growing welfare under capitalism was clear to people who understood its mechanics better than the socialist prophets did. John Stuart Mill wrote in 1848: "Until now, it is doubtful whether all mechanical inventions have eased the daily exertions of any human being. They have made it possible for a larger population to live the same life in toil and bondage... But they have not yet begun to influence the great changes in people's fate which it lies in their nature and future to carry out." <4> Some present-day witnesses still do not grasp what has happened: the old socialist prejudices linger on like a blindfold.

This impact on consumption and the living standards of different groups is more important than tax transfers and support programs. When the system serves more individuals better, it needs less manipulation. To work for one's own profit requires fewer whips and fewer priests.

## The middle class

A further key factor in political development is the dominant role of the bourgeoisie. As early as Aristotle, the social theory was launched that democracy's opportunities depended on the existence of a strong middle class. Then, in Marx's forecast, the middle class waddled to the brink of extinction. This was not the luckiest of predictions - the future read it backward and, in most advanced societies, the middle class is on the way to becoming a majority.

Also of interest is the ideological influence of the middle class. Its values penetrate the leading organs of society. Positions are obtained by virtue of knowledge and competence, not a high birth rate. The qualities increasingly admired are responsible individualism, personal education and improvement, economic security and sense of duty, domestic integrity and family spirit. At the occasional Country Club, the upper class reigns supreme; but the sensitive refinement and the perfect gentleman are going, if not gone, with the wind, a cameo of memory recreated by sentimental poets. In society's control rooms, civil servants from the middle class have taken over from the aristocracy.

Explosive growth of qualified professions has sociopsychological repercussions. The faintly distinguished tone of the "upper middle class" has been drowned in a wave of ever more doctors, engineers and directors. There are differences between niches in the middle class, but aristocratic openings have become fewer. This class recruits new members from both above and below.

The proliferation of these three factors - science, capitalism and the middle class - indicates a development that supports an individualistic outlook. Yet other circumstances are opposing them in some respects, and can thus give rise to a contrary effort. It is mainly two groups, the bureaucracy and the intellectuals, who strive to preserve an old authority or to promote susceptibility to a new authority.

## 10.2 Social forces for altruism

### Bureaucracies

If only political statements were counted, bureaucracy would not be judged an attractive agent of power in the West. It is almost as universally condemned as the Devil during the Middle Ages. This has perhaps resulted in less civil deference, but not in any obstacle to its increasing power. The collapse of Communism, and the aims of many conservative governments to reduce the public sector, have checked it without clearly breaking its trend of continual expansion. Throughout our century, the public sector has swollen enormously, now amounting to about 50% of the gross national product in most of Western Europe.

Nor do leftist and rightist governments differ conspicuously, apart from their vacuous rhetoric. The mushrooming of state bureaucracy has brought it greater power both in society and over its own conditions: a bureaucrat's boss is another bureaucrat.

Equally evident are transformations within the private sector. When capitalism was in its infancy, private enterprises were owned and led in person - more anonymously owned corporations hardly existed. The development from a small entrepreneurial firm to a modern conglomerate makes a difference, not just of quantity, but also of quality, when the directorship is separated from ownership and the higher employees become a sort of competitive bureaucracy. This is reflected by the term "private companies" as distinct from "public companies", which are those listed on the stock exchange and can be owned by anybody. In the latter, rich individuals play an ever smaller role. At the beginning of the century, an owning family directed its company; thirty years ago, it sat on the board but no longer among the management. And today, it seldom sits on the board, which sags with officials of other companies and pension funds, well-reputed experts and, not least, the company's own management.

A large public sector and a concentrated business community are a foundation for vast hierarchical structures. In the public and private sectors alike, bureaucracies ought to be interested in maximizing their independence, so as to fulfill their particular goals. A desire for power does exist in a bureaucracy, and need not cause much conflict with other bureaucracies. Competing elites often find opportunities to dampen mutual antagonism and support each other's claims for power - a Great Coalition. This may be compared with a coalition government where every party leader can expect to receive his own ministry. From the citizens' perspective, the important thing is that these elites should not concoct an alliance, but compete seriously with each other to generate alternatives which suit the voter-consumer as regards goods, services and political decisions.

Naturally, it is tempting to abandon capitalistic conflicts and preach the common interest: "we're all in the same boat". In general theory, the whole business community favors free competition. Yet in practice, everyone tries to avoid the stiff pressure. Other companies may be seen as colleagues rather than competitors, allowing agreements that are mutually beneficial. Political contacts are another escape route; unorthodox collaboration between the state and big companies is by no means a mirage of some paranoid Left. In this connection, an authoritarian - though not totalitarian - socialism has attractions. If certain parties demand total power, others will flatly oppose it, but what if it can turn into balanced cooperation? A corporative form of socialism is quite a realistic option.

Joint action by different power centers, the Great Coalition, offers possibilities for development with several consequences. Elite alliances or cartels do not spell the end of competition; it remains stiff for individuals in each hierarchy who want to reach the top. This internal strife, however, holds few advantages for other people. Only when the competition seeks the masses' approval, votes or money, do

popular interests have an effect on policies.

A special segment of the bureaucracy in this wider sense consists of the organizations working for vested interests. It is often said that an interest becomes less egoistic if expressed as what we have called group egoism (see Chapter 2), whose common self-portrait as "solidarity" is more appealing. But individual egoism also frequently adopts a fine disguise and turns into an "important question of principle". As far as small groups and particular individuals are concerned, not much difference can be detected between their interests. All those who want to keep a village's post office unite to work for the shared opinion. When such vested interests are aggregated into one that embraces innumerable people, an essential change occurs and, in many cases, the public interest is plausibly approximated. Local patriotic groups merge in a region, various regions act together, and soon there is a national organization. The aggregate interest is basically unlike the original factions' interests. To save a given village's post office, and instead abolish that of a neighboring village, is an inadequate philosophy and raises the issue of what is good for the country. Yet development toward a broader interest is not unproblematic - the groups involved affect it.

Considering a small group of employees, such as pilots, they have a chance of furthering their interests with group-egoistic action. They might succeed in getting a 25% pay hike. If all employees of an airline company unite, they acquire more power but, at the same time, the total cost increases. The risk grows that less competitiveness and higher unemployment will result. If the company, for example through a monopoly, passes these costs on to customers, the employees may obtain large salary hikes, say around 15%. Should the wage negotiations become nationwide, the cumulative power waxes, yet the possibility of a third party paying for it wanes. The cake must be shared with other unions which are ready to strike if they get a worse agreement, and this would damage the companies' future ability to pay the members of the unions themselves. Most suitably, the size of public consumption and the scales of taxation are determined in Parliament, and a surplus must stay in the companies to allow investments and create tomorrow's jobs. Only real growth of productivity can provide new resources to be distributed. The central union chiefly influences two factors: the distribution of wage rises among its members, and the total nominal rise.

As a rule of distribution, unions tend to give most attention to the low-paid. This is partly due to an explicit desire for more equal salaries, but a deeper reason is presumably a democratic preference for schemes that benefit the many at the expense of the few. Whether such distribution is fairer than that of the employers may be debated. A judgement of the dynamic effects of distribution is crucial for both sides. The union argument that a loyal wage policy reinforces structural change is not regarded by everyone as advantageous. Yet the main point here is the other factor - a determination of the total rise in wage costs.

Capable union leaders understand the importance of a stable

currency. In numerous economies around the world, all employees can collect a pay rise of more than 25% per month, accompanied by high inflation. One of the least controversial questions about distribution is just the impact of inflation, which benefits those who speculate and enjoy high salaries. Some special-interest organizations, such as house-owners, have large memberships but little influence on this issue. Political parties, industrialists and unions are in complete agreement that a stable currency is a common necessity, and that inflation produces a negative redistribution as well as having other harmful consequences.

