



北京大学
西学影印丛书

英文影印版

政治哲学经典选读

Introduction to Political Thinkers

William Ebenstein Alan Ebenstein



北京大学出版社
Peking University Press

Introduction to Political Thinkers

William Ebenstein

(1910–1976)

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Second Edition

Peking University Press

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Introduction to Political Thinkers by William Ebenstein and Alan Ebenstein.

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

政治哲学经典选读/(美)W. 爱本斯坦, A. 爱本斯坦(Ebenstein, W.; Ebenstein, A.)编.
—影印本. —北京:北京大学出版社, 2003. 1

(北大西学影印丛书)

ISBN 7-301-06047-5

I. 政… II. ①爱… ②爱… III. 政治哲学-教材-英文 IV. D0

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2002)第 097941 号

书 名: 政治哲学经典选读

著作责任者: William Ebenstein Alan Ebenstein

责任编辑: 王立刚

标准书号: ISBN 7-301-06047-5/B·0251

出版发行: 北京大学出版社

地 址: 北京市海淀区中关村北京大学校内 100871

网 址: <http://cbs.pku.edu.cn>

电 话: 出版部 62754962 发行部 62750672 邮购部 62752015 编辑部 62752025

电子信箱: zpup@pup.pku.edu.cn

排 版 者: 北京天宇盛业文化信息咨询有限公司

印 刷 者: 北京大学印刷厂

经 销 者: 新华书店

787 毫米×960 毫米 16 开本 23.5 印张 680 千字 印数 2000

2003 年 1 月第 1 版 2003 年 1 月第 1 次印刷

定 价: 46.00 元

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序

政治哲学自上个世纪七十年代复兴之后,已成为当代哲学的主要领域,政治哲学的对象同时成为政治学、经济学、法律学和社会理论乃至一般文化与文学批评所关注的焦点,换言之,这些领域的一些基础问题原本就是政治哲学的问题。与此相应,各种政治哲学著作也如雨后春笋,应时而生,其中既有开创一个学派的大哲之作,提倡一个观点的雄辩之篇,相互非难的论战之章,亦有收罗各式篇章的文献选编性的初阶读物,而政治哲学史一类的著作也纷纷出版,其中不少就是先前已经付梓却不为人们重视的著作的再版,一时蔚为大观。《伟大的政治思想家》(*Great Political Thinkers: Plato to the Present*, edited by William Ebenstein, Alan Ebenstein, 6th ed, Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000)就是其中的一本。这是一本西方政治哲学文献的大型选编本,有一千多页,多次再版,而本书乃是这部大作的节略本。

此书的编者是威廉·爱本斯坦(William Ebenstein, 1910—1976)和艾伦·爱本斯坦(Alan Ebenstein, William Ebenstein 的小儿子, 经济学家)。威廉·爱本斯坦是一位卓有成就的政治哲学家和政治学者,出身于奥地利,在完成大学教育之后,前往英美,此后就一直在美国的大学里教书,他的擅业在于政治哲学和比较政府研究,而在极权主义(totalitarianism)研究领域里面,威廉·爱本斯坦则位居重镇。爱本斯坦的主要著作可举出如下几种,《法西斯意大利》(*Fascist Italy*, 1939),《纳粹国家》(*The Nazi State*, 1943),《德国记录》(*The German Record* 1945),《现代政治思想》(*Modern Political Thought*, 1960),《世界远景中的美国民主》(*American Democracy in World Perspective*, 1967),《今天的诸主义》(*Today's Isms: Communism, Fascism, Capitalism, Socialism*, 1954)。其中的一些著作屡次再版,比如,《今天的诸主义》已经再版七次,《伟大的政治思想家》在2000年也出到了第六版。因此,我们可以说,摆在读者面前的这本《政治思想家导论》(*Introduction to Political Thinkers*)是在英语世界广受欢迎的上乘之作,亦将受到汉语圈内英语读者的欢迎。

