

John H. Hallowell

The Moral
Foundation
of Democracy



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Foreword

A moral approach to the subject of democracy may not seem unusual to most people, but to many political scientists it will appear naïve or novel or unrealistically antique. The political scientist who emphasizes the *science* in his profession or who thinks of his subject as “morally neutral” will find Professor Hallowell’s treatment challenging. The resurgence, however, of the realists, the traditionalists, the Aristotelians, or the neo-scholastics—whatever name they choose to be known by—brings to the fore the ancient conviction that morals, in the sense of the choice of the right means (characterized by the virtue of prudence) to rationally determined objective ends, lie at the very foundation of politics.

Professor Hallowell’s contributions in this field have been outstanding, and the present work, based upon his Walgreen Foundation lectures, is offered for the better understanding of his school of thought.

JEROME G. KERWIN, *Chairman*

*Charles R. Walgreen Foundation for
the Study of American Institutions*

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JOHN H. HALLOWELL

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I. Democracy—Fact or Fiction?

"Who is this new god called Universal Suffrage?" Pareto asked at the beginning of this century. And he answered: "He is no more exactly definable, no less shrouded in mystery, no less beyond the pale of reality, than the hosts of other divinities; nor are there fewer or less patent contradictions in his theology than in theirs. Worshippers of Universal Suffrage are not led by their god. It is they who lead him—and by the nose, determining the forms in which he must manifest himself. Oftentimes proclaiming the sanctity of 'majority rule,' they resist 'majority rule' by obstructionist tactics, even though they form but small minorities, and burning incense to the Goddess Reason, they in no wise disdain, in certain cases, alliances with Chicanery, Fraud, and Corruption."¹ Whatever the form of government, by whatever name it is called, it is always, according to the Italian sociologist, rule by some elite, a minority that rules either by deception or by violence. And many intellectuals today would agree with that judgment. Any view which regards democracy as having roots in objective reality is discarded as hopelessly naïve, a form of self-deception from which the student of politics should seek emancipation.

Pareto's pronouncement on the delusive character of political philosophy in general and of democratic political theory in particular is all the more impressive because it is proclaimed to be

1. Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society* (4 vols.; New York, 1935), Vol. IV, par. 2183. Quotations used with the permission of Harcourt, Brace and Co.

a *scientific* judgment. For it was Pareto's claim that his *Trattato di sociologia generale* (1915-16) was simply a scientific description of social reality and, as a consequence, that it was free from all metaphysical speculation, moral evaluations, and a priori principles. Explaining human motivation in terms of six principal types of "residues" which are conceived as being something more complex than what had earlier been called "instincts," Pareto, like many contemporary intellectuals, is impressed with the essential irrationality of human behavior. All political philosophies, systems of ethics, theologies, and metaphysical theories, according to Pareto, are simply verbal manifestations of dominant residues. All can be subsumed under the one classification "derivation."² A derivation, he argued, is not accepted because it is true or rejected because it is false but is accepted if it corresponds to our residues and rejected if it does not. Only the scientific method, what Pareto calls the "logico-experimental" method, yields truth; only scientific theories are rational. Theories of progress, democracy, justice, nationalism, internationalism, or socialism are all non-logical derivations. A belief in "natural rights," in "justice," or in "law" is a kind of superstition or prejudice. None of them is a scientific concept, and hence none of them is rationally derived, rationally defensible, true or false. But, in any case, derivations are not very important in determining social change, for it is not by ideas that men are motivated, but by their residues. Says Pareto:

Theologians, metaphysicists, philosophers, theorists of politics, law, and ethics, do not ordinarily accept the order indicated. They are

2. According to Pareto: "Concrete theories in social connections are made up of residues and derivations. The residues are manifestations of sentiments. The derivations comprise logical reasonings, unsound reasonings, and manifestations of sentiments used for purposes of derivation: they are manifestations of the human being's hunger for thinking. If that hunger were satisfied by logico-experimental [i.e., empirical-scientific] reasonings only, there would be no derivations; instead of them we should get logico-experimental theories. But the human hunger for thinking is satisfied in any number of

inclined to assign first place to derivations. What we call residues are in their eyes axioms or dogmas, and the purpose is just the conclusion of a logical reasoning. But since they are not as a rule in any agreement on the derivation, they argue about it till they are blue in the face and think that they can change social conditions by proving a derivation fallacious. That is all an illusion on their part. They fail to realize that their haggings never reach the majority of men, who could not make head nor tail to them anyhow, and who in fact disregard them save as articles of faith to which assent is deference to certain residues.³