A union's distributive ambitions ought, in the long run, to stay within the limits of the average wage rise allowed by increasing productivity. Greater salary demands only contribute to inflationary tendencies which are generally recognized to be damaging, for example by threatening employment. If more change is sought, the principle should be to lower the wages of certain groups. What must be clear is that, in the interests of both the public and the employees as a whole, the average pay rise has to match the productivity increase - say 2%. This enlightened, aggregate self-interest is hard for unions to promote, since their existence is justified by the added power which enables them to push up salaries more than smaller groups can do.

Let us assume that the local unions want a 15% rise, but could get only 5% by bargaining separately. When the central union wins 8%, in a double negotiation against employers who prefer less and employees who demand more, it thinks it has taken good account of the public interest. Had it tried to extract as much as possible, the average rise might have been 10%. Local agreements demonstrate that the employers award even more money although the wages have already risen too much, while communistic agitators speak of class unity and treachery. The leaders feel they have made an unselfish, calculated compromise - showing the members that the union can achieve results and, at the same time, exhibiting restraint and social responsibility.

The central union has difficulty in representing the aggregate interest of employees, as it lies in the organization's logic to favor the sum of local interests - which, unfortunately, conflict with each other. Relative improvement for everyone simultaneously is impossible. Higher sale prices give a company the chance to pay its workers better, but reduce the value of other workers' money. The organized special interest is not easily enlightened by the employees' interest, and remains largely the prisoner of an automatic system.

A further impediment to the central union leadership's support for an enlightened special interest is its own self-interest. If the special interest were to become the public interest, the union would lose all justification for its task, so the leaders have a stake in sustaining conflicts that may not really exist on the aggregate level. They are not only the organization's prisoners, but benefit by counteracting or confusing the aggregate interest. This is undeniably a sticky situation. One solution for the bureaucracy is to attain a secure and respected position, without needing to pursue a policy that is partly destructive. The corporative approach is attractive, and the

central union takes its natural place in the Great Coalition.

The interest of leaders in the various organizations is not, of course, something which can be presented to their members. A corporative solution's ideological defense is that the group interest and the public interest tend to coincide, and that, insofar as self-interest is obstructed, one has a duty to stand up for common altruistic ideals.

### Intellectuals

The second group whose efforts may be troublesome are the intellectuals. This may appear at first sight to be an exaggeration, since these are supposedly champions of virtue and freedom. At least they depict themselves as such - but reservations are in order.

Their classic role as social critics, while progressive, is seldom entirely satisfying in personal terms. An intellectual believes that he knows how things should be done in practice, but has to content himself with theorizing. He feels a calling, but is not chosen. His dream of exerting influence becomes a dream of changing the system: certain people in power must be replaced to let in fresh air. As the economist Joseph Schumpeter put it, intellectuals have "a vested interest in social unrest".<5>

The most inspiring vision is Plato's in "The Republic", where enthroned philosophers constitute the ruling class. According to his enlightened dictatorship, clever minds hold sway over strong hands and treacherous rhetoric. Platonic elitism finds its closest actual version in Communism. Despite the self-portrait of Marxism as the ideology of the working class, this is a school of thought for the intellectuals who occupy the real limelight, and for persuading people from the working class to support the few intellectuals who form the avant-garde. Marxism has succeeded to a degree in selling that concept to workers, but has served in still greater measure as pep-talk to leaders and encouraged their willfulness. Elitism has triumphed chiefly in establishing an authoritarian discipline within the party.

Socially, the potentates in totalitarian movements have been middle-class intellectuals. Abimael Guzmán, who led the Sendero Luminoso guerrillas in Peru, was a professor of philosophy. Stalin left his training as a priest, and Hitler was an unappreciated artist ("a bungling painter in a Tyrolean hat", after Mussolini). Like other Communist parties, the Russian one has always been dominated by ex-bourgeois brains. All eight leaders of the Khmer Rouge were middle class intellectuals.<6> Now and then, an exceptional worker or peasant has tagged along.

Intellectuals are a diverse group with numerous interests and opinions. Under totalitarianism, most viewpoints and their spokesmen fall outside the norm. A dictatorship is not made a paradise for intellectuals by the fact that some of them are its leaders. It soon eliminates the majority of them; nor are they saved by showing a little sympathy for "the people's cause". The ranks have to be

straightened - even art and literature must suit the ruler's taste.

The Platonic ideal of a more democratic elitism, in which quality of thought and not rawness of strength is decisive, remains utopian. Hence intellectuals often select another alternative: the old priestly role, loyal to power and lounging close beside it. Leviathan's right hand grasps the sword, but the clerical crozier rests honorably in his left. The function of an opposing social critic can be positively useful. Yet a wholly negative feature is the sheer ambition of becoming an official priest, of no longer needing to sermonize before a diffident and skeptical congregation, and of yearning to be backed by the sword when telling what people should think. Disturbingly many intellectuals end up in totalitarian movements where they imagine that their ideas will be forcefully realized and their place in the sun assured.

Frequently embarrassing, too, are the political preferences of intellectuals. The 1930s and 1970s were, in more than one respect, low-water marks for political awareness. Representatives of critical thinking fell for the Thirties' primitive demagogues, whose primary appeal was a spirit of solidarity - brutal in the short run, yet promised to be ultimately idyllic. The attractions were not advanced, complex theories with well-camouflaged defects, but a lot of meddling proposals with irresistible simplicity and pretensions. During the 1970s, the same naive optimism prevailed about the Chinese cultural revolution. Intellectuals' weakness for Marxism is so familiar that it requires no elegant proof.

Worth special attention are the symbolic questions that have concerned intellectuals as a group, rather than society in general. Many of these can be seen as important matters of principle, behind which intellectuals have mobilized. However, their explanation includes less lofty motives. There has been a passion for heroes from the group's own ranks, even if the heroism does not seem remarkable or the martyrdom burdensome. Plenty of principles have figured in debates that are actually performances for the media.

Among the reasons for the peculiar priorities of intellectuals is the inconsistency of contemporary society. We have a Christian morality and a liberal practice; if we want more coherence, one or the other must be revised so that they harmonize. Communism's paradise is, in any case, an attempt to reach a reconciliation. What the present book points out is the opposite possibility: that instead of moralizing over practice because it departs from an artificial ideal, we should question the value of a morality with such great deficiencies in rationality and effect.

Every system creates a degree of inequality, and liberal society is no exception. Many people with low status regard this as a sign of injustice in the system, not of their own faults, and various forms of envy are a potent social force which can be a basis for movements criticizing the system. Nearly 200 years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville reflected on that attitude: "For in the same human heart there is also a depraved taste for equality, which seduces the weak into wishing to pull down the strong, and which induces men to prefer equality in

slavery over inequality in freedom." <7>

Similarly, the devastating comment that a person "thinks he's somebody" enables us to hinder others and relegate them to identical servitude. This maxim of mediocrity afflicts especially those who do not view the social structure as rigid, but believe in a capacity to alter their situation. For changeability threatens the conviction of the miserable that his own predicament is hopeless. If every shoemaker stays in his shop, it proves that life is a fate ordained by higher powers: woe to whoever displays individual energy and promise!