本书总共选录十三位西方重要的政治哲学家,或者用编者的说法,十三位伟大的政治思想家的经典著作中的重要章节。如果读者能够将本书所选的文献从头至尾阅读一遍,那么整个西方二千多年政治哲学和政治思想的主流大致就可以把握了。美中不足的是,作者未收录康德的政治哲学的文献,从而使人们对这个主流的理解不免留下一些派势模糊的地方。作者看重英美的政治哲学家,尤其是英国的政治哲学家,这可能缘于他的政治倾向,然而,在政治哲学领域,自德国哲学在西方思想界崛起之后,德国的观点和理论始终保持举足轻重的影响,而其荦然大师绝不仅限于马克思一人。爱本斯坦出身于奥地利,却与英美思想十分合拍,类似维特根斯坦,哈耶克和波普等人的情形,这看起来是奥地利思想学术界的有趣现象。此外,在我们东方人的眼中,编者简单地将此书命名为 *Introduction to Political Thinkers* 而不收入西方以外的政治思想家的文献,则是一个比较明显的成见。

本书编者的工作是相当认真的,在所选的每位哲学家的篇章之前都有一篇详细的介绍

为引导,它介绍相关哲学家的时代和思想的背景,该哲学家的政治哲学的主要观点和原则,以及所选篇章的中心思想。这种精心撰就的导读对初学者来说是十分有用的,即使对有一定基础的读者来说,也是一册方便应用的资料,本书因此而兼具初阶读物和文献选编的双重作用。我想,喜欢政治哲学的读者,很可以将本书用作进入西方政治哲学的门径,深入之后,大有收获是可以期待的。

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PREFACE

Introduction to Political Thinkers is an abridgment of *Great Political Thinkers* (sixth edition, 2000). Many reviewers during the revision process of *Great Political Thinkers* requested an abridged version. Not all instructors teach courses for which the more comprehensive treatment of *Great Political Thinkers* is required. Forty-six thinkers are covered in the larger book; twelve are contained here. The chapters here (with minor exceptions) are exactly as they appear in *Great Political Thinkers*. Only the number of chapters is abridged.

The purpose of *Introduction to Political Thinkers* is to present the most significant political philosophers from Plato forward. Each thinker is critically analyzed and placed in his historical context, and a key reading is then presented. This approach combines the strengths of commentary and original readings.

There are several changes to this second edition of *Introduction to Political Thinkers*. The introduction and chapter on Hayek are new. There are significant revisions to the chapters on Mill and Rawls and lesser changes elsewhere. The bibliographical notes have been updated.

This book—as its title states—is an introduction. After the reader is finished, he is encouraged to study other political philosophers in *Great Political Thinkers*.

Alan Ebenstein
Santa Barbara, California
2001

INTRODUCTION

The history of political thought is the history of human society. The question of how men should organize their societies is the stuff of political thought. Political thought concerns groups, not individuals. It is primarily concerned with the Ought not the Is of societal life. In its broadest sense, political thought concerns how men should live together.

Political thought is typically based on empirical foundations—what societies are possible. But its fundamental issue is not empirical but ethical. Political thought is not primarily about how men and women do live with one another, but how they should. As such, it is a branch of morality or ethics.

Politics does not arise in the situation of an isolated individual. Politics occurs in the circumstance of groups. It is largely forward-looking: How should society be ordered or organized? Its fundamental concern with morality and ethics stems from the situation that political thought guides individuals in how they lead their collective lives. No activity that concerns how men should live together can be anything other than fundamentally moral in nature.

How ought men to live together? This is the fundamental question of political thought. The question of how men and women should live together has been answered differently by the thinkers introduced here. Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill, Marx, Hayek, and Rawls are among the leading political philosophers through the ages. They answer the “Ought” question of society in different ways.

For Plato, at least in his explicit philosophy, there is an ideal world of forms that is eternal and unchanging of which this world is only a shadowy representation. He puts forward an ideal threefold class system composed of societal governors (guardians), soldiers (auxiliaries), and the masses, based on the Spartan system of government, ideally led by a philosopher-king. Plato advocates a communal lifestyle for guardians. Women members of the guardian class would have rights with men. Children would be raised in common. There would be significant thought control.

Though from Athens, Plato is no democrat. His mentor is Socrates, in whose name he largely speaks. Aristotle has a more practical outlook than his teacher Plato. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are part—toward the end—of the great intellectual flowering in Greece half a millennium before Jesus’ birth.