All philosophical discourse, political debate, attempts at ethical evaluation, are forms of "haggling," a futile exercise of the vocal chords or a mere scribbling of the pen. For it is not by reason that the destiny of men is determined but by deception, fraud, and force. Government, whatever the name applied to it for propaganda purposes, is always rule by the few in their own interest. Indeed, Pareto tells us, "the art of government lies in finding ways to take advantage of . . . sentiments, not in wasting one's energies in futile efforts to destroy them. . . . The person who is able to free himself from the blind dominion of his own sentiments is capable of utilizing the sentiments of other people for his own ends."⁴

And all this is proclaimed as a new insight into government, an insight made possible by the development of that new science of society called "sociology." But as a matter of fact, Thrasymachus anticipated it in the fourth century B.C., and Machiavelli expressed somewhat similar sentiments with respect to the art of government in the sixteenth. What Pareto has done is simply to restate the ancient Sophistic argument under the guise of scientific research. As Professor Melvin Rader has pointed out:

The advantage of Pareto's book is that it not only suggests ruthless tactics, but offers a clever defense against the pangs of conscience.

ways; by pseudo-experimental reasonings, by words that stir the sentiments, by fatuous, inconclusive 'talk.' So derivations come into being" (*ibid.*, Vol. III, par. 1401).

3. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, par. 1415.

4. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, par. 1843.

It enlists the prestige of science in support of the will-to-power. As an apostle of the "logico-experimental method," Pareto bedecks his pages with algebraic signs and graphs, most of which are employed to excellent purpose. He "proves" his view that values are purely sentimental by marshaling a large amount of "inductive evidence." He thus appears to be a resolute defender of science, intent upon keeping "theory" uncontaminated by "practice" and "sentiment."

Since he adopts the role of a scientific purist, the casual reader is apt to misunderstand the import of his argument. His treatise in effect is an attack upon the life of reason, and this is true despite his apparent attachment to strict scientific method. As a matter of fact, he so unduly restricts the field of science that a great portion of existence is turned over to violence and passion.⁵

I

But Pareto is by no means alone in seeking to dress his cynicism up in the garments of "scientific objectivity." What Pareto called "derivations," Marx described as "ideologies," Sorel called "myths," and Freud labeled "rationalizations." There are important differences between these terms, and they are not to be equated, but Pareto, Marx, Sorel, and Freud are all agreed that men are motivated more by irrational considerations than by rational ones. But that they should concede that men do, in fact, feel some necessity for explaining their behavior in rational terms, for justifying themselves, says a great deal more about the rationality and ethical sensibilities of human nature than they intend to concede. For why should men feel any necessity at all for "rationalizing" their behavior, for providing "good" reasons for "real" ones, if, in fact, they are *essentially* irrational and controlled by forces, sentiments, or drives over which they have no rational control? How is it *possible* for them to do so?

And why is the social scientist exempt from the irrational forces that determine the thought and conduct of other individuals? On what grounds? If he is not exempt, of what value is his "science"?

5. *No Compromise: The Conflict between Two Worlds* (New York, 1939), p. 50. Quoted with the permission of the Macmillan Company.

On what grounds, for example, is Pareto's theory exempted from the designation which he applies to other people's theories? Is not his social theory but another example of a derivation?

No, he would probably reply, because his is a scientific theory and other people's theories are not. But Marx claimed that his theory was a scientific one, and so did Freud. The concept of the class struggle is, for Marx, a scientific concept just as the conception of libido is a scientific concept for Freud. Since both Marx and Freud explain things quite differently from each other and Pareto's theory differs from each of theirs, which science shall we listen to? What standard shall we use to choose between them? It cannot be the standard of scientific method, since each claims to have employed that method in reaching his conclusions. Which theory is a "derivation," and which is not? Which is an "ideology," and which is not? Which is "rationalization," and which is not?

"We may in fact state it as a rule," C. S. Lewis has pointed out, "*that no thought is valid if it can be fully explained as the result of irrational causes.*" And it is a rule we apply every day of our lives. If a sober man tells us that his house is full of snakes, we may go with him to look for them; but if we know that he frequently suffers from delirium tremens, we pay no attention to him and dismiss his statement as a delusion. In our ordinary dealings with men we discount any beliefs that we even suspect have an irrational cause.