A social foothold always exists for the dissatisfied, with their feeling of being called but not chosen here and now. They are elements of any project that challenges the established order to erect a new structure with new leaders. Friedrich Engels pictured the loyal electorate that "throng to the working-class party in all countries" as "those who have nothing to look forward to from the official world or have come to the end of their tether with it - opponents of inoculation, supporters of abstemiousness, vegetarians, antivivisectionists, nature-healers, free-community preachers whose communities have fallen to pieces, authors of new theories on the origin of the universe, unsuccessful or unfortunate inventors, victims of real or imagined injustice...honest fools and dishonest swindlers." <8>

### 10.3 Democracy's dominance

Nations governed by democracy have given it increasing authority. Ever fewer people consider it only a means, rather than a goal. The politicians have not relinquished power to the voters, but goals apart from the will of the voters have acquired lower status.

Conservatives were once unsure whether their ideas had a future in a state with universal suffrage. To accept democracy was not just a question of method: a permanent abdication from power might be implied. If one sees no chance of a democratic majority favoring one's opinions, the commitment to democracy is lessened - a problem we have discussed in regard to separatism. Yet experience showed that the conservatives' views held potential, so their interest grew.

At the beginning of this century, communism was not alone in being antidemocratic; the democratic socialists were more socialists than democrats. Their goal was socialism, while democracy was to some extent a means of getting there, and in further respects a by-product of socialism. They were convinced democrats according to propaganda, but not fundamentally. The party of social democrats in Germany, as in many other countries, clearly found it difficult to choose democracy during the turbulent years after World War I. Socialists' reservations about democracy ought to have been weaker than the Right's, since they believed strongly in the likelihood of winning a popular majority.

Today, social development is turning against socialists, in the sense that the working class is becoming less numerous. This,

however, is not very significant, because the parties have attracted several other groups of voters. The working class's exclusiveness as a social group, with far greater political rights than the rest, seems absurd to everyone, even workers and socialists. Harmony is disturbed more by different groups, especially ethnic ones, who assert a right to special treatment and balk at democracy's claim to be a superior ideology.

In the advanced democracies, it is hard to imagine a conservative government that leaves some prerogatives to a monarchy, and declares democracy to operate only within limits set by the "national interest". It is equally hard to conceive of a socialist government that would declare certain "socialist achievements" to stand above democratic decisions. Democracy has indeed succeeded in establishing itself as a supreme ideology for important political issues.

Due to the dominant position of democracy, many observers think that an ideological fusion has taken place: democracy's victory also means the death of ideologies. Parties become electoral associations, profited by a tradition since the ideological heyday. This view is well represented by famous scholars like Seymour Lipset. According to them, the ideological discussion between Left and Right has lost substance and is simply a tradition; the Left does not really believe in socialism, and the Right has accepted a leading role for the state.

Each political period is defined by novel questions whose analysts draw the lines in new ways, happily treating the novelties as paramount and the old dichotomies as obsolete. Countless times, the Left-Right dualism has been thought buried. The old guard sees no essential change - only additional illustrations of the familiar antagonism - but seasoned veterans have a natural inclination to fight again mentally in finished wars. The biggest mistake, though, is made by those who perceive enormous changes, because the old issues of war live on. In hopeful moments, one speaks of a total triumph for democracy; yet that day is distant. A first step towards it is to give democracy a stronger philosophical position than that of a visitor in a world of ideas where pre-democratic notions rule the realm of morality.

Lipset also suggested a concept of internationalism which should be examined and not laid discreetly aside. He maintained that, even if democracy and market economy have won in the West, politicians in the underdeveloped countries who foster socialism and revolution ought to be supported. For Lipset, this was not a real policy but a wave of opinion that must be ridden upon, despite awareness that it is wrong.

A further step has been taken in many quarters, interpreting leftist radicalism as the most suitable and realistic solution for the Third World. In the 1960s and 1970s, a reversed Marxism became popular: socialism was not the stage after capitalism, but a stage for countries that were insufficiently developed to adopt democracy and capitalism. Democracy did not, of course, benefit when many of its advocates saw it as only a local phenomenon, a luxury for the rich. Today, socialism has been reduced to a stage which is the longest path from capitalism back to capitalism.

Not until the arrival of advanced democracy can false rhetoric be toned down, according to Lipset - and then with great caution. He cites Richard Crossman with approval: "A democratic party can very rarely be persuaded to give up one of its central principles, and can never afford to scrap its central myth. Conservatives must defend free enterprise even when they are actually introducing state planning. A Labour Government must defend as true Socialism policies which have very little to do with it. The job of party leaders is often to persuade their followers that the traditional policy is still being carried out, even when this is demonstrably not true."<9>

Analogously, Joseph Schumpeter held that a non-capitalistic ideology was needed even in capitalist society. He viewed the old aristocratic authority as a necessary relic which, once it falls, is replaced by a socialist authority and a socialist system. The liberal ideology is not enough.<10>

This insistence upon the need for lies, and on liberalism's ideological feebleness, is difficult to understand. As a measure of opinion, it has been found quite erroneous. One of the present authors worked for some months in Rumania during 1975, but met only two clear supporters of Ceausescu. Other visitors to Eastern Europe have had similar experiences - Communists were fewer in these states than in the democracies. Nevertheless, the conventional show of unity between leaders and citizens persisted. The dissidents were a small, distinct group that should be treated with a little more tolerance, but they were no alternative to the system. Not only Russia, but also the Russians, were Communist. The suspicion that Poles might not be was slow to emerge.

The tide of democracy extending into the Third World drowns the authoritarian idyll. People have not so greatly admired the leaders who were to bring them a bright future. There may not even be grounds for the claim that all misery is the fault of the old colonialists. When, after thirty years, the poor man has only become poorer, he may be starting to look for other explanations. Advocates of democracy seem to make curious judgements of opinion. Rather than believing in the strength of democracy's and capitalism's message, they resort to magical talk about sacrifice, revolution, liberation for the sake of "the people" - not the individual. History affords many such instances of high-flown idealism with purple rhetoric: mass meetings, parades, wreaths and triumphal arches. In the Soviet Union, erection of new monuments over heroes from World War II was a heavy industry as late as the 1980s. Without moralistic heroes, one fears that the machinery will stop.

The business community entertains the same thoughts in another shape. People need, not bosses, but leaders - charismatic chiefs who catalyze their teams to perform. Admittedly, some of us have to hold somebody's hand; we all welcome praise and sympathy. But these tendencies have been exaggerated into a warped view of reality. The employee who does fine on his own, unaided by a leader's compliments and vision, is a common sight. Could it be that the whole of society functions well without prophets who preach sacrifice for collective

projects?

Democracy and capitalistic practice unequivocally favor this possibility. Yet politicians, intellectuals and bureaucrats see it as their task to shout each other down with appeals for other messages.

### The power of myths

During the 1930s, a broad debate went on about the significance of myths, whose suggestiveness worried many democrats and seemed to be a handicap for democracy. Bertil Malmberg wrote in 1935:

"What good are bright techniques against such odds, the deep primeval tones, the horns of fate - demonic music and the voice of gods that drive these millions in their darkened state?"<11>

But when the myths did not prove as self-fulfilling as they claimed to be, they were judged insignificant. Herbert Tingsten remarked, for example, of the fascists: "If any people showed itself less bellicose than others, it was the Italians, who for decades were raised on a faith in the beauty of war and the greatness of death. Either they disbelieved the preaching, or the faith was too weak an incitement."<12> He concluded that myths are not so important, and rejected a "myth about myths". His attempt to render myths obsolete was, however, exaggerated; the fact that they are not omnipotent magical formulas with a record of success does not make them impotent. That myths are only a lightheaded fantasy and lack political effect is, unfortunately, wishful thinking.