The Greeks were never able to unify politically, and Aristotle’s is the last great Greek voice to instruct future centuries. Though Aristotle is thoroughly informed by the city-state in his conceptions of optimal political order, he identifies lasting strands in political organization in societies—rule by the one, rule by the few, and rule by the many. Aristotle prefers rule by the wise one, as Plato does, but he does not think that this is very likely. Aristotle distinguishes between true and corrupt forms of rule by the

one, few, and many and, in their corrupt forms, favors rule by the many over either the corrupt few or one. He sanctions slavery and has a strong sense of community, including political community. He supports a predominantly middle-class society and mixed forms of governance, the latter of which became a prevailing theme during constitutional theorizing and making during the seventeenth through twentieth centuries.

Few deities last through the ages. No one (or almost no one) now worships Zeus or Jupiter. But the ancient Hebrews' god remains God for around two billion Christians and Jews. Jewish monotheistic consciousness has spread over much of mankind. In the oldest sense of the term, the west—in the sense of the Occident distinguished from the Orient—and the realm of Jewish monotheistic consciousness are one.

St. Augustine is a transitional figure between the classical world and European Christendom. He was reared in the thought of the classical world but his outlook is different. While the classical writers emphasized this life, Augustine focuses on what he believes is the life to come. The City of God, not the earthly city, is Augustine's goal.

The Middle Ages are traditionally considered to be a period of falling away in which mankind lost much of the knowledge it previously held, a millennium during which civilization quickly degenerated and remained at a lower level. From a technical sense this is surely true. Perhaps nothing better symbolizes it as it practically reflected the decline of civilization during the Middle Ages than the fate of the great Roman roads made of stone that connected an empire throughout the Mediterranean world during antiquity. These were literally ripped up and their stones utilized as a source for buildings in the semi-independent castle states of the Middle Ages. Roads connecting humanity with each other were turned into castles protecting them from each other.

The Middle Ages were a period of contrast in which philosophical and religious unity accompanied great political disunity. The order of things that existed during the Roman era completely reversed—Rome had great political unity and great philosophical and religious diversity. The Roman Catholic Church became the most important European societal institution during the Middle Ages as nation-states embryonically grew.

St. Thomas Aquinas was the single most important Catholic writer following Augustine. Aquinas, who lived during the thirteenth century, furthered the rediscovery of Aristotle's more practical thought to the more mystical, supernal approach found in Augustine through the tradition of Plato. Aquinas is a rationalist who thinks this world, as well as the next, vital. Aquinas thus paves the way for the modern, tentative approach to knowledge and truth that came into existence during the Renaissance and Enlightenment. Aquinas, as does Aristotle, has a communitarian conception of the good society, though more catholic-universal.

The late Middle Ages are a period whose interpretation has shifted during recent decades as the ever-changing present changes conceptions of the past. Whereas the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries were once considered more an adjunct to the high medievalism of the ninth through twelfth centuries, they are now more likely to be considered a precursor of the modern age, roughly from the sixteenth through twentieth centuries.

An even more accurate analysis of the development of European civilization might be to consider the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the 1400s and 1500s, essential transitional centuries from the ancient-medieval world to the modern world. The world was a very different place—substantively, in outlook—and in direction, in 1399 and 1600. During the 1600s, the first real outcroppings of institutional forms and political ideas that guided and continue to guide first European and now world civilization appeared.

So significant was the change in outlook during the sixteenth century that the 1500s are even more appropriately considered Europe's crucial transformative century, when

antiquity was rediscovered and embraced—and yet separated from the past—when the printing press for the first time allowed the mass distribution of information, when gun powder revolutionized political relations, and when the discovery of a New World in the Americas changed mankind's temporal outlook in myriad ways. Machiavelli of Florence is a leading representative of the new conception of man that emerged in politics. No more tied to a God-centered conception of the world nor possessed of the communal spirit of antiquity, man in Machiavelli's view is a being without eternal or spiritual significance. Machiavelli focuses strictly on this life, and his political thought reflects a bifurcation between the ends and means of politics that existed in his time and place. Typically, when there are no limits on the means of politics, both politics' ends and means deteriorate.

There were competing intellectual, spiritual, and national strains during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. The Protestant Reformation was the greatest change in how men viewed the political and spiritual worlds. The Protestant Reformation to some extent returned to the mystic individualism of Plato through Augustine in contrast to the contemporaneous Aristotelean emphasis of the Roman Catholic Church in part through the influence of Aquinas. Men and women may be saved, according to the Protestant conception, through God's grace alone. There is a law higher than the law of men.