The same writer continues:

Now it would clearly be preposterous to apply this rule to each particular thought as we come to it and yet not to apply it to all thoughts taken collectively, that is, to human reason as a whole. Each particular thought is valueless if it is the result of irrational causes. Obviously, then, the whole process of human thought, what we call Reason, is equally valueless if it is the result of irrational causes. Hence every theory of the universe which makes the human mind a result of irrational causes is inadmissible, for it would be a proof that there are no such things as proofs. Which is nonsense.

But Naturalism, as commonly held, is precisely a theory of this sort. The mind, like every other particular thing or event, is supposed to be simply the product of the Total System. It is supposed to be that and nothing more, to have no power whatever of "going on of its own accord." And the Total System is not supposed to be rational. All thoughts whatever are therefore the results of irrational causes, and nothing more than that. The finest piece of scientific reasoning is caused in just the same irrational way as the thoughts a man has because a bit of bone is pressing on his brain. If we continue to apply our Rule, both are equally valueless. And if we stop applying our Rule we are no better off. For then the Naturalist will have to admit that thoughts produced by lunacy or alcohol or by the mere wish to disbelieve in Naturalism are just as valid as his own thoughts. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. The Naturalist cannot condemn other people's thoughts because they have irrational causes and continue to believe his own which have (if Naturalism is true) equally irrational causes.⁶

The intellectual who, like Pareto, denies the essential rationality of man and of the universe he inhabits involves himself in a contradiction from which he cannot rescue himself. But, wholly aside from the philosophical difficulties, what are the practical consequences? We may subscribe to that revolt against reason which expresses itself in terms of the overwhelming importance of economic factors in the determination of human behavior, or we may prefer the revolt against reason which ascribes overwhelming importance to the libido or the dominant residues; but

6. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York, 1947), p. 28. "By trusting to argument at all," Lewis points out, "you have assumed the point at issue. All arguments about the validity of thought make a tacit, and illegitimate, exception in favour of the bit of thought you are doing at that moment. . . . Thus the Freudian proves that all thoughts are merely due to complexes except the thoughts which constitute this proof itself. The Marxist proves that all thoughts result from class conditioning—except the thought he is thinking while he says this. It is therefore always impossible to begin with any other data whatever and from them to find out whether thought is valid. You must do exactly the opposite—must begin by admitting the self-evidence of logical thought and then believe all other things only in so far as they agree with that" (*ibid.*, p. 30). Copyrighted 1947 by the Macmillan Company and used with the Macmillan Company's permission.

we have opened the door for assertions that truth is simply a manifestation of nationalistic, racial, or class interests. If the art of government consists, as Pareto says it does, in finding ways to use other people's sentiments for one's own ends, then the totalitarian dictatorships of modern times would appear to represent the art of government at its best and most efficient. And if that is true, it is but a futile gesture to oppose them, and we had best now succumb to the inevitable. If justice, natural law, and natural rights refer to no objective reality, if democracy is but a word, then these words can be used in any fashion anyone wants to use them, and there is no way in which we can challenge his right to do so. If a Hitler or a Stalin claims that his system of government represents the purest democracy the world has ever known, that it is the perfect embodiment of justice, there is no way in which we can prove him wrong. We can say, of course, that we do not like what men like Stalin and Hitler do, but we cannot prove them wrong in doing what they do, nor can we defend by reason our preference for a different system.

II

The view that democracy is a fiction, at best a useful symbol, has found expression not only in the writings of Europeans like Pareto but in the writings of many Americans. And it has found, among others, explicit expression in the writings of Thurman Arnold, particularly in his *Symbols of Government* (1935) and *The Folklore of Capitalism* (1937).

The basic cause of our political confusion in America, he says, arises from a naïve faith in the existence of the "thinking man." The "thinking man" of the popular mythology is the man who is able to discern right principles and to prefer them to false ones. The "thinking man" is the man who is able both to discriminate and to act upon the basis of sound reason.

No competent psychologist, Arnold says, believes in the thinking man. He knows that such a man does not exist. But the trouble

is that there are still too many people in the United States who do not take the psychologist's pronouncements on the nature of man seriously. They still insist that appeals in politics should be rational. They insist upon arguing the relative merits of communism, fascism, capitalism, and democracy. They are still naïve enough, Arnold says, to believe that something important and meaningful can emerge from that kind of argument. This illusion is fostered by educational institutions and by professors who have a professional interest in maintaining it. The trouble with "respectable people" generally is that they have faith in principles rather than in organizations. They are so intent upon principles, Arnold declares, that they do not even know how organizations really work.