Tellers of myths were also aware that they might not become a reality. In Mussolini's words, "We have created our myth. The myth is a faith, a passion. It is not necessary that it shall be a reality."<13> And Lenin's: "It has never entered the head of any Socialist to promise that the highest phase of Communism will arrive."<14> In all religions, the priests occasionally doubt the truth of faith. For a leader, too, faith is often not as essential as trust in the power of faith. It may be viewed as a tactical blunder ever to reveal the slightest doubt, but criticism of such confessions should not take a form which encourages stupidity and consequent lying. Doubt and falsehood are better than utter fanaticism.

The power of myths arises from their psychological allure, not their intellectual strength. Being fabricated gives them an advantage, since whoever spreads them can be regarded as participating in a creative process. This is most obvious for works of art, which are extremely dependent on the artist's reputation. Even an esteemed director or author may be panned for an elaborate production, while one of Picasso's napkins or Warhol's stockings is put on exhibition. It is not mainly the artist's effort that underlies such a judgement; the myth's propagandists have been made key creative assistants. A marketer's dream has become real, with a trivial product and a label

that means everything. Picasso and the party do great deeds, no matter what they do.

Neither is it a drawback for the ordinary party member to keep a certain distance from myths. Much of the party propaganda is simple, and his work is simplified by a consciousness that it chiefly aims at persuasion, not truth as such. He need not feel cheap if the propaganda is cheap, and can see himself rather as a smart advertiser. His distance allows self-respect and a still simpler message; the voice is his own, but the formulation belongs to an impersonal chorus. This possibility of judging an idea by its impact, instead of its truth, was not unique to the movements of the 1930s - their innovation was a clearer emphasis on the power of propaganda. The simplified campaigns that are run in all modern democratic elections indicate a breakthrough for the same approach, not a parenthesis.

Our century's history is an excellent illustration of the huge significance of myths. The power of myths is no myth. It is hard to imagine Il Duce, Der Führer, and the Communist avant-garde, without myths that motivate their claims on power to prospective followers. The tradition may be a sufficient reason for a conservative despot, but a radical movement requires an ideology. If myths are assessed in terms of lucidity and realizability, they score low; yet if judged by their value in bringing a small group to power, they have been outstandingly successful. Therefore, it is both factually wrong and tactically silly to declare ideologies dead, then scale down a philosophical discussion. On the contrary, when myths are weak, they must be attacked at their roots, so that fresh shoots do not pop up when the circumstances become more auspicious.

### Group against group

However difficult it is to consider altruistic ideas as serious proposals for a world order, they may be a worthy basis for reconciliation. In a world and a society which risk being torn apart by a struggle between rich and poor egoists, altruistic propaganda can have a calming effect. The solution might be to make begging socially acceptable by preaching about gratitude to the poor and mercy to the rich. This sort of face-lift is probably just what many people think feasible.

Before judging such a solution, it is best to ask whether the problem has been properly understood. That the misery of poverty is the primary source of conflict is only one possibility. The other is that it is not an altruistic, but a reciprocal, deficit which is dangerous: that either party - the rich or the poor man - regards himself as part of a disadvantageous cooperation which he wants to terminate or radically change. Let us look at it this way and see which moral force is the stronger.

For instance, the French Revolution did not fit into a pattern of increasing misery. It was not ignited by worse conditions for ordinary citizens - the Third Estate - since they had in fact become better off. Nor had their separation from the upper class grown, for the other two

Estates were as privileged as a century earlier. What is conventionally called "the revolution of rising expectations" is appropriate here. The cause is commonly thought to be a psychology of "having much and wanting more", but a different explanation seems more important. The Third Estate had made economic progress that generated a new social situation. While the First (noble) and Second (clerical) Estates needed the Third, this dependence was not mutual. As the Third Estate became better off, the imbalance in reciprocal cooperation was ever more disturbing.

The feudal system, though also unbalanced, faced no threat from viable alternatives with better reciprocity. In places where it was unbearable, peasant revolts could erupt. Yet these were rather limited corrections of excessively greedy or brutal lords, than blows against the feudal system itself. The imbalance entailed a kind of symbiosis which enabled the system to endure for a long time.

In the cities, money was spreading as an instrument of reciprocity, but this system did not accord the nobleman an equally secure position. When he failed to fill any real function, his official power was undermined. Even if he was no richer than his grandfather, and his stableman was no poorer than his grandfather's stableman, there was now an alternative with better reciprocal balance. So a revolution occurred, not merely a riot. The French Revolution is scarcely an exception in that respect; violations of reciprocal morality are a strong social force. The indignant revolutionary is the cheated reciprocalist, not the pitiful beggar.

Italy is a modern example of how altruistic and reciprocal morals confront each other. It captures both the problems of welfare states and the global conflict of north against south. The political establishment, comprising Christian Democrats and Socialists, has constantly tried in words and actions to lessen the altruistic deficit. Through taxes and transfers, the country's rich north has paid plenty to its poor south. One can safely say that this morally praised effort has culminated in a moral crisis.

Corruption is everywhere and the politicians have used tax money to buy votes, with or without the Mafia's help. The public sector does not exist mainly to serve the citizens, but to support the office-holders. Pension schemes, shorter working days, and all manner of sickness benefits, stimulate swarms of swindlers. A threshold of moral pain, however, is being reached even for the many petty violators. Their takings are not enough to justify sustaining a system which has such shocking aberrations.

A referendum in April 1993 yielded a large popular majority for all proposed changes.<15> Over 90% voted to abolish the ministry in charge of state aid for the south. The party Lega Nord won heavily and became the biggest in northern Italy, with a program for a loose federation or a partition of the country to stop the transfers. This party can, of course, be seen as a simple spokesman for the northerners' group interest. Yet one must also recognize that the group egoism agreed with a deep moral indignation, reacting against a reciprocal deficit. From the latter perspective, the moral problem is not that the north helps the south too little - an altruistic deficit - but

that the north is being exploited.

Low efficiency aggravates the dilemma of altruism. While some money has gone to the poor, much has been invested in bizarre showpieces and ended in the Mafia's pockets. A moral shadow hangs over the handling of funds, since begging and vote-buying are dubious even when done within the democratic rules of play. Every type of egoism and group egoism has flourished wildly in the altruistic project. This is lamentable and exceptional according to the altruists, but indicates a pattern to more reflective observers.

The Italian example leads us to the global scene. In the United Nations, at regular intervals, long tirades about the rights of the poor are delivered by overpaid ambassadors. They reiterate the high principle that rich countries should give 0.7% of gross national product to poor ones. Still, a considered moral principle behind the moralizing is virtually undetectable. Some complain of difficulties, others express sympathy, then the beggars receive a coin and there is a pause in the imploring.

Most people who have dwelt on the issue draw the same inference. A change must come from work, not alms. The poor countries should get their economies moving, and the beggars need jobs. This is more easily said than done, but the constructive approach is to deal with the basic problem instead of adopting a vastly inferior solution.

How much money the rich slipped into collection-bags was important for the church, and for some of the poor. Poverty in the rich world, though, was not eliminated by charity. Despite this, in the global context, voluntary aid is preached as a duty and said to be very significant, neither of which it is. The notion that a rich man is obliged to support the poor is nothing more than an opinionated demand. Those who wield power and information have a long list of wishes for the citizen to fulfill, and naturally want him to accept them as morally imperative.

### The statistical voter

What, then, does the ordinary voter accomplish that is so central to the democratic system? Arguments for his power are often attractively slanted: "Do you want to join in the decisions?" Since we all do, the almost rhetorical query arouses strong support for the democratic model. It is a biased suggestion, however, because a government is chosen by all the voters, so each individual's contribution is negligible. He may even have greater influence if he goes to a mass rally in a one-party state, applauds a few of the leader's proposals and greets others with silence - a weak influence, yet perhaps more palpable than a vote among several million every fourth year. The focus should be shifted from his role as an extra to the principal actor - the "statistical voter". The main question is what the latter achieves.