The most significant nations in Europe during the next several centuries to emerge during the late Middle Ages and early modern ages are England, Germany, and France. While the Germanic Holy Roman Empire was the pretended successor to the ancient Roman Empire, England was where and whence the most significant action in European civilization occurred during the modern age.

The political right of rebellion or revolution finds its spiritual justification in and practical inspiration from Protestant individualism and its material impetus from changes in technology. Seventeenth century England was a hotbed of political agitation. First came the Puritan Revolution and then the Glorious Revolution. Hobbes' complex thought is difficult to summarize. He is most famous for the statement that in a philosophical state of nature man's life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Though Hobbes politically tends toward absolutism, he emphasizes contract and the positive role of the state to establish a safe and materially productive society.

Locke was philosopher of the English Glorious Revolution of 1688 through which parliament became supreme. The seventeenth through twentieth centuries experienced the expansion of democracy throughout much of the world. It was through the United States Revolution of 1776 that democracy really took root as the foundation of a state system. Concomitant with democracy typically have come institutional safeguards of individual rights—freedom of expression, the rule of law, and private property. The American Revolution was largely Lockean in inspiration; Locke justified the right to rebellion.

English-speaking areas' role in the world was predominant almost throughout the modern age. England was perhaps the preeminent European nation from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, and the United States was preeminent during the twentieth century. In addition to emphasizing constitutional government Locke puts forward the labor theory of value—that goods have value as a result of the labor that goes into producing them. This idea influenced future socialists as much as capitalists.

During the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries France played a larger role than it did during the twentieth. The French Revolution was the dominant political event in Europe during the eighteenth century. Although it should not be maintained that Rousseau was responsible for the French Revolution, the romantic element in his

thought and his stress on human and material equality were an important part of the intellectual background that formed a number of revolutionaries.

Britain produced a string of great thinkers and writers on politics during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, including, in addition to Hobbes and Locke, David Hume, Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill. Mill was the greatest British political philosopher of the nineteenth century. His most well known work is *On Liberty* (1859), which classically defends freedom of thought and expression. Mill was both a liberal and evolutionary socialist, but his decisive commitment was to liberalism, not at all state socialism. He philosophically paved the way for much of the welfare-state expansion of government during the twentieth century.

Marx became a much greater figure in the twentieth century than he was in the nineteenth, as a result of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Since the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, and as a result of the brutality of the political systems that called and call themselves "Marxist," the great intrinsic intellectual significance that was ascribed to him a few decades ago has diminished. *The Communist Manifesto* remains a work of historical importance.

Hayek is the most important libertarian philosopher. His thought grows out of the socialist calculation debate on the practical possibilities of socialism. He puts forward the idea of spontaneous order, that it is possible to reach a world society in which law, not man, rules. He sees private property as the most important institutional safeguard of a free society and prices as necessary to efficient economic calculation. His accomplishment is to turn the question of socialism from an ethical to empirical one.

Rawls is perhaps the most important philosopher of the welfare state. While there is much in his thought that appears contradictory, his idea of "maximin"—to maximize the circumstances of the least well off (minimum) group in a society—may remain as an enduring contribution to political thought. While the principle of maximin may be implemented in ways entirely different than Rawls conceives (in very inegalitarian societies rather than very egalitarian ones), the idea itself is a noble ethical conception and one that a good society should consider if not fully embrace.

In the history of political thought, the works of philosophers may as much represent an era as form one. The value in studying political thought includes that this can enlighten moral understanding or clarify moral understandings of the way societal life should be. As the twenty-first century begins and a new human circumstance emerges, the thoughts of the greatest political philosophers from the past may become less relevant because the situation humanity faces is so new and different compared to the human condition through the ages. Political thought will continue to be about how men ought to live together, however, and the thought of such great political philosophers as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Marx, Mill, Hayek, and Rawls may continue to enlighten historical understanding of how the fundamental question of political thought has been answered and provide enduring insight into the human soul that will influence new political thought.