Arnold points out that "in advertising the 'thinking man' has gone so completely that a modern advertising agency would be amazed at the suggestion that the best way to sell goods is by making a rational appeal." But he notes with regret that "in government the concept still reigns supreme. Men are still asked to diagnose the ills of social organization through the darkened lens of 'schools' of legal or economic theory. They still worry about choosing a 'system' of government."⁷ But fortunately there are some "fact-minded persons who do not believe in the 'thinking man' and who do not expect to gain political objectives by making rational appeals."⁸ These are the politicians, and they are to be distinguished from political scientists, who are "the high priests" of the mythology of the thinking man.

Only when we give up the illusion of the thinking man, stop arguing about such abstractions as capitalism, fascism, socialism, and democracy, stop expecting politicians to make rational appeals and to behave rationally, can we really begin, says Arnold,

7. Thurman Arnold, *The Folklore of Capitalism* (New Haven, 1937), p. 59. Quotations from this book are with the permission of the Yale University Press.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

to solve our problems. Only when government becomes as enlightened as the modern advertising agency and frees itself from all rational scruples, can government really do the work for which it is designed.

To believe in the objective reality of law, justice, and rights, Arnold thinks, is infantile. If we are to be "realistic" in dealing with political problems, we must "grow up," give up our childish ways of thinking, think and act like adults. But Arnold confesses that "what a truly adult human race would be like the writer cannot imagine."⁹ He quotes with apparent approval, however, another writer who describes the adult personality in this way: "And now, when you have ceased to care for adventure, when you have forgotten romance, when the only things worth while to you are prestige and income, then you have grown up, then you have become an adult."¹⁰ But if "the only things worth while to you are prestige and income," it would not appear to matter very much under which system of government you live so long as you can gain a position of prestige within it and enjoy a reasonably comfortable standard of living. If, moreover, prestige and income are "the only things worth while," it would appear that the means employed to acquire them are of little importance. If it involves suffering for others, what some would call "injustice," we can always ease our conscience (for our conscience has a way of intruding itself) by repeating over and over to ourselves that justice is simply a word and no one knows what it means anyway. And if the conflict between our desire for prestige and income and the voice of conscience becomes too great to bear, we can always turn to some psychiatrist who will assure us that the voice of conscience is a vestige of infantilism. He will reassure us and send us happily on our way.

Lest I seem to assign to the psychiatrist too large a role in Arnold's scheme of things, let it be pointed out that he himself assigns to the psychiatrist a major role in that system of govern-

9. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

10. *Ibid.*

ment that will dispense with the illusion of the thinking man. In a book entitled the *Symbols of Government*, Arnold summarizes what he calls "a philosophy for humanitarian politicians" in these words:

From a humanitarian point of view the best government is that which we find in an insane asylum. In such a government the physicians in charge do not separate the ideas of the insane into any separate sciences such as law, economics, and sociology; nor then instruct the insane in the intricacies of these three sciences. Nor do they argue with the insane as to the soundness or unsoundness of their ideas. Their aim is to make the inmates of the asylum as comfortable as possible, regardless of their respective moral deserts. In this they are limited only by the facilities of the institution. It is, of course, theoretically possible to treat the various ideas and taboos which affect modern society, just as the alienist treats the delusions of his patients as factors which condition their behavior. This precludes any classification into sound or unsound theories. . . . The advantages of such a theory for purposes of thinking about government are that we escape the troublesome assumption that the human race is rational. We need not condemn policies which contradict each other solely on the ground that the action of government must be logically consistent. . . . The theory eliminates from our thinking the moral ideals which hamper us wherever a governmental institution takes practical action. . . . It frees us from the necessity of worrying about names, and arguing about the respective merits of communism, fascism, or capitalism—arguments which have the unfortunate effect of creating phobias against practical and humanitarian measures.¹¹

Arnold lists a number of other advantages that flow from the concept of government as an insane asylum, but these are the principal ones.

Most of us, I think, would not describe the organization of an insane asylum as a government, let alone the best government, for we think of government as an organization of responsible individuals and insane persons are clearly not responsible persons. If we were forced to use a political label to describe the ad-

11. Thurman Arnold, *Symbols of Government* (New Haven, 1935), pp. 232 ff. Quoted with permission of the Yale University Press.