The statistical voter is, in effect, not a potential leader of the nation, but a subject. From this perspective, a primary task is to influence the system so that it benefits the common citizen, not

the interests of leaders. Democracy seems to succeed here as well as capitalism does. Elites often tacitly have a low opinion of the voter or consumer, as being rather naive and gullible: with a cult portrait of the party boss and a bunch of pretty girls, anything can be sold. Such an impression of marketing, though, is incomplete. The members of an elite are aware that a better product at a cheaper cost is desirable. A product that is really ahead of the competition will remain an appealing goal. While the party or company may still exploit every marketing trick in the book, a good product is not to be scoffed at, and is quite possibly decisive in the end. Thus, the voter or consumer, who does not attend the meetings, propose any changes that are approved, or even get an objection noted down, and is counted by the hierarchy as a decimal point followed by numerous zeros, can weigh heavily in the outcome.

An election debate has largely to do with sacrifices. The politician recites all the people he intends to help, and urges us to pitch in. It sounds more like a contest of altruism than of self-interest. But the politician seldom mentions the need for rural funding to urban audiences, or that of better child care to pensioners. When extolling the virtue of giving to others, he also refers indirectly to the opportunity of getting from others. Many regard the last point as the core of the apple, and one can easily understand why it is presented in this way. "Show me your vote if you want a higher pension" would be considered a crude formulation.

Such altruistic speeches are not only shadow-play and etiquette. They enable politicians to acquire room for independent action. Among the conflicts within democracy is that which arises when different elite groups seek positions that will allow them to realize their visions. At the same time, voters exert influence so that these visions will harmonize better with their own broad self-interest.

Nobody is a hundred-percent democrat if he has access to power. We may say at the kitchen table that, if we had power, we would always let the people's will shine through. At the leader's mahogany desk, very few candidates repeat that claim. If, for example, the electorate believes that one method of storing nuclear waste is best, whereas you are convinced that another method is necessary, you are unlikely to abstain from pursuing your policy. If you think that capital punishment and abortion are murder, while the people's will takes an opposite view, it is tempting to forbid those acts once you are in power. Your decision might well be called the enlightened people's will, the future people's will, the unprejudiced people's will, and so on. Most of us would be better democrats in handling issues that do not appear crucial. Yet many potentates, after settling into their seats, tend to straighten out the people's will even in minor matters.

In any case, we are all democrats when it comes to choosing between democracy and a wicked dictatorship. But the question is whether to choose democracy over an enlightened despotism. This depends on what counts most, the population's self-interest or the attractive aims of despots. The latter form a smaller group and may seem more aware, more knowledgeable - and more in agreement with our own social outlook. Why not adopt a permanent mandate for the elite's desire to make good

decisions, even if the people do not appreciate how good they are? Why restrict such an urge to do what is right and great? There is a clear reason from the individual citizen's perspective. The interests of an elite and of its subjects differ so widely that it is better to choose continued control by the statistical voter than to give free rein to the "right basic attitude".

That the politician tries to influence the voter, not only carry out his instructions, is not wrong. It is a type of expert assistance, which we receive from many others such as lawyers and carpenters. We expect good advice on how our goals can be reached more effectively than through our amateurish approach. But what if a lawyer or carpenter has quite distinct goals, or considers ours to be bad? Normally he would refuse the assignment, instead of taking it and then coaxing us to accept something we do not want. Altruistic morality offers the politician an excuse to change his assignment, teach the clients a higher and finer value, and set his own goals - in addition to his competence - above theirs. With altruism, he can motivate an attitude which other experts would classify as a breach of conduct. The relationship between clients and assignee is the same here, and he ought to give their interests the same attention.

However, the presupposition is that the clients have a viable goal. If fulfillment of God's wishes is the ultimate objective, some kind of theocracy would be the only suitable system; a person who has devoted his life to studying holy books must be better equipped for such work than a sporadic churchgoer. If the aim is to build up socialism, faith in the proletarian avant-garde is a natural model. Likewise, the preservation of national traditions would justify an aristocracy. Aid to the handicapped, or to underdeveloped countries, is appropriately dealt with by a coherent expert group of informed civil servants. In what way can the statistical voter be better than bishops, party bosses, dukes and experts? A good elite is plausibly both more capable and more dedicated to the cause. Is the voter's power justifiable by being simply an important safety-device in case the elite suddenly runs wild? Should one not also question whether the elite's ideals are really the right goals?

Many people hesitate before the obvious alternative of elevating the voter's self-interest to an official objective. Some maintain that, as experts, they know the statistical voter's "actual" interest better than he does. Even if this were true, it is partly irrelevant. The voter can be expected to pursue his self-interest, whereas the expert's judgements are strongly affected by another interest - his own.

Democracy appears to be a security system that, while undesirable, is necessary to restrain lofty ideals. This may be an adequate argument under peaceful conditions, but it risks becoming insufficient in an age pervaded by desperate negativism about the present and passionate optimism about the future. The voter's self-interest is an indispensable moral basis for a consistent grasp of democracy. How else, than in judging his self-interest, can the ordinary voter be superior to the progressive members of an elite? If the voter's self-interest is doubted as a healthy norm, the rational foundation of democracy is doubted.

The extensive role of self-interest has suffered much criticism. In the philosophy of Aristotle, democracy had a cousin named Politeia.<16> This was also a form of popular rule, yet expressly aimed at doing the best for the public. Democracy was the aberrant version, devoted primarily to self-interest. Although we should not dwell on the history of words, it is notable that Aristotle anchored the concept of democracy in self-interest rather than public interest. Such a shameful origin and orientation for democracy has parallels. Is not the same defect attributed to capitalism and Darwinism? Or might the defect be, instead, an advantage? The primitive approach of democracy is perhaps its fundamental strength, compared with other systems. The great difference may be, not higher and more praiseworthy ideals, but the fact that more people's self-interest influences those in political power.

Altruism is eager to represent itself as an aspect of democratic ideas, or even as their foundation. More accurate would be to regard it as a cuckoo attempting to fit into democracy's nest. Just as a cuckoo emits plagiarized cries more loudly than the real chicks do, an altruist explains that he is a good democrat, and that democracy's aim is to counteract the very self-interest which is its *raison d'être*.

### Diversity

The democratic model of decision-making is resilient when two parties have different proposals and only one of them can be carried out. Democracy is the best procedure for reaching collective decisions - but not for issues that do not call for unity. Whenever one will must bend to another, it means a setback. In general, individual decisions are better than a majority decision which is forced upon a minority. This points to the rationality of not allowing united political decisions to become too numerous.

Even if united decisions perfectly reflected the majority view, they would be worse than individual choices. A group of people in a restaurant may get better service at a lower cost by ordering the same food for everyone; but this food will be the exact preference of only a few members, even if it includes the most popular entrée and main dish and dessert. While the cited advantages might outweigh the grunts of disappointment, the argument of cost-effectiveness soon imposes conformity. The sum of dissatisfied minorities will accumulate into a dissatisfied majority, and democracy is weakened by abuse of power. Overriding reasons are required to warrant a collective decision, and democracy's authority is contingent on staying within its own sphere. Tolerance of state intervention in the private sphere has diminished, since the old respect for overlords has declined and the state's growing demands for adaptation lead to protest. The subject is now a citizen.