So profound are the changes that may occur in the human circumstance, as well as that have occurred during the past century, that it may become accurate to consider the whole period before the twenty-first century as one age compared to the new age or ages that may lie in the twenty-first century and beyond. Answers to the question of how men ought to live together may change as the human circumstance revolutionizes, but the question should continue.

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CHAPTER ONE

PLATO

The imperishable contribution of the Greeks to western civilization lies in the taming of man and nature through reason. In the pre-Greek world, advanced peoples had learned to live with nature by wresting from it, through patient observation, some of its secrets, and by applying them to gainful purposes. But such practical knowledge never lost its close association with demons and myths, fears and hopes, punishments and rewards; and the pre-Greek conception of nature viewed physical phenomena as essentially individual, unique, and incalculable rather than as general, universal, and predictable. The Greeks were not the first to think about recurrent regularities of inanimate events; but they were the first to develop—going beyond observation and knowledge—the *scientific attitude*, a new approach to the world that constitutes to this day one of the distinctive elements of western life.

In the field of human relations, too, Greek inventiveness and originality lay, not in this or that political theory, but in the discovery of the scientific study of politics. The Greeks were not the first to think about the problem of a well-ordered society. But pre-Greek political thought had been a mixture of legend, myth, theology, and allegory, and if there was an element of independent reasoning, it served as a means to a higher end, usually to be found in the tenets of a supernatural system, such as religion. Thus the contribution of Jewish thought to the political heritage of the world has been seminal: The idea of the brotherhood of man, of “one world,” is deeply rooted in the conception of monotheism as transmitted through the Bible. By contrast, polytheism made it difficult for the Greeks to see the basic oneness of mankind, and their religious pluralism reflected their inability to transcend, intellectually and institutionally, the confines of the city-state.

From a social viewpoint, the Bible was opposed to slavery on principle—a unique phenomenon in antiquity—established a weekly day of rest (still unknown in some parts of the earth), and contained a host of protective rules in favor of workers, debtors, women, children, and the poor. The concept of “covenant,” first appearing in the agreement between God and Abraham, is a frequent theme in the Bible whenever momentous decisions are to be made; it becomes again an inspiration centuries later when the Puritans attempt to build a new religion and civil society, or, still later, when President Wilson, a devout Presbyterian, names the constitution of the League of Nations a “Covenant.” But, significant as these contributions to western civilization have been, they never were, nor were they meant to be, political science. They were political and social *ethics* rather than science, and as such constitute one of the three chief tributaries to the mainstream of

western civilization, the other two being the Christian principle of *love* and the Greek principle of *rationalism*.

The first work that deserves to be called political science, in that it applies systematic reasoning and critical inquiry to political ideas and institutions, is Plato's *Republic*. After almost twenty-four hundred years it is still matchless as an introduction to the basic issues that confront human beings as citizens. No other writer on politics has equaled Plato (427–347 B.C.) in combining penetrating and dialectical reasoning with poetic imagery and symbolism.

One of the main (and most revolutionary) assumptions of the *Republic* is that the right kind of government and politics can be the legitimate object of rigorous, rational analysis, rather than the inevitable product of muddling through fear and faith, indolence and improvisation. This Platonic assumption of the applicability of reason to social relations is as hotly debated in the twentieth century as it was in Plato's own time, and it is one of the key elements that go into the making of our political outlook and temperament. To the extent that we believe in the possibility of applying reason and critical analysis to the solution of political and social issues we are all Plato's spiritual heirs, although we may heartily disagree with any or all of his specific teachings. By seeking to disprove Plato on a point of political doctrine or practice, the anti-Platonist has already conceded to Plato the most important single point: that political and social issues can be clarified by argument rather than by force and dogma.

Socrates, Plato's teacher and the chief figure in the *Republic*, has been contemptuously called the "first Social Democrat" by some modern totalitarians; what they hate in him above all is his irritating habit of endlessly searching, through argument, for the reason that lies behind accepted ideas and institutions. Other totalitarians, penetrating less deeply into Plato's thought, have usurped him as their first intellectual ancestor because there is so much in the *Republic* that is explicitly undemocratic, or outright antidemocratic. Yet, implicit in Plato's and Socrates' rationalism is the assumption, incompatible with the cult of violence, that man's intellect can discover the nature of the good life and the means of attaining it by philosophical inquiry.