It is difficult to predict what a future popular majority will think on many normative issues. Often there is substantial support for a restrictive morality - as in the opposition to abortion, pornography and slander. But the liberal alternative has a special advantage in one respect: the individual's power over himself is more valuable than

power over others. Thus, "Pro Choice" possesses a further ally in confronting "Pro Life" and analogous rules of general behavior. When judging that personal choice is best for both the individual and others, ambitions are kept on an equal level with claims; whereas compulsion of those who think differently is unpleasant, as either a proposal or a process. Limits on the use of compulsion are frequently a prerequisite for the results of discussions about what is good, right and desirable. The preference for interpretations that give the individual priority is stronger than the taste for enforced assent to majority policies. A plausible prognosis is that individualism, in this sense, will become ever more robust, and appeals for collective adjustment ever weaker.

If democracy is to retain its vital function as a supreme ideology, it must circumscribe its power relative to a private sphere, in which other approaches are theoretically and practically better. We would be ill-advised to acquire a "trickle-down democracy" where the state confiscates as much as it can and people are left to deal with decisions that do not interest the elected officials. The principle of subsidiarity - that decisions should be taken at the lowest possible level - is pertinent to the distribution of power not only between countries and supranational agencies, but also between the state and its citizens. In this important area, altruism is once again a factor that heads in the wrong direction. It provides a permanent excuse for every politician who wants the voters to adapt to a project he promotes. Lofty aims are always available for whatever he desires.

The democratic system involves a risk of overexpansion. Public debate offers many opportunities to focus on the advantages of an expansive proposal while putting the costs in fine print. A politician naturally sees a widespread need for his services. From Left to Right, there is an interest in any comprehensive political function. Hence, a continual critique is required that questions the system's tendency to unlimited growth. It is wise not to wait for the hairdresser to decide whether one should have a haircut.

If the morality of integrity is made to retreat, worse conditions are created for the citizens and the basis is undermined for democracy as well as reciprocal morality. A self-reliant citizen who compliantly submits to all collective decisions is almost self-contradictory. And without the self-reliant citizen, democracy does not exist.

### The power of consistency

Democracy's strong, indeed sovereign, ideational status has been a problem for totalitarian movements. At the same time as they have ridiculed democracy, their fixed elections and falsified production statistics have tried to persuade people that they can reach the goals of democracy and capitalism by different methods.

Political propaganda may rescue this strategy in the short run, but eventually it ruins its own chances. Why should anyone be satisfied with a clearly faulty imitation, when the consistent solution is at

hand? The trouble with propaganda is that it often does not pursue, but attempts to get around, the consistent solution. Propaganda commonly obeys the same principle as advertising, which means - contrary to popular belief - that it tries to avoid creating entirely new needs and opinions. The reason is not moral but practical: to save time, resources and blunders. Instead, it seeks to generate support for a product or party by utilizing current requirements and values in the easiest possible way. The latter is frequently a simplification, a groundless assertion, or a calculated lie.

In a dictatorship with control over the media, lying is attractive. To deny a policy of keeping political prisoners is easier than to find political support for it. The denial may even become more credible if propaganda emphasizes how wrong it is, and how evil a regime must be to pursue it. A candy manufacturer would presumably also be glad to meet no opposition when advertising his product as excellent for the teeth. The propaganda of dictators is often not ideologically consistent, and relies on short-term distortion. Rightist tyrannies have regularly been described by their originators as temporary efforts to safeguard democracy and public prosperity - against corrupt and incompetent democrats. Communist regimes have gradually adopted the same ideological weakness.

The main difficulty is not this weakness but the real deficiencies in performance. Regardless of what it says, such a regime will probably have the popular majority against it. But the ideological weakness may well be important for its elite: they have attacked liberal democracy and liberal economy at the same time as their propaganda credits them with living up to liberal aims. In many countries, the elite has lost faith in its own message. Rather than clutching at power until the bitter end, its choice has been to abdicate. The inconsistency of a regime's ideology is a plausible cause of that discouragement.

A similar weakness in the moral sphere is, however, exhibited by democracy and capitalism. Occasionally someone argues that we need economic growth in order, for example, to prevent industrial pollution and to help the handicapped. This is reasonable insofar as greater economic resources allow such opportunities, but it poorly and falsely describes the aim and philosophy of capitalism. Analogously, democracy is seen as a means of creative and altruistic politicians to determine how mature the voters are for various self-sacrificing purposes. How prepared is the electorate to help underdeveloped countries, low-paid workers, drug addicts and the like? Here is a perspective that gives the leading role to altruism, and turns democracy into a Gallup system for checking that the voters do not lag too far behind.

Obviously, democracy and capitalism are bad methods for altruistic goals. This conflict may be covered up by propaganda, but only with a Sisyphean effort by the intellect. If one obscures the gap by swearing support for altruistic ideals, one sits at the ideological branch one is sitting on. Adaptability to altruistic values may bring personal favors for the time being, but it makes an inferior defense for democracy and capitalism. These destructive activities have to be abandoned.

Our economic lives are characterized by capitalism, and political life by democracy, while in science the acceptance of Darwinian theory is paramount. Yet our moral philosophy remains pre-capitalistic, pre-democratic and pre-Darwinistic. Its cornerstone is an antithesis to the new system's implicit morals. How long shall we worship this Trojan horse?

#### 10.4 The totalitarian threat

Two principal spectres haunt the future. One of them has been traced above to bureaucracy. A Great Coalition takes over and leads society toward "the common goal". Utopian and Marxist socialism must be considered long dead, but an alternative form of socialism lingers on, according to the model of elitists such as Schumpeter. This socialism arises from surplus instead of scarcity. Devoid of class warfare, it is successively established against an ever weaker adversary.

The other threat to liberal society is fragmentation. Group-egoistic confrontations undermine the view of democracy as a dominant ideology. The trust in democracy is not primarily a philosophical attitude, but a response to actual performance. Democratic passivity, wrong decisions, and feeble leadership are factors that increase the adversary's chances. A totalitarian movement is unlikely to win many votes in an open contest with the democratic system. Its chances lie mainly in competing with further totalitarian movements so that the democratic options no longer seem relevant to events.

Such a triumphant tandem is classically illustrated by the National Socialists and the Communists in Germany during the early 1930s. The Nazi terror gave votes to the Communists, and the Communist terror benefited the Nazis, since the democratic parties appeared too weak to suppress either the Brown or the Red danger. The parliamentary election in the summer of 1932 left the Nazis and Communists with a total of 51.6% of the votes.<17>

Ethnic conflicts have good prospects of a comparable development. In a situation fraught with violence, many members of one group think that the most militant opponent of the other group's abuses is the best candidate. This is usually also the person responsible for the most abuses against the other group. The danger for democracy, and of a vicious circle of violence, is self-evident. An important function of any group is to keep order among the antidemocratic elements in that group, instead of simply protesting about the other group's abuses.

Democracy as a superior ideology does not mean accepting that a parliamentary majority can decide whatever it wants. Every government must have enough judgement to understand the limits of its mandate. But in a democracy the greatest risk is that too little will be changed, not too much. Within the establishment a wearing debate occurs over serious breaches of principle and ruinous transformations made by a new government, yet it hardly alters the real life of the people. Such a lack of effect depreciates the value of democracy,

which most of us regard as a way of choosing changes, not just leaders.

The democratic countries offer relatively few instances of a systemic change where the majority defeats the minority so completely that their coexistence is gravely impaired. One case was the Spanish civil war, whose prelude was a change of system followed by violent events.<sup><18></sup> The Popular Front, a broad leftist alliance, narrowly won an election in February 1936. The choice was between three party groups, so it is hard to clarify the totalitarian shares of the left and right. Communists got only 14 of the 473 seats in the national legislature, while 15 went to the royalists and none to the falangists. The anarchists were a strong group who boycotted the election, and factions in various parties were dubious democrats. Still, the democratic forces should have been dominant. But a weak socialist leadership failed to subdue the undemocratic left, and the country slid toward a contest of arms. The war was seemingly as needless as it was disastrous. When the large democratic center could not hold together, the nation split into two equal blocs under General Franco and the Communists.

The worst happens if democrats, faced by danger, give up their policy and begin a political battle with undemocratic methods of pursuing democratic ambitions. As a paramount principle, one should never reduce the minority's right to gain power if it obtains the support of a popular majority in the future. We have seen earlier that those who violate their own morals are always sentenced most stiffly. To be arrested for fighting is more embarrassing for a priest than for a skinhead.

An antidemocratic opposition is only fortified if, on some key issue or issues, it upholds a policy that has great popular approval. The defense of democracy requires an adaptation to these issues, in order to lessen the totalitarian party's attractiveness. This may be difficult when one has stubbornly rejected everything the adversary stands for. Inability to reflect popular opinion is, however, a defect in democratic parties and not a virtue. It becomes fatal when a majority, or large minority, of the voters are compelled either to abandon their attitude on such an issue and favor a democratic party, or else to maintain their attitude and side with antidemocrats.

In view of the problems arising from political and economic activities, it would be strange if people did not occasionally feel deep dissatisfaction. This might concern a politician or a party, but sometimes the whole system is questioned. In situations with radical criticism of the system, a strong fundamental ideology is well worth having. To consider ideologies dead would then be to throw away a valuable line of defense. Even worse is an anti-individualistic morality which attacks the political and economic system's basis, namely self-interest. A moral campaign is forever being waged with a magical formula: "Serving the cause is good - to serve yourself is bad". Since totalitarian systems are best due to their "high" ideals, the consequence is to encourage enemies of democracy. And the error is only slightly palliated by humanitarian criticism of the enemies' "methods". All totalitarian movements include far-reaching altruistic

ideas, and it is these which should be attacked.

In this context, it may be rewarding to examine such a destructive ideology as Nazi antisemitism. What is the underlying thought? A common approach is to regard antisemitism as an instrumental idea: in seeking power, a group needed an enemy to rage against, and traditions of antisemitism made the Jews a suitable target for propaganda. But the explanation is inadequate, for the Nazis had no lack of enemies. They had the Weimar Republic, the Treaty of Versailles, and the Marxists, to name only some. Why appoint the Jews to the throne of evil?

Ideological explanations often refer to a contempt for weakness as the overriding ideology. Extermination of Jews was thus a sequel to the killing of physically and mentally ill people. To be sure, the Nazis worshipped strength and their propaganda never ceased to deprecate the Jews. Yet does this mean the Jews were looked upon as weak? Propaganda that emphasizes the enemy's weakness, lowness and dumbness is an indirect denial thereof, as such a deficient opponent would deserve scant attention. When the opponent is assiduously reviled for being a feckless subhuman or "paper tiger", even the propagandist must think he is facing a threat. According to Nazi philosophy, the Jews were mighty indeed; in some obscure manner, they had infiltrated the corridors of power from Washington to Moscow, from palatial banks to union offices. The emaciated prisoner was weak, but not the Jewish conspirator in the National Socialist world-view. Traditional antisemitism, too, held the Jews in greater envy than contempt.

If the Jews were not weak, what rendered them so detestable? One answer comes from Hitler's general perspective. In "Mein Kampf" he gave his opinion of egoism: "As soon as egoism masters a folk, the bonds of order dissolve and, in hunting their own happiness, people plunge from heaven straight into hell... Language has a term which, in the most splendid way, expresses an action in this sense. It is 'the fulfillment of duty', meaning that one does not gratify oneself but serves the public. The temperament from which such a mode of action emerges, we call idealism - as distinct from egoism or selfishness. We thereby mean every single individual's ability to sacrifice himself for the public, for his fellow human beings."<19>

Hitler was here subscribing to a conventional notion that the struggle between culture and barbarism consists of suppressing egoism. Only when this assessment results in a more concrete analysis does he depart from other idealists. Granted that society and egoism are mutually opposed, a way of measuring egoism is to see whether different groups have managed to form societies. The Jews' success in surviving as a group for the past 2,000 years, but without creating their own state, becomes a pillar of Hitler's theory. Jews epitomize egoism: "they lack the most essential precondition for creation of a cultural folk, namely the idealistic temperament. The Jewish people's will to sacrifice does not extend above the individual's naked instinct for self-preservation."<20>

According to Hitler, the inability to build their own society leads the Jews to parasitize other nations. However, Jewish egoism is strong and dangerous - not weak - and must, therefore, be countered

with great force. Egoism's monster has materialized both in Germany and abroad through Jewish blood. All ideas that disagreed with National Socialism were influenced by this group, showing why every antagonist betrayed what was German and embraced what was Jewish. Germany stood for culture, Judaism for egoism.

The Holocaust can be interpreted as a uniquely bloody group-egoistic confrontation in which ideology was more a rationalization than a cause. But violence is not so unilateral in most clashes of group egoism; usually it is a spiral that aggravates conflict. For comprehensive, systematic and one-sided brutality, an abnormally strong ingredient of ideology is necessary. A great crime and a high ideal go together. Letting the Jew embody egoism is among the many attempts to pin this despised trait on a group whose members are then branded as inferior parasites. The National Socialists' genocidal war upon Jewry was also an ideological crusade against egoism.

Expressions of metaphysical religion are often so compromising that they are unlikely to recur as a threatening alternative. Efforts will certainly be made to exonerate their sullied banner-bearers. A believer longs to be faithful. As the author Alexander Solzhenitsyn recalled, Communists in labor camps tended to imagine that Stalin did not know what went on there; it was a misunderstanding, not a policy actually pursued by the leader and the party. Some scholars, such as Robert Faurisson, claim that the extermination of Jews is primarily a product of propaganda against the Germans. Whenever Marx is wrong, somebody tries to save him by arguing that he had a quite different meaning. Yet these sorts of whitewashing are not so risky; the dirt is ineradicable. The real danger is that the forces which give rise to totalitarian ideology receive very limited criticism, leaving their foundations uncompromised. A standard excuse is "the human factor" - leaders did not possess the good intentions which the faithful might have desired. On the contrary, perhaps the results are what could reasonably have been expected. Ought we not to regard the human factor as a rule to be taken account of, rather than a continual surprise?

In totalitarian societies, most people protest at the manner in which the individual's submission is carried out. These systems' advocates always argue by emphasizing, not only their idyllic character, but also the violence in non-totalitarian society. Like a salve to cure pimples, the treatment may seem more endurable if they show a miserable "before" and an attractive "after" picture. The faults of other systems, and the existence of poverty or "structural violence", are supposed to eclipse one's own fixation with violence and reduce its terror to a minor distinction in quantity, not in kind.

Through the obliteration of capitalistic elements and Jewish blood, one thus eliminates the basis for misery. A new society can then be depicted which differs from the totalitarian. If Hitler wins long enough, he will become a peacemaker - for war is impossible without enemy armies. Once the police state has exposed all its opponents, it can begin to relax; socialism may turn into communism. This society looks much the same in its numerous versions: egoism has been extinguished and altruistic principles are blossoming. Since its

spokesmen are somewhat more pacific, it might be given a broader label such as "the Total Society".<sup><21></sup> In present society, conflicts occur between people with varying interests, desires and ambitions. In the Total Society, one has attained a higher rationality which leads people to bow beneath a greater unity, an unprecedented synthesis, an ultimate Totality.

Here, obedience is paid either to a benevolent state power, or to a diffuse but well-behaved anarchy with no social antagonisms. One avoids the morality of the Prisoner's Dilemma, the need for special rewards to those who do one good, and in particular the effort of reacting negatively toward those who disappoint one. People will want to cooperate in the absence of both rewards and punishments, so the dilemma evaporates.