In one basic point, modern political analysis would gain in insight and understanding if it followed Plato more closely: Plato never starts out with the hypothesis of a *homo politicus*, an abstract "political man" unrelated to the richness and complexity of individual selves or of society as a whole. Today Plato's psychology may seem naive in its analogies and presumed facts, but what is of timeless significance is his conviction that no theory of politics can be sound unless based on the study of man. Modern psychology has taught us enough about neurotic persons to make us realize that a healthy society cannot be composed of men and women who are haunted by fear and insecurity.

Plato's political thought also introduced the concept of the "public" as distinct from the "private" in the context of governmental relations. As a Greek, Plato could not be clearly aware of the opposing ideas of the individual and (or, sometimes, versus) the state because the city-state was a spiritual and religious unity, as well as a social, economic, and political one. The Jewish and Christian religions separated man's soul from his quality as a citizen and established the notion of an inalienable and indestructible human spirit outside the domain and jurisdiction of government, a philosophy that was unknown and unknowable to Plato. In the polytheistic religions of the city-states, the gods were community gods, and there could be no question of the individual's being in one respect a member of his community, and in another not. Yet, if Plato was unaware of the opposition of the individual versus the state—since the seventeenth century the dominant leitmotiv of western political speculation—he was keenly aware of the *res publica*, the "common thing" in the mutual relations of human beings.

Before Greek experience and analysis, the only major dichotomy known to man, consciously or unconsciously, was that between the "sacred" and the profane." Its evolution into that of "public" and "private" is part of western secularism that goes back directly to Greek life and thought. Medieval feudalism abandoned the distinction between private and public relations in political and economic institutions; from the king downward there was no clear-cut division between the private and public property or authority of the lords and their vassals. In such a system the color and intensity of personal relations between the ruler and the ruled make rational discussion of political issues and true constitutionalism difficult; this fact can still be observed today in countries in which (as in some parts of the third world) impersonal government is an ideal rather than a reality.

Even when the concept of the modern sovereign state first developed in sixteenth-century Italy, *lo stato* meant essentially the ruler and the "machine" that he had built up for himself, and it was a long time before "the state" assumed the anonymous and impersonal character with which it was later endowed. In some modern authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, rulers tend again to mingle inextricably the domains of the public and the private, "borrowing" castles and picture galleries that belong to the state, "acquiring" vast industrial empires for their brothers and nephews, and building up private, and often personal, military forces competing with those of the state. The inevitable growth of corruption in such regimes is the price paid for the dissolution of the clear separation between public and private authority.

One of the hallmarks of genius is that it can enrich each generation anew. In the heyday of *laissez faire*, Plato's ideal of a highly trained administrative and political class, dedicated to public service without consideration of personal happiness or financial gain, exercised relatively less appeal because society was assumed to be an automatic and self-regulating piece of machinery, and political wisdom could well be summarized in the succinct formula of "the less government, the better." Plato's conception of government as the highest moral and practical task to which men of knowledge and virtue ought to devote themselves seemed out of date in the days in which doing nothing was deemed to be the noblest function of a political association. The force of circumstances, accelerated by wars and depressions, has necessarily enlarged, in recent times, the scope and function of government, and in Plato we rediscover the ideal of public service as second to none. Democrats are bound to reject Plato's own solution of this problem, the rule of those who know over those who do not, regardless of the latter's consent, but they will have to grasp, if democracy is to survive in a tough and dangerous world of competing skills, that there is no substitute for high-minded and efficient government in solving tensions and conflicts within and between nations.

We also increasingly practice Plato's teaching that the road to better government and public service is through an appropriately conceived system of education. In fact, the ultramodern and rapidly growing realization of education as a never-ending process, embracing adults as well as the young, goes back directly to Plato: he clearly saw that education was more than the acquiring of basic facts and ideas in one's childhood and adolescence, and he was the first to propose an elaborate system of adult training and education.

Democrats differ with Plato's system of education on two scores: first, Plato reserved educational opportunities of prolonged duration and intensity for future rulers only, whereas the democrat looks on education as a means to the good life that should be available to all. Second, Plato believed that the selection of rulers could best be made through the prolonged training of men and women, generally those born into the ruling class or picked, in exceptional situations, from the lower classes of the workers,