The Total Society consummates the work commenced by Hitler: "Our socialism reaches much deeper. It does not change the external order of things, it orders solely the relationship of man to the state... Then what do property and income count for? Why should we need to socialize the banks and the factories? We are socializing the people."<sup><22></sup> Different points of view agree that the old savage (see Chapter 9) will not suit the Total Society - it calls for nothing less than "the new man".

Sociobiology sets forth a view of human nature in which man cannot be reconstructed into "new man". Consequently, no total society will ever grow out of the totalitarian state; this is doomed to last. Jewish corruption, capitalistic instinct, and proneness to devilish temptation could not be eliminated even if many times more people were killed than during our century. Such "low" egoistic traits are inherent in the species. It is always possible to get cooperation from the Prisoner's Dilemma by abolishing freedom of action: one gives people "an offer they can't refuse". Similarly, a solution to the dilemma of freedom would be to abolish freedom.

The very notion of changing people so that they will adapt to society invites criticism from two perspectives. As a fantasy, it may be appealing - but a thoughtful analysis soon reveals reasons why it is not ideal. This vision is simply unrealizable, and social engineers with such fine ambitions are headed for failure. Repeated attempts should not raise our hopes of seeing any result. To dream of the Total Society is to approach a totalitarian society.

Some imagine the Total Society as a pleasant, practicable hybrid between the totalitarian and liberal types, with less oppression than the former and more solidarity than the latter. They are indulging a dangerous illusion. The way out of totalitarian society has often proved to go, not to the Total Society, but directly to liberal society. And the way toward the Total Society ends nowhere but in totalitarian society. In other words, a society without egoism, with people interacting harmoniously as well-brought-up cells in the social body, remains a dictatorial fiction - whether one would "pay any price" to get there, or regards it as a harmless idyll.

## A literary example

The mechanics of a totalitarian system may be further inspected through the eyes of an author who, perhaps, has portrayed them better than anyone else: George Orwell. His penetrating description of components in the logic of tyranny is still highly relevant to a discussion of morality.

Leading the long gray line of characters in "1984" is a party worker, Winston Smith, who holds a minor post at the Ministry of Truth. His job is to alter historical accounts so that yesterday's events agree with today's party message. The language itself is adapted into "Newspeak", which enhances the aims of the state and hinders criticism; an implication, logically enough, is that the Ministry of Truth deals with truth. All forces are to unite behind the state's strivings - yet Winston Smith is not a solidarian cell in the social body. He craves physical love, has his own thoughts, and praises the individual goals which, according to the state, a good party member ought to stand above. His resistance to omnipotent, oppressive government finds a main focus, not in moral condemnation, but in a diary note which sounds marginal: "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows." What he means is that the state is constrained by the laws of logic and mathematics. There is truth and there are lies. Far from being marginal, it is a fundamental human point of departure. A reality exists which the mind can grasp, and an individual can understand and judge his superiors in terms of that reality.

The antithesis is blind faith. For a Christian, no contradiction occurs between real life and the idea of God as "good and all-powerful". A priest may complain about the world's misery, but observation and belief need not coincide - "Inscrutable are the ways of the Lord". Similarly, the Communist Party's infallibility is considered true in spite of the continual changes in its policy and the retouching of Politburo group photographs to purge past leaders: such is proletarian truth. Again, Hitler's state distinguished between German mathematics and Jewish mathematics. The authorities want to control the yardsticks by which they can be measured and judged. When reality clashes with conviction, the latter is decisive. Only by believing in the public lie does one demonstrate solidarity with the faith. Nonetheless, intellectual integrity knows that truth is not proletarian, and that mathematics is not German.

The other source of Winston Smith's resistance is his inability to love the leader sincerely. He prefers lowly reciprocal love for a woman to subservient love for a party chief. Every totalitarian movement aims to liberate the individual from his personal interest. He must see himself not as an independent subject, but as a tool of God or the class struggle. His egoistic outlook has to be replaced by that of the ruthless, self-effacing martyr.

These two goals - elimination of both intellectual and emotional integrity - are the platform of totalitarian states. They urge man to become a means instead of an end. Anti-intellectualism and altruism are their instruments. Winston Smith's defeat by his oppressors is

certain when, broken by torture, he converts to a new faith - two plus two equals five - and a new emotion - a love for Big Brother."

Egoism occasionally exhibits awful aspects, but never the inhuman self-denial of love for an almighty cause. This is where man proves most dangerous, sinking to his lowest level. We have witnessed it countless times, yet the moralists go on muttering that selfish greed is the nadir and negation of humanity.

Today, the churches in many countries are crumbling at heart. Orwell's regime has few direct counterparts. Hitler and Mussolini appeal to sporadic sheep. Only the boots are left from Stalinist monuments. But fresh shoots will undoubtedly arise on the common soil of altruistic philosophy. The talk goes on about boundless love for saviors, about the wonders of unselfish solidarity. One talks without reflecting, and without smelling the corpses.

## 10 Summary

Three important environmental factors have worsened the conditions for altruism in our age, by strengthening an individualistic perspective. Scientific advances, at the expense of faith as an explanatory model, render people less easy to manipulate. Capitalistic mass production has led to greater and wider prosperity, in which altruistic morality plays a quite subordinate role. An ever more dominant middle class supports many values that foster individual ability, which does not suit an altruistic philosophy.

A social force that can favor altruism is bureaucracy. With a large public sector and concentrated business life, vast hierarchic structures are formed, blurring the leaders' self-interest. Altruistic philosophy protects these leaders better than does a group egoism opposed by other strong groups. A second such force is that of intellectuals, who historically have shown a weakness for totalitarian movements. They are often enticed by a priestly position with high status and the duty of preaching unselfishness. The shared basis of all totalitarian states is an altruistic philosophy which submits the individual's self-interest to a loftier goal, but what those systems really prize is the self-interest of an elite or leader. Communism is the ideology of a self-appointed avant-garde, not of a working class. Jesuits and Jacobins, Leninists and the lot, may as well unite.

Although democracy's dominance seems secure, the ideological defense against totalitarian myths is fragile. This is primarily because the altruistic foundation is not attacked, as distinct from specific myths and their consequences. The democratic philosophy has been half-buried by pre-democratic ideas that reject the voter's reliance on self-interest and see him as a vehicle for idealistic constructions. Instead of key questions, such as how to satisfy people's self-interest better, or how to choose between a majority's self-interest and respect for a minority's, much energy is wasted on agitating against the very legitimacy of self-interest as a ground for

decisions.

## Notes Chapter 10. Altruism and political sociology

1. Johnson, *Modern Times* p. 257
2. See Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. II p. 23.
3. Measured in GNP per capita, the differences between North and South Korea become 1 to 7, according to IMF statistics for 1992. *The Economist*, July 17 1993.
4. Mill, *The Principles of Political Economy* .
5. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, p. 146.
6. Johnson, *Modern Times* p. 655.
7. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1.
8. Engels in Lipset, *Political Man* p. 137.
9. Crossman in Lipset, *Political Man*, p. 442.
10. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, p. 214.
11. Malmberg in Tingsten, *Från idéer till idyll*. p.188.
12. Tingsten, *Från idéer till idyll*, p. 188.
13. Mussolini in Schmandt, p. 449.
14. Lenin in Schmandt, p. 419.
15. *The Economist*, June 26, 1993.
16. Aristotle, *Politics* (Politiká).
17. Lipset, *Political Man*, p. 139
18. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, p. 156.
19. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, citations pp. 281-283.
20. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 284.
21. Tocqueville uses this term in a similar sense in *Jämlikheten vårt öde*, p. 121.
22. Hitler, in Johnson, *Modern Times*, p. 293.